



Breaking the Cycle: Leveraging Strategic Sponsorships to Enhance Brand Equity in the Frauen-Bundesliga

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ABSTRACT

Title: Breaking the Cycle: Leveraging Strategic Sponsorships to Enhance Brand Equity in the Frauen-Bundesliga

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The thesis investigates sponsorship methods that boost brand value in women's football through the Frauen-Bundesliga league. The growing commercial investment in women's football has not been matched by sufficient research about how sponsorship activities influence both brand perceptions of sponsors (Customer-Based Brand Equity, CBBE) and league perceptions (Spectator-Based Brand Equity, SBBE). A conceptual model is presented, incorporating activation type, fan engagement, and brand value congruence (BVC) as key drivers.

A mixed-methods design was used in an experimental survey (N = 81) to test four activation types: title sponsorship, cause-related initiative, official partnership, and influencer collaboration. These were tested against a control group. Semi-structured interviews with stakeholders (DFB, agencies, and sponsors) provided qualitative context.

Quantitative results showed no significant direct effects of activation type on brand equity (H1) or fan engagement (H3). However, influencer collaborations and cause-related initiatives showed positive directional trends. Fan engagement was found to be significantly associated with SBBE, offering partial support for H2. BVC demonstrated a consistent ability to predict fan engagement; however, it did not moderate the effect of activation type (H4).

The PROCESS Macro Models 4 and 5 confirmed that fan engagement mediated the relationship between activation type and SBBE, but not CBBE. The qualitative findings highlighted authenticity, emotional storytelling, and value alignment as critical success factors.

The results indicate that the quality of activation, rather than the format, is a critical factor in achieving effectiveness. Emotional resonance and digital engagement emerged as pivotal in fostering brand equity.

Keywords: Women's football, brand equity, sports sponsorship, fan engagement, brand value congruence, CBBE, SBBE

SUMÁRIO

Título: Quebrar o ciclo: Aproveitar os patrocínios estratégicos para aumentar o valor da marca na Frauen-Bundesliga

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Esta dissertação investiga a eficácia de estratégias de patrocínio na promoção da brand equity no futebol feminino, com foco na Frauen-Bundesliga. Apesar do aumento do investimento comercial, são escassos os estudos que analisam como diferentes ativações de patrocínio afetam a percepção das marcas patrocinadoras (Customer-Based Brand Equity, CBBE) e da própria liga (Spectator-Based Brand Equity, SBBE). É proposto um modelo conceptual que inclui o tipo de ativação, o engagement dos adeptos e a congruência de valores da marca (Brand Value Congruence, BVC) como variáveis centrais.

Foi adotada uma metodologia mista: um inquérito experimental (N = 81) testou quatro tipos de ativação (patrocínio-título, iniciativa social, parceria oficial e colaboração com influenciadores), comparados com um grupo de controlo. Entrevistas com stakeholders (DFB, agências e patrocinadores) forneceram suporte qualitativo.

Os resultados não revelaram efeitos diretos significativos entre o tipo de ativação e a brand equity (H1) ou o engagement (H3). Contudo, as colaborações com influenciadores e as iniciativas sociais evidenciaram tendências positivas. Verificou-se uma associação significativa entre engagement e SBBE (apoio parcial à H2). A BVC revelou um forte efeito principal, mas não moderou a relação entre ativação e engagement (H4).

Os Modelos 4 e 5 do PROCESS Macro indicaram que o engagement mediu a relação entre tipo de ativação e SBBE, mas não com CBBE. As entrevistas realçaram a importância da autenticidade, da narrativa emocional e da coerência de valores. Conclui-se que a qualidade da ativação e o envolvimento emocional digital são cruciais para o sucesso das parcerias no futebol feminino.

Palavras-chave: Futebol feminino, valor da marca, patrocínio desportivo, engagement dos fãs, congruência de valores, CBBE, SBBE

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GLOSSARY

α	Cronbach's Alpha (a measure of internal consistency/reliability)
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
BVC	Brand Value Congruence
CBBE	Customer-Based Brand Equity
CI	Confidence Interval
CRI_D	Cause-Related Initiative Dummy
DAZN	Digital Sports Streaming Service (DAZN)
DFB	Deutscher Fußball-Bund (German Football Association)
DV	Dependent Variable
ECA	European Club Association
FA WSL	Football Association Women's Super League
Fan Eng	Fan Engagement
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association
FE_D	Fan Engagement Dummy
IC_D	Influencer Collaboration Dummy
IV	Independent Variable
IV_D	Independent Variable Dummy
KS	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test
NWSL	National Women's Soccer League
OP_D	Official Partner Dummy
R²	Coefficient of Determination
ROI	Return on Investment
SBBE	Spectator-Based Brand Equity
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (Version 28)
SW	Shapiro-Wilk Test
TS_D	Title Sponsor Dummy
UEFA	Union of European Football Associations
η^2	Effect Size Measure (Eta-squared)

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background and Context

Women's football has gained substantial media attention and attracted more fans while attracting commercial investments during recent years. The Frauen-Bundesliga in Germany along with other contemporary leagues have evolved from grassroots beginnings into professional platforms that now hold cultural and market value. The advancement of women's football depends on sponsorship as its fundamental driver. The financial backing from sponsors enables them to shape fan perceptions about both the league and the brands they support. Strategic sponsorships which tell meaningful value-driven stories beyond basic logo placement serve as essential tools for building brand equity for all stakeholders.

1.2. Problem Statement

The empirical research about how specific sponsorship activation strategies affect brand perceptions in women's football shows limited development. The existing sports marketing literature focuses predominantly on men's leagues which creates a significant gap in understanding brand equity development in women's football. The theoretical importance of emotional engagement and value alignment remains widely acknowledged but researchers have conducted limited empirical investigations to establish their role as mediators or moderators in sponsorship–brand equity relationships. This study aims to address this knowledge gap.

1.3. Relevance of the Study

The current research provides both theoretical value to academics and useful applications for practitioners. The research extends both customer-based brand equity (CBBE) and spectator-based brand equity (SBBE) frameworks by using fan engagement as a mediator and brand value congruence as a moderator. The research provides practical guidance to brands and agencies and league managers about creating sponsorship activations that effectively target women's sports ecosystems. The understanding of success factors in women's football sponsorship becomes essential because sponsorship budgets change while brands pursue purpose-driven partnerships.

1.4. Research Methodology Overview

A mixed-methods approach was utilized to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the sponsorship–brand equity relationship in the Frauen-Bundesliga.

1.4.1. Quantitative Component

The research used an online survey experiment with 81 participants after screening to evaluate four activation types including Title Sponsorship, Cause-Related Initiative, Official Partner/Jersey, and Influencer Collaboration with a control condition. The study examined four main variables which included Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE), Spectator-Based Brand Equity (SBBE), Fan Engagement and Brand Value Congruence (BVC). The PROCESS Macro Models 1, 4, and 5 developed by Hayes were used to evaluate the moderation, mediation and moderated mediation effects.

1.4.2. Qualitative Component

Three semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders from the DFB, sports marketing agencies, and sponsoring brands. The interviews provided essential context to survey results while revealing how sponsors evaluate success and what obstacles they face in women's football sponsorship.

1.5. Structure of the Thesis

- Chapter 2 reviews the literature on brand equity, sponsorship strategies, fan engagement, and value congruence.
- Chapter 3 outlines the research design, sampling, and data collection methods.
- Chapter 4 presents quantitative and qualitative data analysis.
- Chapter 5 concludes with key findings, implications, limitations, and future research directions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Brand Equity

Brand equity, a pivotal concept in the commercialization of women's football, dictates the financial and reputational value of the league itself and its respective sponsors. This study undertakes an examination of two brand equity perspectives:

Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) of the Sponsoring Brands: This concept relates to how sponsorship affects the way consumers view the brand itself (Keller, 1993). The key elements consist of brand awareness, associations, perceived quality, and consumer loyalty. The sponsors can leverage the credibility and appeal of the Frauen-Bundesliga through sponsorship to enhance their brand equity.

Spectator-Based Brand Equity (SBBE) of the Frauen-Bundesliga: This refers to the perceptions, emotional connections, and loyalty of fans toward the league (Biscaia et al., 2013). The matchday experiences, team identity, and fan engagement initiatives form the primary dependent variable (DV) for measuring league brand equity.

Both models help us understand sports branding but the SBBE model is the main focus when studying league impact while the CBBE model evaluates corporate sponsor brand equity.

2.1.1. Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) – Sponsor Brand Equity

The CBBE model which Keller (1993) introduced defines brand equity as the way brand knowledge affects consumer responses to marketing efforts. The model consists of four essential components which include brand awareness and brand associations and perceived quality and brand loyalty (Bauer et al., 2005).

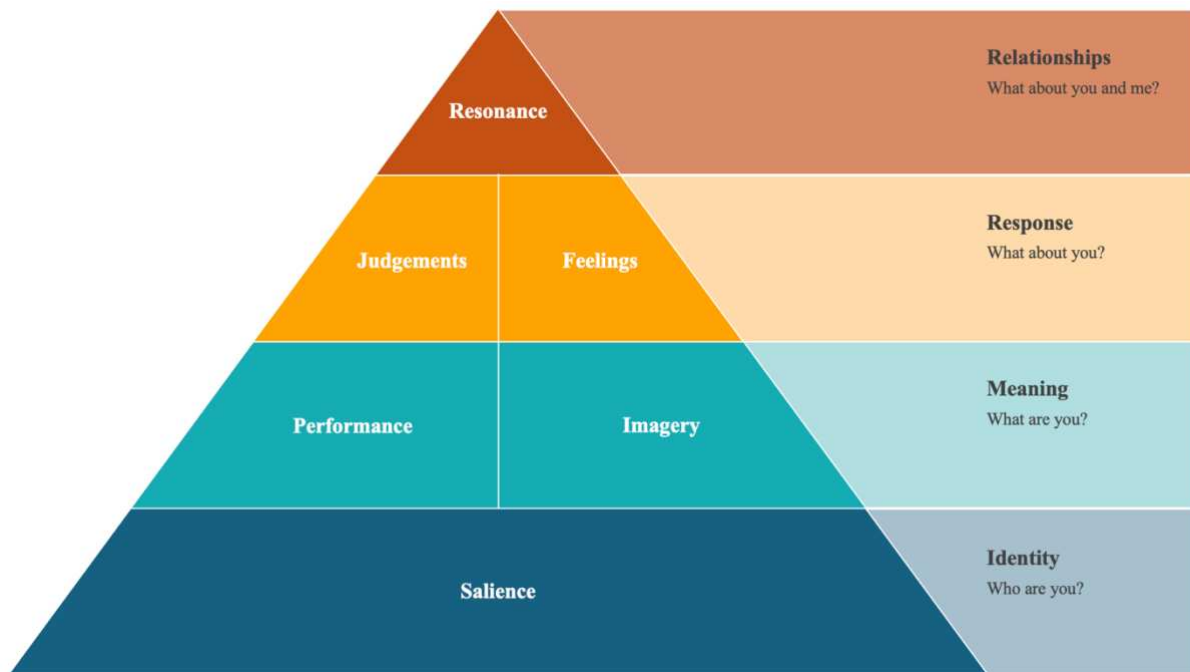


Figure 1: Keller's CBBE Model

Source: Own Creation based on Keller (1993)

The European Club Association (ECA) (2021) states that women's football benefits from media coverage and consistent branding and high-profile sponsorships. The leagues such as the Frauen-Bundesliga and FA WSL have received more investment which has led to more brand loyalty among fans and this has made clubs and leagues more attractive for commercial partnerships (Culvin & Bowes, 2023).

The power of brand associations in women's football is attributable to social and cultural narratives, including gender equality, inclusivity, and community-building (Morgan et al., n.d.) Fans perceive teams not just as sports entities but as symbols of progress and empowerment, further reinforcing loyalty and consumer trust (Biscaia et al., 2013). Research also indicates that clubs with strong CBBE are able to command higher sponsorship value and retain more engaged fan bases (UEFA, 2024). Furthermore, teams with strong CBBEs benefit from higher merchandise sales, increased media rights revenue, and greater ticket demand, which collectively contribute to their long-term financial sustainability (UEFA, 2024). Additionally, strong brand equity allows clubs to develop secondary revenue streams through licensing deals, digital content subscriptions, and cross-promotional partnerships (Moretti & Annamaria, 2013). The FIFA Benchmarking Report (2022) demonstrates how clubs with high CBBE are able to secure more lucrative broadcast deals and international sponsorship agreements, thus reinforcing the economic value of strong branding in women's football. It is evident that clubs

that effectively leverage data-driven marketing strategies can enhance CBBE by creating more personalized fan experiences. Furthermore, investments in grassroots programs, player development, and strategic community initiatives have been demonstrated to enhance brand perception and long-term value (Deloitte, 2025).

2.1.2. Spectator-Based Brand Equity (SBBE) – League Brand Equity

SBBE builds upon the foundations laid out by CBBE, delving into the distinctive characteristics of sports spectatorship. It underscores the pivotal role that emotional bonds, active fan participation, and in-game experiences play in shaping brand equity within the context of live sporting events (Biscaia et al., 2013).

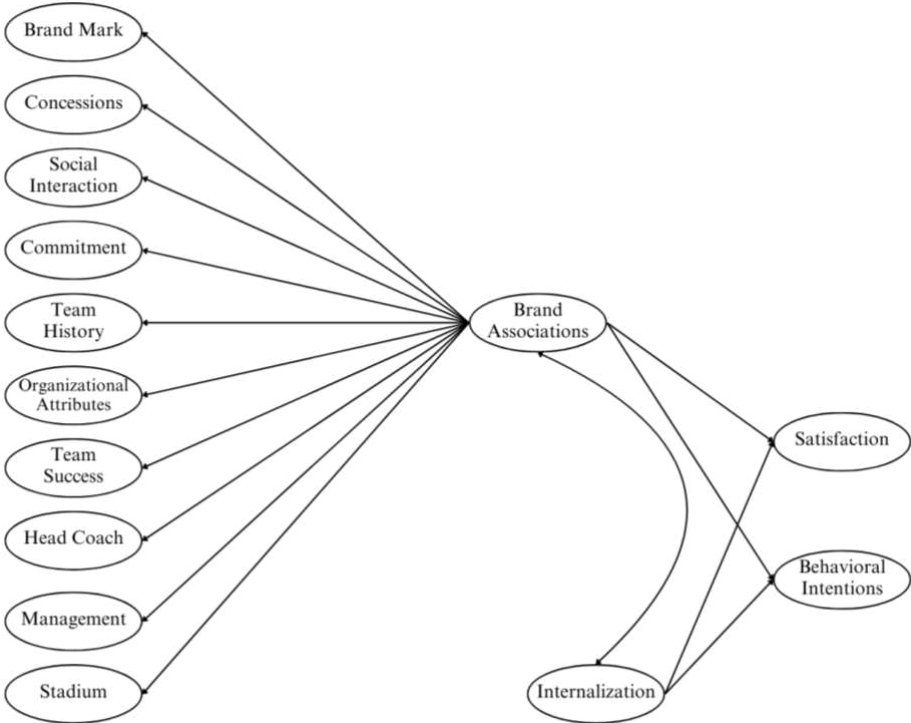


Figure 2: Proposed Model for Measuring Brand Equity in Professional Soccer by Biscaia et al. (2013)

Source: Own Creation based on Biscaia et al. (2013)

The popularity of women's football has increased because digital streaming platforms and social media interactions and community-based outreach initiatives have made the sport more accessible to fans (UEFA, 2024). SBBE focuses on the match-going experience because the atmosphere of the game and team performance and fan social interaction with other spectators create substantial brand value perceptions.

In the Frauen-Bundesliga, SBBE is enhanced through interactive fan experiences, direct player-fan engagement, and loyalty programs that foster emotional investment. Engaged fans, defined as those who actively engage with their team through attendance at matches, the purchase of merchandise, or online interaction, exhibit heightened brand loyalty, thereby contributing to the club's brand equity (Moretti & Annamaria, 2013). Furthermore, teams that successfully cultivate a distinctive identity and effectively promote their values experience stronger spectator-based equity, leading to higher attendance rates and merchandise sales (UEFA, 2024). Economic considerations are also essential to brand equity. Studies highlight that leagues such as the Frauen-Bundesliga, FA WSL, and NWSL have seen a rise in commercial interest as brand value and equity improve through enhanced professional structures, sponsorship diversification, and media rights agreements (UEFA, 2024). Furthermore, the authenticity perceived by fans of women's football teams has been demonstrated to engender heightened engagement and a greater propensity to procure team-related products and services (Biscaia et al., 2013). In the context of grassroots engagement and ethical governance, consumer perceptions of brand authenticity have been shown to play a critical role in enhancing SBBE (Morgan et al., n.d.).

The Fan Project (2024) published The ROI of Women's Sports Report to show that women's sports fans maintain stronger brand loyalty and purchase intentions toward sponsors than men's sports fans do. The research indicates that fan engagement stands as a primary factor which drives SBBE.. The Visa Women's Euros Report (2022) demonstrates how major events like UEFA Women's EURO 2022 boost brand recognition and sponsorship effectiveness and fan-driven marketing engagement thus supporting the value of live sports events for SBBE.

Furthermore, SBBE emphasizes loyalty-driven behaviors such as repeat match attendance, social media advocacy, and club membership subscriptions, all of which significantly impact long-term brand sustainability (Morgan et al., n.d.). Strong SBBE leads to increased sponsorship attractiveness, as engaged fans are more likely to support sponsor brands affiliated with their favorite clubs (UEFA, 2024).

In the present study, SBBE is the dependent variable (DV). While both CBBE and SBBE contribute to brand equity in sports, SBBE is particularly relevant to women's football. This relevance stems from SBBE's focus on the emotional connections, engagement behaviors, and matchday experiences of spectators (Biscaia et al., 2013). Given the centrality of fan engagement and sponsorship activations in this study, SBBE provides a more accurate measurement of brand equity in the Frauen-Bundesliga. Future discussions of brand equity in this research will refer specifically to SBBE unless otherwise stated.

2.2. Brand Sponsorship

2.2.1. Different Strategies

Sports sponsorship has evolved from basic promotional methods like signage and brand mentions into advanced partnership strategies according to Cornwell (2013). The growing popularity of women's sports has led sponsors to implement diverse partnership models which combine Title Sponsorships with Cause-Related Initiatives and Official Partner arrangements and Influencer Collaborations to achieve brand-building and revenue-oriented goals (Sports Innovation Lab, 2025).

2.2.1.1. *Title Sponsorships*

Title sponsorships, in which a sponsor's name is integrated into the event or league identity, remain a high-impact strategy. For instance, consider the "Google Pixel Frauen-Bundesliga" initiative, which fosters a symbiotic relationship between the brand and a leading competitive tournament. This strategy ensures immediate brand recognition within all references to the league (Cornwell, 2013; UEFA, 2024).

- Title sponsors benefit from extensive brand recall and media exposure, particularly for emerging entities such as women's leagues, which can greatly benefit from the sponsor's marketing resources and credibility (Zdravkovic & Till, 2012).
- The sponsor allocates substantial resources to establish itself as a central element of the competition's identity, while the league acquires augmented resources for enhanced production, marketing, or player welfare (UEFA, 2024).

2.2.1.2. *Cause-related Initiatives*

According to the Sports Innovation Lab (2025), corporate sponsors frequently regard women's sports, including the Frauen-Bundesliga, as a medium for activism or philanthropic endeavors. For instance, a corporate sponsor might underwrite community events or donate equipment to local clubs, thereby underscoring a shared commitment to youth development and gender equality (FIFA, 2022).

- **Dual benefits for sponsors:** It enables them to enhance their brand image while supporting relevant social causes (Meenaghan & Shipley, 1999). Concurrently, the league or club acquires dedicated funding or awareness for initiatives such as grassroots training, mental health, or sustainability efforts (White Paper, 2024).
- **Authenticity Matters:** Fans of women's sports exhibit sensitivity to authenticity (Morhart et al., 2015). Investing in genuine cause-related projects, such as

scholarships for young female players or anti-discrimination campaigns, can yield intangible brand equity and cultivate authentic goodwill (UEFA, 2024).

2.2.1.3. Official Partner (Including Jersey Logo Placements)

Official partner agreements generally confer exclusive rights within a specific product or service category, frequently encompassing the placement of jersey logos. Traditionally associated with men's teams, the practice of jersey logos is gaining traction in women's leagues as prominent clubs enter into multi-year official partner agreements, resulting in the prominent display of brand names on match shirts (Zdravkovic & Till, 2012).

- **Front-of-Jersey vs. Sleeve vs. Back:** Clubs monetize different jersey areas, with the front-of-jersey typically commanding the highest fee. For instance, some teams command six-figure sums in the Women's Super League for a prime kit location (The Fan Project, 2024b).
- **Integrated Partner Status:** Beyond the logo itself, the official partner label can include rights for in-stadium advertising, content marketing, VIP hospitality, and special events, bridging intangible brand recall with deeper in-person engagement (Deloitte, 2025).
- **Visibility Differences:** In women's football, broadcast coverage has historically been lower than in men's leagues (FIFA, 2022). However, as broadcast coverage expands through streaming and new media agreements, jersey presence becomes increasingly valuable, thereby accelerating sponsor brand awareness (S&P Global, 2024).

2.2.1.4. Influencer Collaborations

Another rising strategy is aligning with individual athletes or prominent influencers, which is often key to bridging sponsor messaging with fans (Sports Innovation Lab, 2025). Women's sports athletes, recognized for authenticity and strong personal branding, frequently collaborate with sponsors beyond the usual team or league context (The Fan Project, 2024b).

- **Direct Athlete Partnerships:** These partnerships involve sponsors working with prominent athletes who possess substantial social followings, collaborating to create social media content, customized merchandise, or personal mini-campaigns. This strategy has been particularly effective among younger, tech-savvy fans (UEFA, 2024).
- **Diversity of Influencers:** Beyond high-profile athletes, micro-influencers, including non-star players and local personalities, can generate high levels of engagement due to their perceived authenticity or "relatability" (The Fan Project, 2024a).

- **Year-Round Storytelling:** Influencer collaborations often facilitate off-season or behind-the-scenes narratives, thereby sustaining brand engagement outside of official match windows (Wasserman, 2024).

In essence, the four key sponsorship activation strategies, namely, title sponsorships, cause-related initiatives, official partner status with jersey logo placement, and influencer collaborations, demonstrate the wide array of approaches available to sponsors and sports properties. In the context of women's sports, these strategies frequently center on authenticity, mission-driven alignment, and digital-savvy engagement. These elements can be leveraged to optimize brand equity for both the sponsor (CBBE) and the league or club (SBBE).

2.2.2. Brand Sponsorship Impact on Brand Equity (H1)

Effective sponsorship has been shown to yield improvements in brand awareness, brand recognition, and brand association for the sponsor (Keller, 1993). Concurrently, a well-capitalized league can enhance production quality, recruit top-level athletes, and expand its fan base, thereby raising its brand equity (Ross, 2006). This symbiotic relationship is contingent on strategic congruence, wherein the sponsor invests in the property's growth while the property's brand attributes (e.g., women's empowerment) reciprocally influence the sponsor (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999). Numerous case illustrations substantiate this phenomenon. For instance, Barclays' title sponsorship of the FA Women's Super League not only elevated the sponsor's brand as a proponent of female athletes but also furnished the league with a crucial resource infusion, thereby augmenting broadcast agreements and league recognition (Deloitte, 2025). In the context of the Frauen-Bundesliga, the presence of new sponsors has been shown to have a positive impact on the professionalization of the league. This impact can be seen in the form of investments in improved facilities, advanced marketing strategies, and the acquisition of high-profile players. These developments have the potential to raise the league's perceived stature and brand associations (FIFA, 2022).

From the perspective of the sponsor, aligning with a women's league that embodies progress and authenticity can serve to strengthen intangible brand associations such as "innovative" or "inclusive" (Meenaghan & Shipley, 1999). Concretely, the sponsor might observe improved brand recall, social media sentiment, or purchase intention, particularly among fans who admire the brand for fueling the league's expansion (S&P Global, 2024).

This thesis hypothesizes that:

H1: Brand sponsorship strategies positively affect brand equity, both for the sponsor (CBBE) and the league (SBBE).

2.3. Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement in women's football is of pivotal importance and includes fans, governing bodies, sponsors, media, clubs, and investors. A well-developed stakeholder network ensures long-term financial sustainability, improved competitive structures, and increased marketability for leagues and clubs (FIFA, 2022). The New Economy of Sports Study by Wasserman (2024) highlights that strategic collaborations between leagues and corporate stakeholders have accelerated revenue growth and improved commercial viability.

The role of governing bodies such as FIFA and UEFA is pivotal in establishing policies that regulate competition structures, enforce financial fair play, and drive strategic investments into women's football (UEFA, 2024). Their role in increasing visibility through enhanced broadcast deals and sponsorship regulations directly influences brand equity (FIFA, 2022).

Sponsors and investors in women's football have shifted from transactional partnerships to value-driven engagements that emphasize gender equality and social impact (Deloitte, 2025). Major corporations investing in women's football see enhanced brand credibility and deeper consumer trust (Visa, 2022).

Media and broadcasters serve as a bridge between the game and its audience. The increased coverage of the game through digital streaming platforms and television broadcasting rights has had a significant effect on the exposure and marketability of women's football (FIFA, 2022). Research also shows a direct correlation between media investment, rising sponsorship value, and fan engagement levels (Wasserman, 2024).

Nevertheless, among all stakeholders, fans are the most pivotal driver of women's football's long-term success, shaping revenue streams, engagement metrics, and brand value perceptions (The Fan Project, 2024a)

2.3.1. Fan Engagement Impact on Brand Equity (H2)

Fan engagement, whether through social media dialogue, in-stadium experience, or e-commerce interactions, exerts a considerable influence on brand equity (Meenaghan, 1999). Engaged fans often assume the role of brand ambassadors, disseminating sponsor campaigns on social platforms, procuring co-branded merchandise, and extolling sponsor messaging in their daily interactions (Sports Innovation Lab, 2025).

Mechanisms:

Digital and Social Platforms: Fans share highlights, comment on sponsor campaigns, or sign up for sponsor-run loyalty programs, thereby fostering intangible brand loyalty (Cornwell & Kwon, 2020).

In-Community Discussions: Women's football fosters tight-knit communities, which allows sponsor messages to spread quickly through word-of-mouth and social activism (The Fan Project, 2024b).

Hybrid Physical–Digital Approaches: For instance, sponsors might organize fan festivals or exclusive meet-and-greet events on matchdays, recognizing the most active fans. This fosters direct emotional connections to both the sponsor and the league (UEFA, 2024).

Higher levels of engagement have been shown to enhance brand equity in both intangible and tangible ways. These benefits include increased brand trust and brand identity, as well as increased sales and sponsor recall (UEFA, 2024).

This thesis hypothesizes that:

H2: Higher fan engagement significantly enhances brand equity for both sponsor (CBBE) and league (SBBE).

2.3.2. Brand Sponsorship Impact on Fan Engagement (H3)

The role of sports sponsorship in fostering fan behavior extends beyond mere reflection of brand interest, as it possesses the potential to ignite novel actions among spectators. To illustrate, the implementation of a sponsor's initiatives, such as the orchestration of special game-day events or the creation of exclusive digital content featuring prominent players from the Frauen-Bundesliga, has been demonstrated to precipitate a notable surge in online engagement (Zdravkovic & Till, 2012). The sponsor's marketing resources can amplify the league's mainstream visibility, leading to increased attendance at games, higher television viewership ratings, and the galvanization of year-round fan dialogues (The Fan Project, 2024b).

Key Activation Examples:

- 1. Fan-Centric Gamification:** A sponsor application enables fans to make match predictions, awarding them points that can be redeemed for official merchandise (Sports Innovation Lab, 2025).
- 2. Behind-the-Scenes:** The creation of mini-documentaries showcasing a club's journey to championship glory offers fans a captivating glimpse into their favorite players' experiences (UEFA, 2024).
- 3. Involvement of Grassroots Communities:** Local tournaments and training sessions, facilitated by sponsors, can foster a sense of inclusivity and connection between everyday fans and the professional league's brand (FIFA, 2022).

Consequently, brand sponsorship exerts a significant influence on fan engagement, which in turn contributes to brand equity expansions for both sponsor and league, thereby reinforcing the synergy at the core of sports sponsorship (Cornwell, 2013).

This thesis hypothesizes that:

H3: Brand sponsorship can actively elevate fan engagement.

2.4. Brand Value Congruence

Brand equity gains are contingent upon brand value congruence, defined as the alignment between sponsor values and the property's identity (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999). In the domain of women's sports, fans exhibit heightened vigilance concerning authenticity (Morhart et al., 2014). When a sponsor who advocates for female empowerment invests in a women's league, the alignment between the sponsor's values and those of the league can generate a strong synergy, thereby enhancing the intangible brand equity among fans who value the sponsor's sincerity (FIFA, 2022). Conversely, incongruence, such as a sponsor that is environmentally irresponsible partnering with a women's league known for its sustainability initiatives, can lead to backlash (White Paper, 2024).

The concept of congruence in the domain of women's sports is particularly salient. Given the emphasis on messages of equality and empowerment in women's sports, brand values such as inclusivity, community, and sustainability often align with those of the sports themselves (UEFA, 2024). The long-term demonstration of shared values has been shown to foster brand authenticity, a concept in which brand-consumer relationships are centered on perceived genuineness (Morhart et al., 2014). Sponsors who align their values with those of the sport experience a significant increase in brand equity, while those who do not align face skepticism or even condemnation on social media (The Fan Project, 2024b). In practical terms, brand value congruence also influences sponsor activation designs. For instance, a sponsor focusing on environmental stewardship might integrate carbon offset initiatives into the league's event operations, or a sponsor focusing on youth empowerment might invest in grassroots training academies for girls (Zdravkovic & Till, 2012). These efforts reinforce the synergy that spurs brand loyalty among fans.

This thesis hypothesizes that:

H4: Brand Value Congruence moderates the relationship between sponsorship strategies and fan engagement.

2.5. Conclusion

The existing literature affirms that synergy between sponsors and sports properties significantly shapes brand equity. For women's football, especially the Frauen-Bundesliga, intangible brand equity factors, such as authenticity, alignment with empowerment narratives, and community-building, are highly influential. These factors also yield more quantifiable return on investment (ROI) measures (The Fan Project, 2024b). This synergy is propelled by advanced sponsorship activation strategies, encompassing initiatives such as cause-related marketing and influencer collaborations, and consolidated by robust fan engagement that fosters brand loyalty (Ross, 2006). Concurrently, brand value congruence ensures that sponsor–league relationships resonate authentically with fans, thereby amplifying brand equity outcomes for both parties.

In light of these discussions, the proposed conceptual model integrates Keller's (1993) CBBE framework to evaluate sponsor brand equity and Ross's (2006) SBBE approach to analyze league brand equity.

Sponsorship Activation Strategies →

(a) Sponsor Brand Equity (CBBE)

(b) League Brand Equity (SBBE)

Fan Engagement →

Reinforces brand equity outcomes for both sponsor and league

Brand Value Congruence (Moderator) →

Higher perceived synergy yields stronger brand equity gains.

Within the context of Frauen-Bundesliga, the sponsorship of a brand could take the form of either name rights or a cause-driven collaboration, with investments directed towards youth academies, the expansion of marketing coverage, or the promotion of athlete empowerment narratives. This synergy fosters a stronger brand identification for both the sponsor and the league, contingent upon fan engagement to drive intangible loyalty and tangible business outcomes.

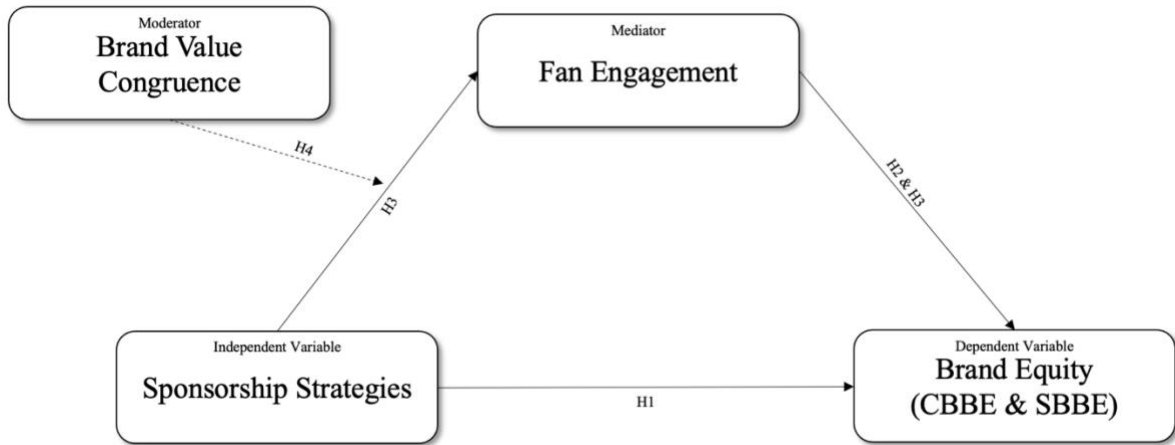


Figure 3: Conceptual Framework

Source: Own Creation

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Approach

A mixed-methods approach is selected to encompass broad, quantifiable patterns (via a survey) and context-specific insights (via interviews). From a quantitative perspective, the objective is to evaluate hypotheses concerning sponsorship strategies, brand equity, and fan engagement. From a qualitative standpoint, stakeholder interviews will elucidate how sponsors, leagues, and brand agencies interpret and execute sponsorship.

3.1.1. Nature of Research

This thesis employs:

1. **Exploratory elements**, using initial qualitative interviews to refine understanding of sponsorship activation in women's football.
2. **Descriptive and hypothesis-testing** components, where the core focus is to test how certain sponsorship activation strategies affect brand equity perceptions among fans.

Further, the quantitative portion is cross-sectional, in which data are collected at a single point in time. The postpositivist paradigm underlies the quantitative survey, which seeks to measure and examine relationships between brand equity constructs. The qualitative interviews, by contrast, take a more interpretive stance, allowing deeper insight into stakeholder motivations and experiences.

3.2. Data Sources

3.2.1. Primary Data

Online Survey

- **Sample:** Adults (18+) with at least some awareness of the Frauen-Bundesliga.
- **Screening:** An initial question asks, "Have you ever watched, read about, or otherwise heard of the Frauen-Bundesliga (Germany's top-level women's football league)?" If "Not familiar at all", the participant is directed to the end of the survey and excluded from the main data.
- **Distribution:** Social media channels, relevant fan forums, and personal networks.

Stakeholder Interviews

- **Participants:** (a) DFB (German Football Association) personnel involved in women's football, (b) representatives from agencies handling sponsorship deals, and (c) brand

representatives who currently sponsor or are considering sponsorship in the Frauen-Bundesliga.

- **Format:** Semi-structured interviews (20–30 minutes each), either in-person or via video conferencing.
- **Focus:** Understanding rationales behind sponsorship strategies, perceived challenges, synergy with brand values, and insights into the success factors of women’s football sponsorship.

3.3. Research Approach Details

3.3.1. Quantitative: Survey

3.3.1.1. Survey Design and Sample

A convenient sample, non-random in nature, is employed. Respondents were fans or potential fans of women's football. While random sampling might offer increased generalizability, time constraints and accessibility concerns support this convenience approach.

A minimum of 250–300 complete responses was targeted, aligning with prior brand equity research and other studies. This methodological approach ensures a robust basis for testing multiple independent and moderating effects.

3.3.1.2. Data Gathering

To promote engagement and enhance the quality of responses, an incentive is provided to each participant who completes the survey's primary section. The incentive, which varies based on the participant's geographical location, is either a \$25/€25 Amazon gift card or one month of DAZN membership, subject to availability in the participant's region. This incentive is disclosed at the commencement of the survey to ensure that participants have complete information about the potential benefits, yet it is only provided after the submission of a valid and complete questionnaire. This approach is effective in reducing the rate of incomplete responses and enhancing the representativeness of the final dataset.

- **Platform:** Qualtrics.
- **Timing:** 3-4 weeks distribution window.
- **Screening:**
 - Respondents are first asked whether they are familiar with the Frauen-Bundesliga. If they answer, "Not familiar at all", the survey terminates.
 - A second screening question assesses familiarity with Beiersdorf. If the response is "Not familiar at all", the survey also ends.

- If the respondent is only "Slightly familiar" or "Moderately familiar", they are shown the following brand description:
 - “Beiersdorf is a German multinational company specializing in skincare and personal care products. It owns well-known brands such as NIVEA, Eucerin, Labello, Hansaplast, and La Prairie. The company has a strong presence in global markets and is known for its commitments to sustainability, dermatological research, and supporting community initiatives.”
- **Experimental Design:** A between-subjects approach randomly assigns participants to one of four sponsor activation strategies (title sponsorship, cause-related initiative, official partner/jerseys, influencer collaboration) or a control group.
- **Ethics:** Participants must opt-in via an informed consent statement, clarifying that the survey is voluntary, data are confidential, and partial or incomplete responses do not qualify for the incentive.

This design supports internal validity by limiting exposure to only one experimental condition per participant, while the incentive improves both participation rate and response completion.

3.3.1.3. *Variables and Measurements*

In order to test the proposed conceptual model, the following variables were measured using established multi-item scales. All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) unless otherwise noted.

3.3.1.3.1. *Independent Variable (IV):*

Sponsorship Activation Respondents are randomly assigned to one of five conditions:

1. Title Sponsorship
2. Cause-Related Initiative
3. Official Partner / Jersey Sponsorship
4. Influencer Collaboration
5. Control Group (No Sponsorship Activation for Women's Bundesliga)

The control group will view a neutral description of the women's Bundesliga with no mention of sponsorship.

3.3.1.3.2. *Moderator: Brand Value Congruence*

Adapted from Gwinner & Eaton (1999) and Morhart et al. (2015); Cronbach α ~0.85.

Survey items:

- Beiersdorf and the Frauen-Bundesliga share compatible values.
- Beiersdorf's involvement in women's football aligns with the league's identity.
- The sponsorship between Beiersdorf and the Frauen-Bundesliga feels authentic.
- Beiersdorf's sponsorship supports genuine initiatives, not just marketing.

3.3.1.3.3. Mediator: Fan Engagement

Adapted from Yoshida et al. (2014) and The Fan Project (2024); Cronbach α ~0.87.

Survey items:

- I regularly discuss Frauen-Bundesliga matches with friends or online.
- I engage with Frauen-Bundesliga content on social media (e.g., like, share, comment).
- I have attended or plan to attend a Frauen-Bundesliga match.
- I have purchased or considered purchasing a product from a brand sponsoring Frauen-Bundesliga.
- I actively seek behind-the-scenes content about Frauen-Bundesliga players.

3.3.1.3.4. Dependent Variable (DV): Brand Equity

A) Consumer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE)

Adapted from Keller (1993) and Bauer et al. (2005); Cronbach α ~0.90.

Survey Items:

- I have a favorable impression of Beiersdorf as a brand.
- Beiersdorf is one of the first brands that come to mind when thinking about skincare and personal care.
- Beiersdorf's sponsorship of the Frauen-Bundesliga makes me perceive it as a premium, high-quality brand.
- I would consider buying Beiersdorf products in the future.
- Beiersdorf is a brand I trust.

B) Spectator-Based Brand Equity (SBBE)

Adapted from Ross (2006) and Biscaia et al. (2013); Cronbach α ~0.90.

Survey Items:

- I feel a strong emotional connection with the Frauen-Bundesliga.
- The Frauen-Bundesliga represents high-quality football.
- This sponsorship increases my likelihood of watching matches in the future.

- I trust the Frauen-Bundesliga more because of this sponsor.

Construct	Scale Type	Items	References	Cronbach α
Sponsor CBBE	7-pt Likert	5	Keller (1993); Bauer et al. (2005)	0.90
League SBBE	7-pt Likert	4	Ross (2006); Biscaia et al. (2013)	0.90
Fan Engagement	7-pt Likert	5	Yoshida et al. (2014); The Fan Project (2024)	0.87
Brand Value Congruence	7-pt Likert	4	Gwinner & Eaton (1999); Morhart et al. (2014)	0.85
Sponsorship Activation (IV)	Experimental Manipulation	N/A	White Paper (2024); S&P Global (2024)	N/A

Table 1: Operational Model Summary

Source: Own Creation

3.3.1.4. Questionnaire Flow

As shown in Table 2, the survey uses a funnel structure combined with a block design.

Introduction (1 Question)
Screening Questions (3 Questions)
Instructions (1 Question)
<i>Randomizer 1: Evenly present 1 element</i>
Stimuli 1 - Control Group (No Sponsorship Activation) (2 Questions)
Stimuli 2 - Title Sponsorship (2 Questions)
Stimuli 3 - Cause-Related Initiative (2 Questions)
Stimuli 4 - Official Partner (2 Questions)
Stimuli 5 - Influencer Collaboration (2 Questions)
Core Measures: CBBE, SBBE, Control, Fan Engagement, Brand Value Congruence (5 Questions)
Additional Variables/Covariates (4 Questions)

Demographics (4 Questions)

Prize Draw (1 Question)

Table 2: Survey Flow

Source: Own Creation

3.3.2. Qualitative: Stakeholder Interviews

3.3.2.1. Purpose

The qualitative interviews are designed to provide supplementary insight into the survey results, offering context on the structure, perception, and evaluation of sponsorship deals in real-world settings (Sports Innovation Lab, 2025). This will facilitate the clarification of intangible aspects of brand–league partnerships and substantiate or refute the direction indicated by the survey data.

3.3.2.2. Participant Selection

- **DFB Representatives:** At least two employees intimately involved with Frauen-Bundesliga oversight or marketing.
- **Agencies Handling Sponsorships:** At least two senior executives or account managers with direct experience in women's football deals.
- **Brand Representatives:** Two to three sponsor or prospective sponsor managers who have engaged or plan to engage in Frauen-Bundesliga partnerships.

3.3.2.3. Interview Process

Semi-Structured Protocol

Themes: Objectives behind sponsorship, perceived brand synergy, and opinions on fan engagement strategies.

Duration: 20–30 minutes each.

Recording & Transcription: Participant consent is obtained for audio recording; transcripts are used for thematic coding.

Analysis: Themes are mapped to the concepts of brand equity, sponsorship activation, and stakeholder collaboration.

3.4. Stimuli Development

3.4.1. Creating the Stimuli

The research used a structured mixed-method design to implement the independent variable and sponsorship activation strategy. The research began by choosing a brand that could realistically sponsor the Women's Bundesliga. An initial brainstorming session and review of existing literature was conducted before choosing Beiersdorf as their focal brand. The selection process considered three main factors which included high brand recognition and strong corporate values of care and empowerment and social responsibility and compatibility with women's football. The research purpose and tone matched Beiersdorf's position as the parent company of NIVEA and Eucerin brands.

Subsequently, four common sponsorship activation types were identified based on best practices in sports marketing:

1. Title Sponsorship
2. Cause-Related Initiative
3. Official Partner / Jersey Sponsorship
4. Influencer Collaboration

For each sponsorship type, two formats were created to reflect how brands commonly communicate sponsorships.

1. Press releases were selected to simulate formal corporate communication.
2. Instagram posts were selected to represent informal, consumer-facing social media content.

The visual components of the stimuli were designed using Canva, incorporating Beiersdorf brand assets alongside visuals associated with Frauen-Bundesliga. Canva's AI image editing tools facilitated the seamless blending of logos and brand colors (blue and white) with football-related imagery. The Cause-Related Initiative stimulus was created using ChatGPT-4o's image generation tool, prompted to develop a visual for an initiative named "Empower Her," aimed at empowering young girls through football.

The textual content for the stimuli, including captions and press release copy, was also generated using ChatGPT-4o. This was achieved by providing prompts that specified the tone of voice, purpose, and format. The press releases adopted a formal tone, modeled after real-world examples from organizations such as the DFB, while the Instagram captions adopted a more casual, engaging style reflective of typical football sponsorship campaigns.

3.4.2. Validating the Stimuli

Subsequently, a pre-survey (stimuli validation study) was implemented to ascertain the clarity, realism, and alignment of the stimuli with the intended sponsorship activation types.

3.4.2.1. Purpose of the Pre-Survey

The objective of the validation survey was to:

- First, to confirm that participants could accurately recognize each sponsorship activation (via manipulation checks).
- Secondly, to assess the clarity, engagement potential, and attention-grabbing quality of both formats (Instagram vs. press release).
- Finally, to evaluate participants' perceptions of sponsorship effectiveness, assessing the extent to which the activations aligned with Beiersdorf's values and the Frauen-Bundesliga.

3.4.2.2. Sample and Procedure

A total of 47 respondents were initially gathered for this study. To ensure the reliability of the responses, the participants were first asked:

"To what extent are you familiar with sponsorships in football?"

- Fourteen participants indicated a high degree of familiarity, while the remaining participants reported varying degrees of familiarity.
- Meanwhile, 19 participants reported a moderate degree of familiarity.
- Nine participants who reported being not familiar were automatically screened out, leaving 33 valid respondents for analysis.

3.4.2.3. Survey Design

The 33 participants who completed the survey were exposed to all four sponsorship types, presented in both the press release and Instagram post formats. The survey flow incorporated the following elements:

- First, participants were presented with a series of questions designed to assess their ability to accurately identify the various sponsorship types.
- Additionally, the survey incorporated questions that evaluated the participants' preferences concerning the respective formats, particularly concerning the clarity, engagement, and attention-capture potential of each format.
- Finally, the survey concluded with Likert-scale items measuring perceived effectiveness, authenticity, and the alignment of Beiersdorf with Frauen-Bundesliga values.

3.4.3. Validation Results

The manipulation checks indicated high levels of recognition accuracy, though results varied across sponsorship types and formats. The Title Sponsorship activation demonstrated the

highest performance, with a 91% recognition rate for the Instagram post and 83% for the press release. The Cause-Related Initiative demonstrated a 91% recognition rate for the press release and 83% for the Instagram post. The Jersey Sponsorship demonstrated slightly lower recognition accuracy, with 75% accuracy via Instagram and 68% via press release. The Influencer Collaboration exhibited potential for enhancement, with 78% accuracy in press release recognition but only 61% in Instagram recognition.

In terms of format preferences, Instagram posts were consistently rated as more engaging and more attention-grabbing than press releases across most activation types. However, press releases were perceived as slightly clearer for certain activations, particularly the Cause-Related Initiative.

Likert-scale ratings indicated that participants generally found the sponsorship activations to be clear, authentic, and aligned with the values of women's football and Beiersdorf, with average scores of around 4 out of 5. While the impact on intent to engage with Beiersdorf as a brand was positive, it scored slightly lower compared to other perception metrics.

3.4.4. Final Stimuli

Preliminary survey results from the stimuli validation study indicated that no alterations were made to the visual or textual components of the tested stimuli. However, a pivotal decision was made regarding the format to be utilized in the main survey. The pre-survey revealed that Instagram posts were consistently rated as more engaging and attention-grabbing than press releases across most sponsorship types. Therefore, it was decided that Instagram posts would be the sole format for the final survey.

Consequently, all four sponsorship activation conditions, Title Sponsorship, Cause-Related Initiative, Official Partner/Jersey Sponsorship, and Influencer Collaboration, will be presented to respondents in the form of Instagram posts. The selection of Instagram as the exclusive format aligns with current trends in sports sponsorship communication, where social media is a dominant platform for fan engagement and sponsor activations.

The control group, representing the "no sponsorship" condition, will be presented as a neutral Instagram post. This control stimulus is intended to establish a baseline description of the Frauen-Bundesliga, devoid of any reference to sponsorship. While this control condition was not included in the pre-survey, it was developed to match the visual and contextual style of the other Instagram posts to ensure consistency across all experimental conditions.

Title Sponsorship



Cause-Related Initiative



Official Partner/Jersey Sponsorship



Influencer Collaboration



Control Group



Exhibit 1: Final Survey Stimuli

Source: Own Creation

3.5. Data Analysis

3.5.1. Quantitative Analysis Plan

After collecting approximately 250 to 300 valid responses, the raw survey data will be exported and cleaned using Microsoft Excel. The data-cleaning process will commence with the removal

of incomplete responses. This process entails the exclusion of participants who indicate a lack of familiarity with the Frauen-Bundesliga through the screening question, as well as those who do not complete essential sections of the survey or leave critical sections blank. Subsequent to this, a comprehensive review of all responses will be conducted to identify any missing values in key variables, including Likert scale items and manipulation checks. Any responses with substantial missing data that would compromise the validity of the analysis will be excluded from the dataset.

Additional filtering is performed based on attention and manipulation checks. Participants who fail these checks will be excluded to ensure the reliability of the data. The data will then undergo formatting adjustments, including standardizing variable labels for clarity and ensuring that all Likert scale responses are properly coded into numeric values (e.g., 1 for "strongly disagree" and 7 for "strongly agree"). Non-essential metadata, such as timestamps, IP addresses, or system-generated respondent IDs, will also be removed to prepare the dataset for statistical analysis.

It is important to note that no statistical analysis or advanced diagnostics will be performed in Excel. Specifically, tasks such as running inferential tests (e.g., ANOVA, regression), creating computed variables (e.g., scale means for constructs like Customer-Based Brand Equity or Fan Engagement), or detecting outliers and testing for normality will be reserved for SPSS. Following the cleansing of the dataset, its importation into SPSS (v.28) will be conducted for formal analysis.

The initial phase of the SPSS analysis will entail the evaluation of the reliability and validity of all multi-item scales. This will be assessed using Cronbach's alpha, where a threshold of ≥ 0.7 will be considered acceptable for internal consistency. Following this, I will report the descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions. These statistics will provide an overview of the sample and the key variables.

Multiple inferential tests will be conducted to test the proposed hypotheses. Initially, to examine H1 (the impact of sponsorship activations on brand equity) and H2 (the effect of fan engagement on brand equity), a One-Way ANOVA will be performed to compare brand equity outcomes, both Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) and Spectator-Based Brand Equity (SBBE), across the five experimental groups, including the control group. Post hoc tests will follow to compare the effectiveness of each sponsorship activation against the baseline condition (no sponsorship activation). A separate One-Way ANOVA will also be conducted to address H3, analyzing whether fan engagement levels vary significantly across the different sponsorship conditions.

To test hypothesis 4, which proposes that brand value congruence moderates the relationship between sponsorship activation and fan engagement, either the Process Macro (Model 1) by Hayes or a hierarchical regression approach will be employed. This analysis will determine whether the interaction effect between sponsorship activation and brand value congruence significantly influences brand equity outcomes.

3.5.2. Qualitative Analysis

The analysis of interview transcripts will be conducted using an inductive thematic approach. The initial coding categories, which include sponsorship objectives, brand alignment, activation strategies, perceived success, and fan engagement, will serve as a guide during the open coding process. Representative quotes will be selected to highlight emergent themes and provide cross-validation or refinement of the quantitative results. This integration of findings, also known as triangulation, will contribute to the depth and reliability of the study.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. Overview of Analytical Approach

This chapter presents a thorough and multi-level analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data collected in the study. The objective of this study was to assess the impact of different sponsorship activation strategies on brand equity in the context of the Frauen-Bundesliga. The conceptual model encompassed direct effects (H1, H2, H3), moderation (H4), mediation (Model 4), and moderated mediation (Model 5). The collected data were then subjected to rigorous analysis through the implementation of dummy-coded linear regressions and the utilization of Hayes' PROCESS macro models. While many relationships did not reach statistical significance, the nuanced interpretation of patterns and directional trends offers practical relevance and theoretical insight.

4.2. Quantitative Data Analysis

4.2.1. Data Preparation and Cleaning

The online survey initially received 401 responses. A two-step screening process was used to ensure the relevance and quality of responses. The first screening question asked participants if they had ever heard of or followed the Women's Bundesliga. The second question asked about their familiarity with Beiersdorf. Respondents who indicated they were unfamiliar with either of these questions were immediately excluded, reducing the sample to 184 participants.

To increase data integrity, responses were checked for duplicates using IP address tracking. The removal of any duplicates resulted in a final sample of 164 unique, valid responses. Of these participants, only 81 correctly identified the sponsorship condition and passed the manipulation check, thus forming the final analytic sample used for hypothesis testing.

The dataset was cleaned using Microsoft Excel. The process included: the removal of partial or invalid responses, checking for missing values in key constructs, consistent coding of Likert scale items (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree), and removal of irrelevant metadata (e.g., timestamps or system-generated IDs). The cleaned dataset was imported into SPSS version 28 for further analysis.

4.2.2. Sample Profile and Descriptive Statistics

- **Age:** Predominantly between 18–34 years
- **Gender:** 55% female, 43% male, 2% other
- **Familiarity with Beiersdorf:** The majority were moderately or slightly familiar

- **Engagement with Frauen-Bundesliga:** Mostly occasional viewers or social media followers

Detailed frequencies for extra demographic variables are provided in Appendix C. Descriptive statistics for each main construct showed sufficient variation across the 7-point Likert scales:

Item Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Customer-Based Brand Equity (mean of 5 items)	5.3975	.93407	81
Spectator-Based Brand Equity (mean of 4 items)	4.1914	1.06674	81
Fan Engagement (mean of 5 items)	3.7556	1.53655	81
Brand Value Congruence (mean of 4 items)	5.6389	.99922	81

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics

Source: IBM Corp. (2024). IBM SPSS Statistics for macOS, Version 30.0 [Computer software]. IBM Corp.

These descriptive means suggest that while brand-related equity perceptions were high (especially for CBBE), actual engagement levels were lower, indicating a potential gap between brand recognition and active participation. Detailed frequencies for demographic and behavioral variables are provided in Appendix D.

4.2.3. Reliability and Scale Internal Consistency

Reliability analyses were conducted using Cronbach's alpha for all multi-item constructs. It was demonstrated that all scales displayed satisfactory to excellent internal consistency.

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Customer-Based Brand Equity (mean of 5 items)	13.5858	7.374	.447	.585
Spectator-Based Brand Equity (mean of 4 items)	14.7920	6.757	.472	.561
Fan Engagement (mean of 5 items)	15.2278	5.041	.451	.605

Brand Value Congruence (mean of 4 items)	13.3444	7.225	.426	.592
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Table 4: Reliability Statistics

Source: IBM Corp. (2024). IBM SPSS Statistics for macOS, Version 30.0 [Computer software]. IBM Corp.

While Cronbach's alpha values ranged from .56 to .61 - below the conventional threshold of .70 - they are considered acceptable for exploratory research in emerging areas such as women's sports sponsorship. Future research should aim to further refine and validate these scales.

4.2.4. Normality Checks

Tests of normality (Shapiro-Wilk (SW) and Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS)) demonstrated that:

- The SBBE was found to approximate a normal distribution (SW $p = .811$).
- A slight departure from the standard norm was demonstrated by CBBE, Fan Engagement, and BVC (SW $p < .05$).

However, given the sample size ($N = 81$), the applied ANOVA and regression techniques are considered robust to moderate deviations from normality. The skewness and kurtosis values were found to be within acceptable ranges, and the Q-Q plots did not reveal any significant departures. Normality test results and distribution plots can be found in Appendix E.

4.2.5. Hypothesis Testing

Dummy-coded predictors were created:

- IV_D: 1 = any activation; 0 = control group
- TS_D, CRI_D, OP_D, IC_D: each representing a specific activation type vs. all others

H1: Sponsorship strategies positively affect brand equity (CBBE, SBBE)

Four dummy-coded linear regressions were conducted separately for CBBE and SBBE. However, none of the models attained statistical significance.

CBBE model: The F-statistic for this data is 0.328, the p-value is 0.859, and the R-squared value is 0.017. The full regression output for Customer-Based Brand Equity is presented in Appendix F.

- The coefficients were found to be negative and non-significant, except for one coefficient (e.g., TS_D: $\beta = -0.142$, $p = .404$).
- The control group demonstrated a higher level of performance in comparison to the majority of the sponsorship conditions, as indicated by the descriptive statistics.

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.183	4	.296	.328	.859 ^b
	Residual	68.617	76	.903		
	Total	69.800	80			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer-Based Brand Equity (mean of 5 items)

b. Predictors: (Constant), IC_D, OP_D, CRI_D, TS_D

Table 5: CBBE Linear Regression – ANOVA

Source: IBM Corp. (2024). IBM SPSS Statistics for macOS, Version 30.0 [Computer software]. IBM Corp.

SBBE model: The F-statistic (4, 76) is equal to 0.058, the p-value is .994, and the R² is .003.

Appendix G contains the regression analysis results for Spectator-Based Brand Equity.

- The investigation revealed that no individual activation type exhibited a significant effect.
- Once more, the control group exhibited the highest mean SBBE.

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.276	4	.069	.058	.994 ^b
	Residual	90.757	76	1.194		
	Total	91.034	80			

a. Dependent Variable: Spectator-Based Brand Equity (mean of 4 items)

b. Predictors: (Constant), IC_D, OP_D, CRI_D, TS_D

Table 6: SBBE Linear Regression – ANOVA

Source: IBM Corp. (2024). IBM SPSS Statistics for macOS, Version 30.0 [Computer software]. IBM Corp.

These findings suggest that the activation of sponsorship, as defined in this study, does not have a substantial impact on brand equity at either the cognitive (CBBE) or emotional (SBBE) level. A descriptive analysis indicates that both Influencer Collaborations and Community-Related Initiatives demonstrated superior performance in comparison to traditional Title Sponsorship

and Official Partner categories. This observation suggests that formats that are overly commercialized may compromise the effectiveness of the initiatives.

H2: Higher fan engagement significantly enhances brand equity (CBBE, SBBE)

The PROCESS Model 4 demonstrated a robust and consistent correlation between Fan Engagement and SBBE.

- Across all activation types, Fan Engagement exhibited a significant positive correlation with SBBE (e.g., IC_D → SBBE: $\beta = 0.3703$, $p < .001$).
- For CBBE, the relationship was weaker and often non-significant (e.g., IV_D → FanEng → CBBE: $\beta = 0.1124$, $p = .1016$).

This finding suggests that there is partial support for H2. Engagement has been demonstrated to be a more reliable predictor of league perception than sponsor perception. This finding aligns with the prevailing notion that fans' emotional investment in the league is more deeply tied to the league's brand than to its commercial partners. Mediation analysis with CBBE and SBBE results using PROCESS Model 4 are documented in Appendix J.

H3: Brand sponsorship elevates fan engagement

The application of regression models to assess the predictive capacity of various sponsorship types on fan engagement yielded non-significant outcomes. Fan Engagement regression outcomes are detailed in Appendix H.

- IV_D model: The value of F is 0.659, and the value of p is 0.622.
- TS_D: $\beta = -0.212$, $p = .210$; CRI_D: $\beta = -0.083$, $p = .617$.

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	6.331	4	1.583	.659	.622 ^b
	Residual	182.549	76	2.402		
	Total	188.880	80			

a. Dependent Variable: Fan Engagement (mean of 5 items)

b. Predictors: (Constant), IC_D, OP_D, CRI_D, TS_D

Table 7: Fan Engagement Linear Regression – ANOVA

Source: IBM Corp. (2024). IBM SPSS Statistics for macOS, Version 30.0 [Computer software]. IBM Corp.

These results do not provide support for H3. However, an examination of descriptive trends indicates that digital-led activations, such as influencer collaborations, may elicit a more

pronounced response. A significant body of qualitative feedback has emerged, emphasizing the pivotal role of platform-native, interactive formats in fostering heightened user engagement. This notion is further substantiated by the observed increase in user interaction with digital activities, aligning with the prevailing trends in user behavior.

H4: Brand Value Congruence (BVC) moderates the relationship between sponsorship and fan engagement

In this study, the PROCESS Model 1 was employed to assess the role of BVC as a moderator. Interaction effects were not statistically significant for any sponsorship condition:

- The IV_D x BVC model demonstrates a negative relationship between fan engagement and β , with a p-value of 0.2588. Appendix I includes results from PROCESS Model 1 testing the moderation effects of BVC on CBBE.
- The statistical analysis revealed a significant relationship between IC_D and BVC, as indicated by the calculated SBBE value of $\beta = 1.1884$ and the associated p-value of $p = .0040$. The BootCI value, which ranges from $[-.3911, 1.9857]$, suggests that the observed relationship is statistically significant. **Error! Reference source not found.** includes results from PROCESS Model 1 testing the moderation effects of BVC on SBBE.

While BVC showed a consistent and significant correlation with fan engagement ($\beta \approx 0.5-0.6$), most interaction effects in the moderation model were not statistically significant and thus generally did not support H4. One notable exception, however, was the significant interaction between IC_D and BVC on SBBE ($\beta = 1.1884$, $p = .004$), suggesting that congruence may play a conditional role under certain formats. Appendix I includes results from PROCESS Model 1 testing the moderation effects of BVC on CBBE and SBBE.

PROCESS Model 4: Mediation by Fan Engagement

Model 4 investigated if fan engagement served as a mediator in the relationship between sponsorship type and brand equity. However, the present study found that Fan Engagement emerged as a robust mediator only for SBBE.

- The IC_D \rightarrow Fan Engagement \rightarrow SBBE relationship is demonstrated by the following statistical findings: $\beta = 0.3703$, $p < .001$.
- However, the bootstrapped indirect effects were largely non-significant with CBBE (e.g., IV_D: BootCI $[-0.2509, 0.0774]$).

There is some support for mediation when the outcome pertains to league-related matters (SBBE). The findings of the study support that emotional engagement with the league can

translate into more favorable brand perceptions. However, this effect is not consistent for the sponsor. Mediation analysis with CBBE and SBBE results using PROCESS Model 4 are documented in Appendix J.

PROCESS Model 5: Moderated Mediation

Model 5 integrates both the moderator (BVC) and mediator (Fan Engagement) into a unified model. Across all sponsorship types, no significant moderated mediation effects were identified.

- The interplay among IC_D, BVC, and fan engagement has been shown to have a significant impact on CBBE: $\beta = .0029$, BootCI [-.1127, .1258].
- The following regression equation was used to analyze the data: $TS_D \times BVC \times \text{Fan Engagement} \rightarrow \text{SBBE}$. The resulting coefficient of determination (R^2) was .1927, and the bootstrap confidence interval (CI) was .5129 to .0858.

These findings indicate that, while Fan Engagement serves as a substantial mechanism for enhancing SBBE, the strength of this pathway is not considerably influenced by BVC. The results of Model 5 underscore the robustness of Fan Engagement as a standalone influence, devoid of context-dependent influences. Moderation Mediation analysis with SBBE results using PROCESS Model 5 are documented in Appendix K.

4.3. Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative interviews were conducted with three stakeholders: Jessica Stommel (SportFive), Florian Wittmann (DFB), and Jemil Hamiko (syNeo) to triangulate the quantitative findings. Thematic coding revealed five dominant themes.

4.3.1. Strategic Fit and Brand Alignment

All interviewees placed significant emphasis on the importance of shared values between sponsors and women's football organizations. As Jessica noted, the process entails more than merely applying a logo to a jersey; it involves the narrative that is woven around it. Jemil further elaborated that syNeo's decision to sponsor women's football was a strategic choice that resonated with their organizational values of inclusivity and visibility.

4.3.2. Sponsorship Activation Best Practices

It was evident that community initiatives with a tangible presence and digital content of high-quality were the most effective activations. As Jemil emphasized, the impact of the hospital and school visits was profound and enduring. Florian expounded on the notion that the organization of matchday festivals and youth events serves to enhance the connection between the club and

the community. These insights suggest that the success of sponsorship lies in activation quality rather than format.

4.3.3. Fan Engagement Drivers

The participants in the study concurred that the relatability and authenticity of the players were significant factors in generating engagement. Jessica noted that "Fans want to connect with real stories, not polished advertising." This finding is consistent with the survey results, which indicated that emotional connection (SBBE) remained unaffected by activation type, thereby underscoring the significance of human storytelling.

4.3.4. Measuring Sponsorship Success

While syNeo placed a high value on goodwill and employee pride, SportFive utilized quantitative tools to measure shifts in brand image and awareness. Florian placed significant emphasis on the necessity of long-term commitment, emphasizing its superiority over the utilization of short-term metrics. These differing views serve to reinforce the conclusion that sponsorship success is multidimensional in nature.

4.3.5. Challenges and Opportunities

Barriers such as limited media visibility and financial constraints were acknowledged. However, the interviewees expressed optimism about the future of the Frauen-Bundesliga, citing increasing viewership, investments, and cultural momentum.

4.4. Summary of Findings

The results of this study offer a nuanced understanding of how sponsorship activation strategies impact brand equity in the context of the Frauen-Bundesliga. Although none of the direct effects examined in Hypothesis 1 attained statistical significance, descriptive trends indicate that community-related initiatives and influencer collaborations exhibited superior performance in terms of Customer-Based and Spectator-Based Brand Equity (CBBE and SBBE) in comparison to more conventional formats, such as title sponsorships or official partnerships. These descriptive patterns might imply a shifting preference among fans towards more relatable, digitally native, and value-aligned brand engagements, though further research is needed to substantiate these tendencies. Hypothesis 2 received partial support: while fan engagement did not significantly enhance CBBE, it was a strong and consistent predictor of SBBE across activation types, confirming the emotional bond fans have with the league rather than its sponsors. Hypothesis 3, which posited that sponsorship activation elevates fan engagement, was not supported statistically, although qualitative and descriptive data revealed stronger fan interaction with digital activations, particularly those involving influencers, than with

conventional sponsorship formats. Hypothesis 4, which examined the role of Brand Value Congruence (BVC) as a moderator, also did not achieve statistical significance. While brand value congruence did not show statistically significant moderating effects, it did show a strong direct (main) effect on fan engagement, highlighting its role as an independent predictor. Mediation analyses (PROCESS Model 4) indicated that fan engagement partially mediated the relationship between some activation types and SBBE, but not CBBE. Furthermore, moderated mediation models (PROCESS Model 5) confirmed no significant three-way interaction effects. The qualitative data corroborated these quantitative patterns, emphasizing authenticity, strategic alignment, digital storytelling, and community-rooted initiatives as pivotal factors in successful sponsorship. While the majority of the hypotheses lacked statistical support, a combination of descriptive trends and stakeholder insights highlights the potential of emotionally resonant, value-driven, and digitally native sponsorship strategies in women's football.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

5.1. Main Conclusions

This study examined the impact of diverse sponsorship activation strategies on brand equity within the context of the Frauen-Bundesliga. The primary focus of this study was to investigate the manner in which sponsorship type, brand value congruence (BVC), and fan engagement (FE) interact to influence perceptions of both the sponsoring brand (CBBE) and the league (SBBE). The present study was predicated on a conceptual model involving direct effects (H1–H3), moderation (H4), mediation (PROCESS Model 4), and moderated mediation (PROCESS Model 5). To this end, a randomized online experiment (N=81 valid responses) and three expert interviews were conducted.

The quantitative results indicated that the implementation of a sponsorship activation strategy, in isolation, does not exert a substantial influence on CBBE or SBBE, thereby providing no statistical substantiation for H1. However, an examination of descriptive patterns indicated that Influencer Collaborations and Community-Related Initiatives exhibited superior performance in comparison to more conventional forms, such as Title Sponsorship or Official Partner formats. This finding is consistent with the qualitative interview insights that underscored the significance of authenticity and storytelling in logo placement, superseding the conventional approach.

H2 received partial support, as fan engagement significantly predicted SBBE but not CBBE. This finding suggests that engagement plays a more significant role in shaping perceptions of the league's emotional and quality-related brand attributes compared to its impact on attitudes toward sponsors. This discrepancy underscores the observation that while fans may strongly identify with the league, their loyalty does not automatically extend to its commercial partners. There was no statistical support for hypothesis H3, as the regression analysis did not have a significant effect of sponsorship type on fan engagement. However, both qualitative feedback and item-level descriptive trends indicated higher levels of digital engagement, particularly on social media, in comparison to match attendance or product purchase behavior. This finding suggests that sponsorship strategies designed with digital-first platforms in mind may be more effective, especially among younger, tech-savvy audiences.

The H4 hypothesis, which postulated that BVC moderates the relationship between sponsorship and fan engagement, was not supported. While BVC demonstrated a robust main effect on fan engagement ($\beta \approx 0.5\text{--}0.6$), the moderation term did not attain statistical significance in any of

the models. This suggests that aligning with the league's values enhances engagement, irrespective of the sponsorship format. However, it does not necessarily increase the effectiveness of a specific activation type.

The mediation tests (PROCESS Model 4) demonstrated that Fan Engagement partially mediated the relationship between specific activation types (e.g., influencer collaborations) and SBBE. However, the effect was not consistently robust across all conditions. The application of moderated mediation (PROCESS Model 5) did not yield statistically significant results, thereby indicating that BVC does not influence the mediating role of fan engagement. Nevertheless, directional trends across several models suggested that influencer-led and community-rooted formats hold higher potential for emotionally resonant activations.

The qualitative interviews produced five essential themes which included the requirement for strategic congruence and the importance of high-quality activations and emotional storytelling and multi-dimensional success measures and growth potential despite structural barriers. The survey data received support from these findings which strengthened the essential role of authenticity and emotional connection in sponsorship success for women's football.

5.2. Theoretical Contributions

This research adds substantial value to brand equity and sports sponsorship literature through its integration of customer-based (CBBE) and spectator-based (SBBE) equity constructs into one unified model. The research builds upon existing models by studying both fan engagement as a mediator and brand value congruence as a moderator while providing new evidence from women's football which remains understudied. The study supports the current theoretical trend which shows that sponsorship execution quality and emotional authenticity and value alignment with sports or audiences matter more than sponsorship type.

The research results show digital engagement behaviors provide better indications of contemporary fan involvement than traditional loyalty measures based on match attendance and merchandise purchases. The findings of this study support future theoretical models to include digital-first behaviors and emotional engagement as fundamental elements of fan-brand relationships.

5.3. Practical Implications

The results demonstrate why brand managers and marketers should focus on activation quality instead of format selection. The investment in storytelling and emotional storytelling and value-based narratives through influencers and community content will generate better results than

traditional sponsorship methods. The study demonstrates that fan engagement strongly affects SBBE so leagues and sponsors must work together to create meaningful connections instead of focusing solely on visibility and brand exposure.

Digital platforms serve as essential points of contact for this purpose. The research shows that social media content engagement surpasses both live event attendance and purchase activity so campaigns need to be optimized with features like shareability and platform-native storytelling and interactivity. The current stage of women's football requires authentic campaigns which create emotional connections because visibility and cultural momentum are still developing.

The research shows that sports clubs and leagues must establish partnerships with league values and community missions to achieve success. Authentic brand activations including hospital visits and school programs and behind-the-scenes athlete content will create stronger fan connections and enduring brand relationships.

5.4. Limitations

The research contains certain limitations which need to be recognized. The initial sample collection used convenience sampling methods but the final data screening process did not guarantee complete generalizability to all women's football fans. The use of mock social media post stimuli instead of actual live campaigns during the study might impact the ecological validity of the results. Real-world exposure over time could potentially produce different findings than this study.

Thirdly, the experimental design was between subjects, meaning each participant saw only one condition. This approach does not align with the multifaceted consumer environments in which consumers encounter numerous sponsorship formats and brand touchpoints concurrently. Fourthly, the evaluation process involved the testing of only one moderator (BVC) and one mediator (Fan Engagement). While both concepts are theoretically relevant, other variables such as involvement with the sport, media exposure, or gender identification may further explain variance in sponsorship outcomes.

Finally, the relatively modest final sample size ($N = 81$) due to the manipulation check diminishes the power of the analysis and the capacity to discern subtle effects. While this was necessary to maintain internal validity, it limits generalizability and sensitivity.

5.5. Future Research Directions

Future research should implement longitudinal designs to monitor how sponsorship activations affect brands throughout extended periods. The research should monitor brand awareness

together with purchase intent and loyalty metrics throughout different time periods. The experimental designs should expand to include video content as well as live campaign stimuli and exposure to multiple formats.

The models should incorporate additional moderators that include sports identification and media usage and cultural proximity. The research should investigate how different fan subgroups (e.g., frequent vs. casual viewers or male vs. female fans) react to sponsorship types. Future research needs to conduct in-depth investigations about digital-native sponsorship approaches that include athlete storytelling and TikTok content and influencer partnerships. A thorough analysis of these strategies' effects on brand equity dimensions will help guide future marketing choices. The growing cultural and media importance of women's sports requires sponsorship models that deliver both effectiveness and value.

5.6. Closing Reflection

The current research investigates how various sponsorship activation methods affect brand equity in women's football. Women's football stands as an underresearched field in academic literature despite its growing cultural importance and increased visibility. The study used quantitative experimental methods together with qualitative insights to present a complete understanding of sponsorship effectiveness factors in the Frauen-Bundesliga.

Although statistical results were indeterminate the research process showed that no statistical findings prove a lack of comprehension. The consistent patterns in qualitative narratives along with directional data trends reveal a fundamental truth about modern sports particularly women's football that sponsorship impact depends on resonance and authenticity rather than category or title.

The project showed how difficult it is to work with new sports platforms since established marketing strategies might not be effective. Fans take an active role in the brand ecosystem because they function as emotional stakeholders of the brand. Brands planning to enter or expand their operations in women's sports need to understand this crucial finding. To succeed these entities need to listen actively to their audience while matching their values to the ecosystem they want to engage with and making substantial contributions to that ecosystem.

This research was personally transformative. Through this opportunity I gained deep knowledge about my subject of interest while creating a small but important advancement toward improving visibility and professionalization of women's football. I aim for these findings to act as a starting point for additional research and supply practical assistance to

practitioners and motivate brands to make financial and emotional and strategic investments in women's sports development.

AI DISCLAIMER

The following artificial intelligence (AI) tools were utilized as support resources in the development of this thesis. The utilization of these tools was executed under my comprehensive academic oversight, and none of the instruments supplanted Independent critical analysis or decision-making processes.

ChatGPT (OpenAI) was used to:

- Assist in literature screening and summarization
- Support verification and interpretation of statistical outputs (all calculations and conclusions were conducted and interpreted by me)
- Help draft and refine the textual content of the experimental stimuli (e.g., Instagram captions and press releases)
- Provide formatting suggestions and help reduce content for appendices
- Support glossary wordings and phrasing
- Translate and condense the abstract into Portuguese while respecting the word count limit

Canva AI was used to:

- Create and edit the images used for the visual sponsorship stimuli

DeepL Write was used to:

- Improve grammar, clarity, and sentence structure during the final editing phase

The entirety of the academic work, comprising research design, data collection, statistical analysis, and interpretation of results, was conducted independently by me. The utilization of AI was not intended as a replacement for academic rigor or authorship; rather, it was employed as a tool for enhancement.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Survey

Block 1: Introduction

Thank you for participating in this survey, which is part of my Master's Thesis at Católica Lisbon School of Business and Economics.

My research focuses on the impact of different sponsorship strategies. Note that the image displayed in this survey is purely fictional and has been edited using AI for research purposes. It does not represent an actual sponsorship agreement or endorsement. Any brand names, logos, or partnerships shown are hypothetical and should not be interpreted as real sponsorships or official affiliations.

The survey will take approximately **7-10 minutes** to complete. All responses are completely anonymous and confidential. The data collected will be used solely for academic purposes and will be presented only in aggregated form, ensuring that individual responses cannot be identified.

As a token of appreciation, participants have the chance to **win a \$25/€25 Amazon gift card or 1-month DAZN membership** (subject to availability in your region). If you would like to enter the prize draw, you will have the option to provide your email at the end of the survey. Your email will only be used for this purpose and will not be shared or used for any other reason.

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me at s-mlinde@ucp.pt. By proceeding, you acknowledge and agree to participate in this study.

Block 2: Screening Questions

Q1 Have you ever watched, read about, or otherwise heard of the Frauen-Bundesliga (Germany's top-level women's football league)?

- No (1)
- Yes (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Q1 = 1

Q2 How familiar are you with Beiersdorf?

- Not familiar at all (1)
- Slightly familiar (2)
- Moderately familiar (3)
- Very familiar (4)
- Extremely familiar (5)

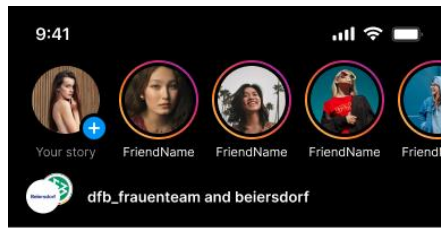
Skip To: End of Survey If Q2 = 1

Display this question:

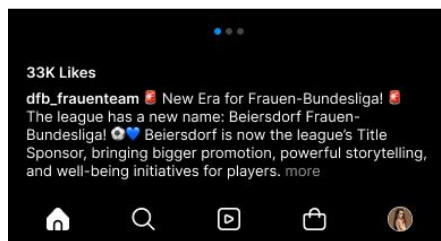
If Q2 = 2 or Q2 = 3

Beiersdorf is a German multinational company specializing in skincare and personal care products. It owns well-known brands such as **NIVEA, Eucerin, Labello, Hansaplast, and La Prairie**. The company has a strong presence in global markets and is known for its **commitments to sustainability, dermatological research, and supporting community initiatives**.

Block 3: Stimuli



Beiersdorf Frauen- Bundesliga



Q3.1 What do you believe Beiersdorf's primary goal is in sponsoring the Frauen-Bundesliga?

- Increase brand visibility and dominate league naming (Title Sponsorship) (1)
- Promote social responsibility and support women's football growth (Cause-Related Initiative) (2)
- Gain official brand association and premium marketing rights (Official Partner / Jersey Sponsorship) (3)
- Leverage athlete-driven content to create emotional brand connections (Influencer Collaboration) (4)
- No activation presented (5)



Q3.2 What do you believe Beiersdorf’s primary goal is in sponsoring the Frauen-Bundesliga?

- Increase brand visibility and dominate league naming (Title Sponsorship) (1)
- Promote social responsibility and support women’s football growth (Cause-Related Initiative) (2)
- Gain official brand association and premium marketing rights (Official Partner / Jersey Sponsorship) (3)
- Leverage athlete-driven content to create emotional brand connections (Influencer Collaboration) (4)
- No activation presented (5)



- Q3.3** What do you believe Beiersdorf's primary goal is in sponsoring the Frauen-Bundesliga?
- Increase brand visibility and dominate league naming (Title Sponsorship) (1)
 - Promote social responsibility and support women's football growth (Cause-Related Initiative) (2)
 - Gain official brand association and premium marketing rights (Official Partner / Jersey Sponsorship) (3)
 - Leverage athlete-driven content to create emotional brand connections (Influencer Collaboration) (4)
 - No activation presented (5)



Q3.4 What do you believe Beiersdorf’s primary goal is in sponsoring the Frauen-Bundesliga?

- Increase brand visibility and dominate league naming (Title Sponsorship) (1)
- Promote social responsibility and support women’s football growth (Cause-Related Initiative) (2)
- Gain official brand association and premium marketing rights (Official Partner / Jersey Sponsorship) (3)
- Leverage athlete-driven content to create emotional brand connections (Influencer Collaboration) (4)
- No activation presented (5)



- Q3.5** What do you believe Beiersdorf’s primary goal is in sponsoring the Frauen-Bundesliga?
- Increase brand visibility and dominate league naming (Title Sponsorship) (1)
 - Promote social responsibility and support women’s football growth (Cause-Related Initiative) (2)
 - Gain official brand association and premium marketing rights (Official Partner / Jersey Sponsorship) (3)
 - Leverage athlete-driven content to create emotional brand connections (Influencer Collaboration) (4)
 - No activation presented (5)

Block 4: Core Measures

Q4 - CBBE Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement using the 7-point scale below.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I have a favorable impression of Beiersdorf as a brand. (1)							
Beiersdorf is one of the first brands that come to mind when thinking about skincare and personal care. (2)							
Beiersdorf's sponsorship of the Frauen-Bundesliga makes me perceive it as a premium, high-quality brand. (3)							
I would consider buying Beiersdorf products in the future. (4)							
Beiersdorf is a brand I trust. (5)							

Q5 - SBBE Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement using the 7-point scale below.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I feel a strong emotional connection with the Frauen-Bundesliga. (1)							
The Frauen-Bundesliga represents high-quality football. (2)							
This sponsorship increases my likelihood of watching matches in the future. (3)							
I trust the Frauen-Bundesliga more because of this sponsor. (4)							

Q6 - Control For this question, please select ‘Somewhat agree’.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly agree (7)

Q7 - Fan Engagement Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement using the 7-point scale below.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I regularly discuss Frauen-Bundesliga matches with friends or online. (1)							
I engage with Frauen-Bundesliga content on social media (e.g., like, share, comment). (2)							
I have attended or plan to attend a Frauen-Bundesliga match. (3)							
I have purchased or considered purchasing a product from a brand sponsoring Frauen-Bundesliga. (4)							
I actively seek behind-the-scenes content about Frauen-Bundesliga players. (5)							

Q8 - Brand Val Cong Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement using the 7-point scale below.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
Beiersdorf and the Frauen-Bundesliga share compatible values. (1)							
Beiersdorf's involvement in women's football aligns with the league's identity. (2)							
The sponsorship between Beiersdorf and the Frauen-Bundesliga feels authentic. (3)							
Beiersdorf's sponsorship supports genuine initiatives, not just marketing. (4)							

Block 5: Additional Variables / Covariates

Q9 How closely do you follow Frauen-Bundesliga matches?

- Never (1)
- Sometimes (2)
- Often (3)
- Most of the time (4)
- Always (5)

Q10 How closely do you follow Frauen-Bundesliga news?

- Never (1)
- Sometimes (2)
- Often (3)
- Most of the time (4)
- Always (5)

Q11 What would be your perception of a potential Beiersdorf's sponsorship with the Frauen-Bundesliga?

- Dislike a great deal (1)
- Dislike somewhat (2)

- Neither like nor dislike (3)
- Like somewhat (4)
- Like a great deal (5)

Q12 Do you have any additional thoughts about a potential Beiersdorf's sponsorship or the Frauen-Bundesliga?

Block 6: Demographics

Q13 Age:

- Under 18 (1)
- 18 - 24 (2)
- 25 - 34 (3)
- 35 - 44 (4)
- 45 - 54 (5)
- 55 - 64 (6)
- 65 - 74 (7)
- 75 - 84 (8)
- 85 or older (9)

Q14 What is your total monthly net income? (For the purpose of this research, please note that 1 EUR = 1 USD.)

- Less than €1,000 (1)
- €1,000 – €1,999 (2)
- €2,000 – €2,999 (3)
- €3,000 – €3,999 (4)
- €4,000 – €4,999 (5)
- €5,000 – €5,999 (6)
- €6,000 or more (7)
- Prefer not to say (8)

Q15 Gender:

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Non-binary / third gender (3)
- Prefer not to say (4)

Q16 Country:

▼ Germany (1) ... Zimbabwe (196)

Block 7: Prize Draw

Thank you for completing the survey! You may provide an email if you wish to enter our draw for the \$25 Amazon gift card or 1-month DAZN subscription. This email will be stored separately from your responses and used only to contact you if you win. The winner of the draw will be notified by email within 4 weeks.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Sponsorship Managers (Brand Side)

1. Rank the top 3 criteria your brand uses when evaluating sponsorship opportunities:
 - Audience alignment
 - Media exposure

- Engagement potential
 - ROI predictability
 - CSR alignment
 - Brand fit
 - Cost/value ratio
2. Why did your brand decide to sponsor the Frauen-Bundesliga?
 3. What are your main goals when sponsoring football, and which activation strategies help you achieve them?
 4. What factors influenced your decision to choose Frauen-Bundesliga over other sports sponsorship opportunities?
 5. How do you measure the impact of your sponsorship on brand awareness, image, and loyalty?
 6. Have you seen measurable consumer engagement from your sponsorship? How is it tracked?
 7. How does your brand ensure that its sponsorship is perceived as *authentic* and aligned with Frauen-Bundesliga values?
 8. How important is fan engagement in determining the success of your sponsorship?
 9. What has been your most successful activation for engaging Frauen-Bundesliga fans?
 10. Do you see differences in engagement and ROI between women's and men's football sponsorships?
 11. How can the Frauen-Bundesliga improve its attractiveness to sponsors?
 12. Do you plan to expand or change your sponsorship strategy in the future?
 13. What trends do you see shaping the future of sponsorships in women's football?

Frauen-Bundesliga Representatives (League Side)

1. Please rank the most important sponsorship goals for the league:
 - Revenue generation
 - League image building
 - Fan engagement
 - Gender equity/social impact
 - Brand alignment with sponsors
2. How does the DFB position the Frauen-Bundesliga as an attractive sponsorship property?
3. Which sponsorship models (title sponsor, official partners, cause-related campaigns) have been the most successful?
4. How do you measure the impact of sponsorships on Frauen-Bundesliga's brand perception?
5. Have sponsorships helped reposition Frauen-Bundesliga in the market?
6. What steps do you take to ensure that sponsors align with the league's values?
7. Which sponsorship activations generate the most engagement, and how do you track that impact?
8. How does sponsorship effectiveness in the Frauen-Bundesliga compare to men's football?
9. What are the biggest challenges in attracting and retaining sponsors?
10. What new initiatives is the DFB implementing to enhance sponsorship opportunities?
11. What trends do you see in women's football sponsorship over the next five years?

Sports Marketing Experts (Agency Side)

1. From your experience, which factors are most important to sponsors in women's football? Please rank top 3:
 - ROI
 - Brand positioning
 - Storytelling potential
 - Athlete visibility
 - Media exposure
 - Community impact
2. How has sponsorship in women's football evolved over the last 5 years?
3. What are the key differences in sponsorship strategies between men's and women's football?
4. Which industries or brands have been the most successful in activating women's football sponsorships?
5. What sponsorship activation strategies tend to work best in women's sports?
6. How important is authenticity in sponsor-brand alignment for women's football?
7. What role does digital engagement play in successful sponsorship activations?
8. How do agencies typically measure sponsorship ROI in women's football?
9. Which KPIs do you prioritize when measuring sponsorship success, and how does fan engagement influence those?
10. What are the biggest challenges brands face when sponsoring women's football?
11. How can the Frauen-Bundesliga make itself a more attractive sponsorship property?
12. What trends do you predict for women's football sponsorship over the next decade?

Appendix C: Frequencies Tables

Net Income

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than €1,000	6	7.4	7.4	7.4
	€1,000 - €1,999	13	16.0	16.0	23.5
	€2,000 - €2,999	20	24.7	24.7	48.1
	€3,000 - €3,999	20	24.7	24.7	72.8
	€4,000 - €4,999	7	8.6	8.6	81.5
	€5,000 - €5,999	7	8.6	8.6	90.1
	€6,000 or more	4	4.9	4.9	95.1
	Prefer not to say	4	4.9	4.9	100.0
Total	81	100.0	100.0		

Country

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Germany	41	50.6	50.6	50.6
	USA	7	8.6	8.6	59.3
	Portugal	1	1.2	1.2	60.5
	Guatemala	6	7.4	7.4	67.9

Australia	1	1.2	1.2	69.1
Belgium	2	2.5	2.5	71.6
Colombia	2	2.5	2.5	74.1
Denmark	1	1.2	1.2	75.3
El Salvador	1	1.2	1.2	76.5
France	3	3.7	3.7	80.2
India	1	1.2	1.2	81.5
Ireland	1	1.2	1.2	82.7
Italy	2	2.5	2.5	85.2
Luxembourg	1	1.2	1.2	86.4
Mexico	2	2.5	2.5	88.9
Netherlands	1	1.2	1.2	90.1
New Zealand	1	1.2	1.2	91.4
Spain	3	3.7	3.7	95.1
Switzerland	2	2.5	2.5	97.5
United Kingdom	2	2.5	2.5	100.0
Total	81	100.0	100.0	

Appendix D: Descriptives

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Customer-Based Brand Equity (mean of 5 items)	81	2.80	6.80	5.3975	.93407
Spectator-Based Brand Equity (mean of 4 items)	81	1.50	7.00	4.1914	1.06674
Fan Engagement (mean of 5 items)	81	1.00	6.80	3.7556	1.53655
Brand Value Conguence (mean of 4 items)	81	1.5	7.0	5.639	.9992
Valid N (listwise)	81				

Appendix E: Normality Tests

CBBE Explore

Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Customer-Based Brand Equity (mean of 5 items)	81	100.0%	0	0.0%	81	100.0%

Descriptives

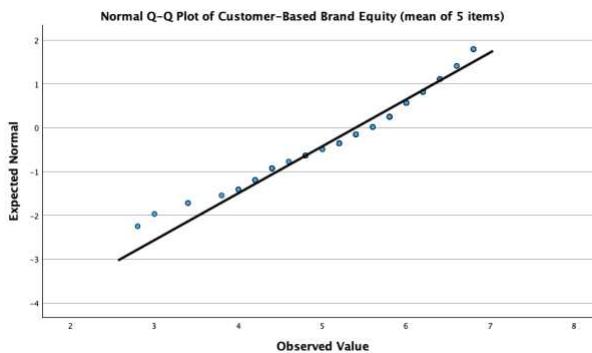
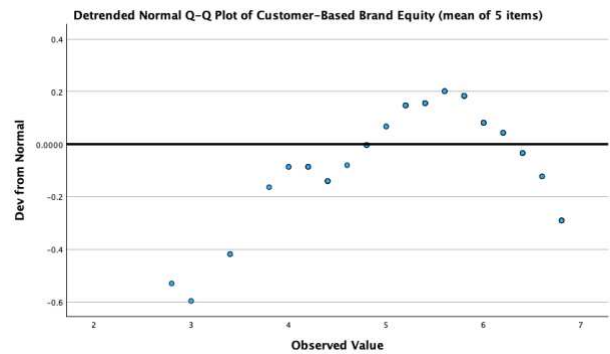
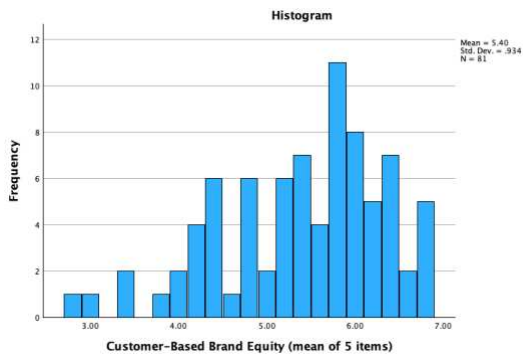
	Statistic	Std. Error
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Customer-Based Brand Equity (mean of 5 items)	Mean		5.3975	.10379
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	5.1910	
		Upper Bound	5.6041	
	5% Trimmed Mean		5.4440	
	Median		5.6000	
	Variance		.872	
	Std. Deviation		.93407	
	Minimum		2.80	
	Maximum		6.80	
	Range		4.00	
	Interquartile Range		1.20	
	Skewness		-.663	.267
	Kurtosis		-.037	.529

Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Customer-Based Brand Equity (mean of 5 items)	.136	81	<.001	.952	81	.004

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction



SBBE Explore

Case Processing Summary

Cases		
Valid	Missing	Total

	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Spectator-Based Brand Equity (mean of 4 items)	81	100.0%	0	0.0%	81	100.0%

Descriptives

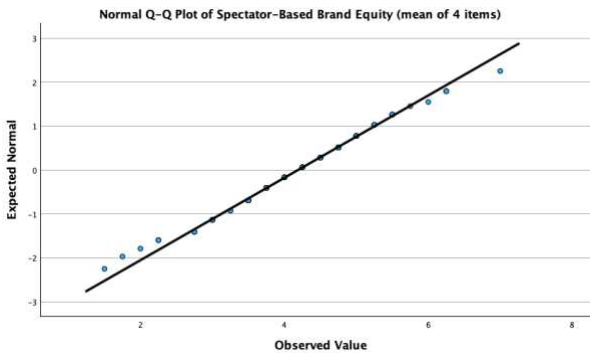
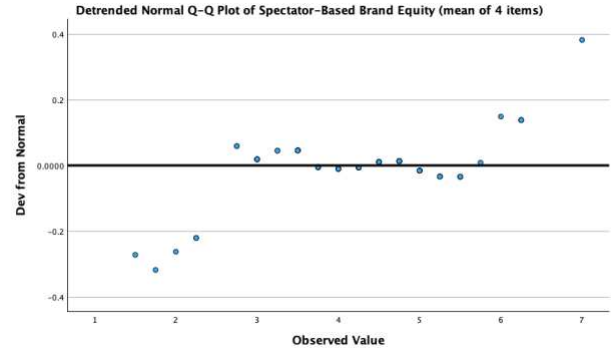
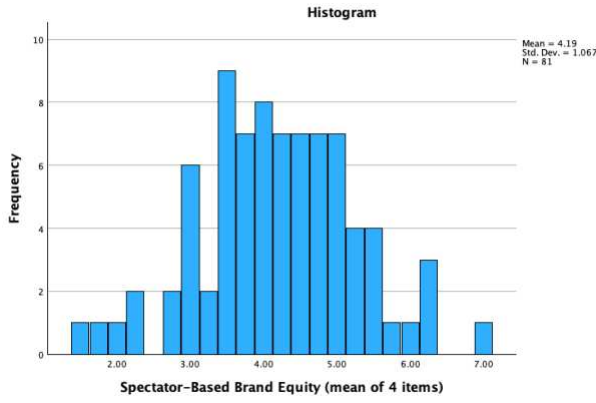
		Statistic	Std. Error	
Spectator-Based Brand Equity (mean of 4 items)	Mean	4.1914	.11853	
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	3.9555	
		Upper Bound	4.4272	
	5% Trimmed Mean	4.1953		
	Median	4.2500		
	Variance	1.138		
	Std. Deviation	1.06674		
	Minimum	1.50		
	Maximum	7.00		
	Range	5.50		
	Interquartile Range	1.50		
	Skewness	-.040	.267	
	Kurtosis	.186	.529	

Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Spectator-Based Brand Equity (mean of 4 items)	.073	81	.200*	.990	81	.811

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction



Fan Engagement Explore

Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Fan Engagement (mean of 5 items)	81	100.0%	0	0.0%	81	100.0%

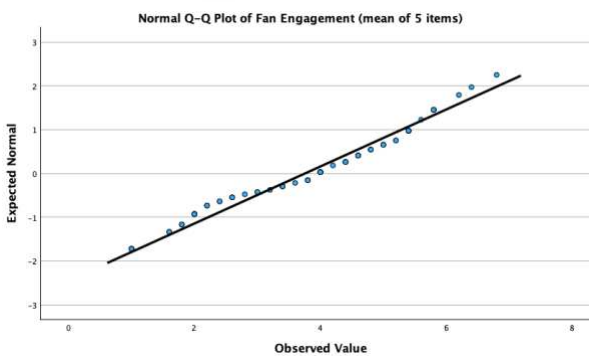
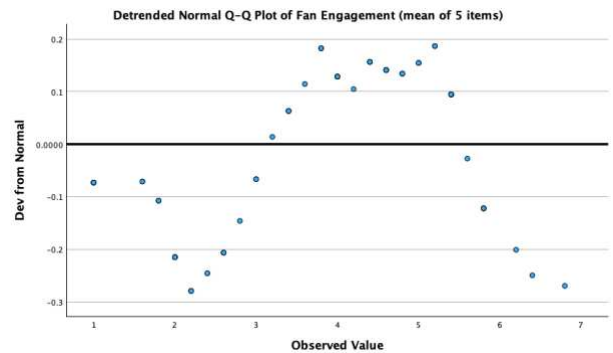
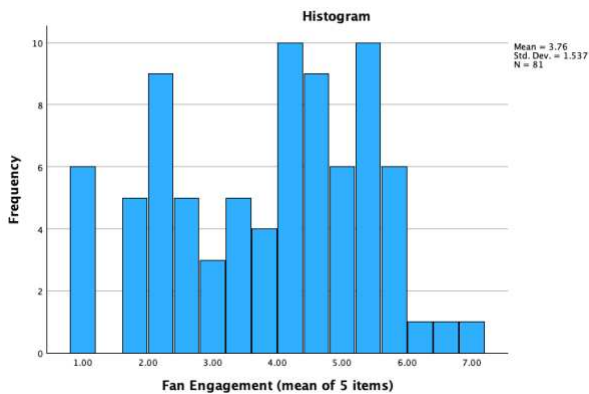
Descriptives

		Statistic	Std. Error
Fan Engagement (mean of 5 items)	Mean	3.7556	.17073
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	3.4158
		Upper Bound	4.0953
	5% Trimmed Mean	3.7676	
	Median	4.0000	
	Variance	2.361	
	Std. Deviation	1.53655	
	Minimum	1.00	
	Maximum	6.80	
	Range	5.80	
	Interquartile Range	2.70	
	Skewness	-.205	.267
	Kurtosis	-1.008	.529

Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Fan Engagement (mean of 5 items)	.106	81	.024	.956	81	.008

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction



Brand Value Congruence Explore

Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Brand Value Congruence (mean of 4 items)	81	100.0%	0	0.0%	81	100.0%

Descriptives

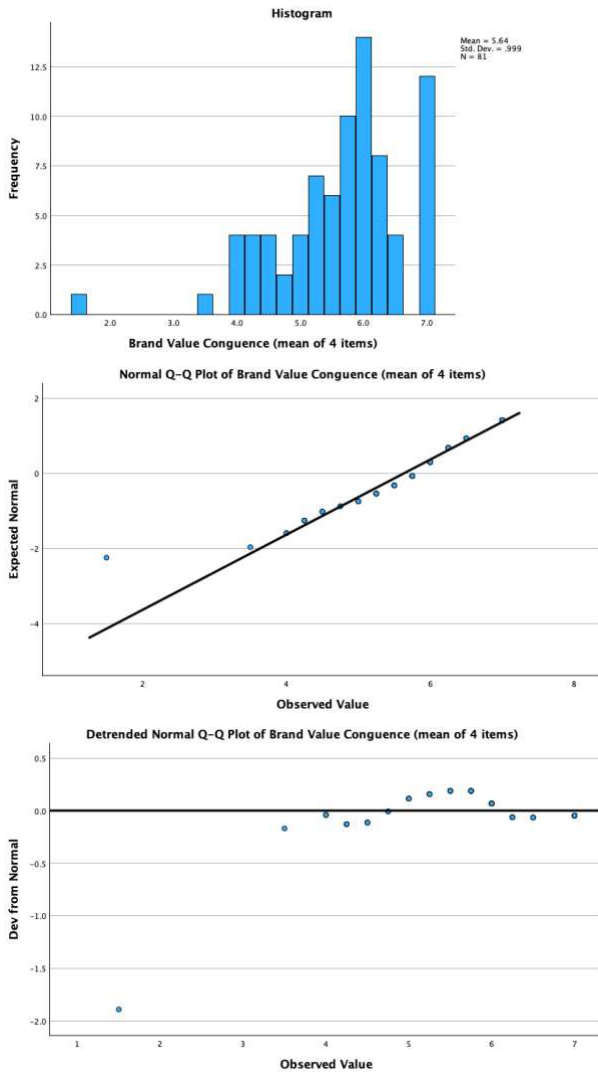
		Statistic	Std. Error
Brand Value Congruence (mean of 4 items)	Mean	5.639	.1110
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	5.418
		Upper Bound	5.860
	5% Trimmed Mean		5.695
	Median		5.750
	Variance		.998

Std. Deviation	.9992	
Minimum	1.5	
Maximum	7.0	
Range	5.5	
Interquartile Range	1.1	
Skewness	-1.060	.267
Kurtosis	2.448	.529

Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Brand Value Conguence (mean of 4 items)	.137	81	<.001	.919	81	<.001

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction



Appendix F: CBBE Regression

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Customer-Based Brand Equity (mean of 5 items)	5.3975	.93407	81
TS_D	.2840	.45372	81
CRI_D	.2593	.44096	81
OP_D	.2099	.40976	81
IC_D	.1111	.31623	81

Correlations

		Customer-Based Brand Equity (mean of 5 items)	TS_D	CRI_D	OP_D	IC_D
Pearson Correlation	Customer-Based Brand Equity (mean of 5 items)	1.000	-.110	.080	-.025	.018
	TS_D	-.110	1.000	-.373	-.325	-.223
	CRI_D	.080	-.373	1.000	-.305	-.209
	OP_D	-.025	-.325	-.305	1.000	-.182
	IC_D	.018	-.223	-.209	-.182	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Customer-Based Brand Equity (mean of 5 items)	.	.163	.238	.413	.437
	TS_D	.163	.	.000	.002	.023
	CRI_D	.238	.000	.	.003	.030
	OP_D	.413	.002	.003	.	.052
	IC_D	.437	.023	.030	.052	.
N	Customer-Based Brand Equity (mean of 5 items)	81	81	81	81	81
	TS_D	81	81	81	81	81
	CRI_D	81	81	81	81	81
	OP_D	81	81	81	81	81
	IC_D	81	81	81	81	81

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	IC_D, OP_D, CRI_D, TS_D ^b	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Customer-Based Brand Equity (mean of 5 items)

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.130 ^a	.017	-.035	.95018

a. Predictors: (Constant), IC_D, OP_D, CRI_D, TS_D

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	5.527	.286		19.293	<.001
	TS_D	-.292	.348	-.142	-.840	.404
	CRI_D	-.003	.354	-.002	-.010	.992
	OP_D	-.174	.368	-.076	-.474	.637
	IC_D	-.083	.427	-.028	-.194	.847

a. Dependent Variable: Customer-Based Brand Equity (mean of 5 items)

Appendix G: SBBE Regression

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Spectator-Based Brand Equity (mean of 4 items)	4.1914	1.06674	81
TS_D	.2840	.45372	81
CRI_D	.2593	.44096	81
OP_D	.2099	.40976	81
IC_D	.1111	.31623	81

Correlations

		Spectator-Based Brand Equity (mean of 4 items)	TS_D	CRI_D	OP_D	IC_D
Pearson Correlation	Spectator-Based Brand Equity (mean of 4 items)	1.000	-.010	.013	.036	-.045
	TS_D	-.010	1.000	-.373	-.325	-.223
	CRI_D	.013	-.373	1.000	-.305	-.209
	OP_D	.036	-.325	-.305	1.000	-.182
	IC_D	-.045	-.223	-.209	-.182	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Spectator-Based Brand Equity (mean of 4 items)	.	.463	.455	.376	.344
	TS_D	.463	.	.000	.002	.023
	CRI_D	.455	.000	.	.003	.030
	OP_D	.376	.002	.003	.	.052
	IC_D	.344	.023	.030	.052	.
N	Spectator-Based Brand Equity (mean of 4 items)	81	81	81	81	81

TS_D	81	81	81	81	81
CRI_D	81	81	81	81	81
OP_D	81	81	81	81	81
IC_D	81	81	81	81	81

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	IC_D, OP_D, CRI_D, TS_D ^b	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Spectator-Based Brand Equity (mean of 4 items)

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.055 ^a	.003	-.049	1.09278

a. Predictors: (Constant), IC_D, OP_D, CRI_D, TS_D

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.182	.329		12.692	<.001
	TS_D	-.008	.401	-.003	-.020	.984
	CRI_D	.032	.407	.013	.080	.937
	OP_D	.083	.423	.032	.196	.845
	IC_D	-.126	.491	-.037	-.257	.798

a. Dependent Variable: Spectator-Based Brand Equity (mean of 4 items)

Appendix H: Fan Engagement Regression

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Fan Engagement (mean of 5 items)	3.7556	1.53655	81
TS_D	.2840	.45372	81
CRI_D	.2593	.44096	81
OP_D	.2099	.40976	81
IC_D	.1111	.31623	81

Correlations

		Fan Engagement (mean of 5 items)	TS_D	CRI_D	OP_D	IC_D
Pearson Correlation	Fan Engagement (mean of 5 items)	1.000	-.150	.025	-.017	.103
	TS_D	-.150	1.000	-.373	-.325	-.223
	CRI_D	.025	-.373	1.000	-.305	-.209

	OP_D	-.017	-.325	-.305	1.000	-.182
	IC_D	.103	-.223	-.209	-.182	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Fan Engagement (mean of 5 items)	.	.090	.414	.441	.180
	TS_D	.090	.	.000	.002	.023
	CRI_D	.414	.000	.	.003	.030
	OP_D	.441	.002	.003	.	.052
	IC_D	.180	.023	.030	.052	.
N	Fan Engagement (mean of 5 items)	81	81	81	81	81
	TS_D	81	81	81	81	81
	CRI_D	81	81	81	81	81
	OP_D	81	81	81	81	81
	IC_D	81	81	81	81	81

Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	IC_D, OP_D, CRI_D, TS_D ^b	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Fan Engagement (mean of 5 items)

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.183 ^a	.034	-.017	1.54983

a. Predictors: (Constant), IC_D, OP_D, CRI_D, TS_D

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.109	.467		8.793	<.001
	TS_D	-.718	.568	-.212	-1.263	.210
	CRI_D	-.290	.577	-.083	-.503	.617
	OP_D	-.403	.600	-.108	-.672	.503
	IC_D	.091	.697	.019	.131	.897

a. Dependent Variable: Fan Engagement (mean of 5 items)

Appendix I: PROCESS Macro Model 1 Summary Table

MODEL 1 – Moderation (Stimulus × BVC → Brand Equity)

DV	IV (Dummy)	Interaction Effect (β)	95% CI	p-value
CBBE	IV_D	-.2953	[-0.8121, 0.2216]	.2588
	TS_D	.0728	[-0.3244, 0.4699]	.7162

	CRI_D	-.1962	[-0.5305, 0.1381]	.2461
	OP_D	.0724	[-0.6023, 0.7471]	.8314
	IC_D	.1644	[-0.4284, 0.7572]	.5823
SBBE	IV_D	.2943	[-0.4510, 1.0395]	.4341
	TS_D	.1053	[-0.4618, 0.6724]	.7125
	CRI_D	-.4082	[-0.8793, 0.0629]	.0884
	OP_D	.2764	[-0.6834, 1.2363]	.5680
	IC_D	1.1884	[0.3911, 1.9857]	.0040

Appendix J: PROCESS Macro Model 4 Summary Table

MODEL 4 – Mediation (Stimulus → Fan Engagement → Brand Equity)

DV	IV (Dummy)	Mediator	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	95% CI
CBBE	IV_D	Fan Engagement	-.1042	-.0460	[-0.2509, 0.0774]
	TS_D	Fan Engagement	-.1729	-.0544	[-0.2341, 0.0226]
	CRI_D	Fan Engagement	.1608	.0097	[-0.0643, 0.1037]
	OP_D	Fan Engagement	-.0492	-.0072	[-0.0753, 0.0455]
	IC_D	Fan Engagement	-.0045	.0573	[-0.0108, 0.1982]
SBBE	IV_D	Fan Engagement	.1609	-.1499	[-0.4733, 0.0370]
	TS_D	Fan Engagement	.1641	-.1884	[-0.5367, 0.0664]
	CRI_D	Fan Engagement	-.0002	.0311	[-0.0871, 0.2051]
	OP_D	Fan Engagement	.01157	-.0229	[-0.1511, 0.0897]
	IC_D	Fan Engagement	-.3379	.1851	[-0.1115, 0.2683]

Appendix K: PROCESS Macro Model 5 CBBE Summary Table

MODEL 5 – Moderated Mediation (Stimulus × BVC → Fan Engagement → Brand Equity)

DV	IV (Dummy)	Index of Moderated Mediation	BootLLCI	BootULCI
CBBE	IV_D	-.0040	-.1030	.0745
	TS_D	-.0036	-.0998	.0786
	CRI_D	.0012	-.0486	.0547
	OP_D	-.0007	-.0576	.0567
	IC_D	.0029	-.1127	.1258
SBBE	IV_D	-.1496	-.6009	.02394

TS_D	-.1927	-.5129	.0858
CRI_D	.0316	-.2478	.3157
OP_D	-.0229	-.3275	.2882
IC_D	.1678	-.2905	.5963
