

Examining the Impact of Sports Sponsorship on Fan Attitude and Purchase Intentions towards Sponsors' Products in Professional Football: A Study of the Ghanaian Fan Base

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Abstract: This paper investigates the mediating role of fans' attitudes in the relationship between sports sponsorship and the purchase intention of Ghanaian football fans. Survey data were collected from 398 official supporter groups of Kumasi Asante Kotoko SC (Circles) and Accra Hearts of Oak SC (Chapters) using a purposive sampling technique. A structured questionnaire was utilized to gather the data. The study employed structural equation modeling (SEM) to validate the model. The results indicate that sponsorship significantly influences purchase intention and fans' attitudes. Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that fan attitude mediates the relationship between sponsorship and purchase intention. These findings suggest that sponsorship plays a significant role in improving the purchase intention of football fans, and the impact of sponsorship on purchase intention is strengthened by fans' attitudes. Overall, this study enhances our understanding of the complex dynamics between sponsorship, fans' attitude, and purchasing intention, particularly in the context of Ghanaian football fans. While the study provides useful findings for industrial players and practitioners, it is essential to acknowledge that this study relied on cross-sectional survey data, which limits our ability to establish causal relationships. Additionally, the current study focused specifically on soccer fans of only two Clubs in Ghana, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to fans of other teams or sports, limiting the applicability of the study's results to a broader context.

Keywords: Sports sponsorship, purchase intention, fans' attitude.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sports sponsorship has become a multi-billion-dollar industry globally, with companies from various sectors investing in sports partnerships. It has proven to be an effective communication tool that offers a platform for companies and their brands to connect with consumers, leverage the passion and loyalty associated with sports, and achieve their marketing goals by capitalising on the popularity and reach of sports.

Sport and its related activities have seen significant growth in the last decade, especially in Europe, with the English Premier League (EPL) all making significant waves in sports discourse. The success of European soccer could largely be attributed to investment in the form of sponsorship (Huth 2020). It was estimated that approximately two-thirds of US firms' sponsorship is channeled to sports (Eshghi, Shahriari, & Ray 2021). The sports sponsorship market was estimated at 64.8 billion U.S. dollars in 2021. The industry is projected to grow at 7.5 percent by 2030, reaching a value of 112.2 billion U.S. dollars (Plumley & Wilson 2022).

In the last decade, the growth of sports sponsorship in Africa which Ghana is no exception has been impressive, sports in Africa keep improving in terms of quality and competitiveness as it has shown glimpses of talents that are worthy of investment. Because international sponsoring companies recognized the exceptional skills exhibited by African athletes in various sports, various sponsorship deals have been secured (Akowuah, 2020).

The market for investments in African sports and athletes is expanding gradually, and corporations seek to expand by engaging individuals on the continent. Given the substantial sums of money involved, it is essential to understand the outcomes of sponsorships. Sports sponsorship has become a tool with the ability to raise brand awareness, modify consumer attitudes, and strengthen the corporate image (Dinh, Nguyen-Viet, and Phuong 2023).

The consumer is one of the three key stakeholders in sponsorship since they are so important to the accomplishment of a sponsorship deal. Sponsorships are intended to link a brand with a certain event, group of people, or action to enhance the brand's reputation and ultimately increase sales (Sun, Leung & Bai 2021).

Though there has been significant growth in sponsorship research in the last decade by employing various theories and frameworks to unearth how consumers respond to a sponsorship effect on their purchase intention and behavior (Seung-Hoon et al., 2019; Melovic et al., 2019; Trivedi, 2020; Elasri Ejjaberi et al., 2020; Pan and Phua, 2021), prior studies have drawbacks which require urgent attention. Firstly, existing studies of sponsorship research are dominantly focused on developed economies, with very little effort in emerging economies like Ghana. Though few studies (Biscaia et al., 2017; Koronios et al., 2016) have attempted to show how sports sponsorship could drive purchase intention, how they occur remains unknown. Thus, the main question that this study seeks to answer is:

RQ1: What is the relationship between sports sponsorship and the purchase intention of the fan base?

With the intensified investment in sports in Ghana, it is worth understanding how and when sponsorship works (Yeboah 2019). This study, therefore, attempts to fill the gap by examining how sports sponsorship influence purchase intention among the Ghanaian fan base. Secondly, apart from the limited studies in emerging economies, earlier studies remain inconclusive, to contribute to the debate, this study introduces the role of fans' attitudes. Recent studies have emphasized the relevance of fans' attitudes as an outcome of sports sponsorship (Melovic et al., 2019; Koronios et al., 2022) and a significant predictor of purchase intention (Lin ad Bruning, 2023; Thomas et al., 2022). To date, very little or none is known regarding the indirect role (mediating) influence of fans' attitudes between sports sponsorship and the purchase intention of sports products. In this study, fans' attitudes have been proposed in the research model as a mediator. Though earlier studies have shown fans' attitudes as an essential antecedent of consumer behaviour, the interface between sports sponsorship and fans' attitude in driving a purchase intention of the fan base has also not been given adequate attention in extant literature. To fill this gap, this study, based on the AIDA model theory, argues that sports sponsorship may be the key to the purchase intention of the fan base, but the relationship may occur via fans' attitudes. This leads to the second research question:

RQ2: Does fans' attitude mediate between sports sponsorship and purchase intention of sports products?

This paper is novel because prior studies on the purchase intention of fans have primarily concentrated on a small number of developed societies, whereas this study examines the relationship between sports sponsorship and the purchase intention of fans. The hypothesized model will be examined to shed light on the parameters of fan base purchase intention that are influenced by sports sponsorship (Schartel Dunn & Nisbett 2023). Organisations will be able to remain competitive if they have a thorough comprehension of these factors. The paper explains whether the relationship between sports sponsorship and fan base purchase intention is bivariate. This is one of the initial attempts to combine internal and external factors to provide evidence that sports sponsorship can aid in the purchase intention of fan bases.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

AIDA Model Theory

The AIDA model theory, developed by Ambler in 2010, is an acronym for Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action. This contemporary theory aims to evaluate sponsorship deals and their impact on consumer purchasing decisions (Jiang, Chiu & Chan, 2023). The model focuses on the widely known hierarchy-of-effects model. It emphasizes the importance of creating awareness to generate interest among individuals, which is crucial for supporting sponsorship at different levels. Evaluations of the AIDA theory have highlighted its significance in the context of various sports events and the expected returns for sponsors (Ambachew, 2022).

According to the AIDA model, every product needs to be presented to the public to stimulate customers' interest and influence their purchasing preferences. Therefore, creating awareness and capturing attention are essential to drive

customer interest. Messages, whether in the form of images, text, or videos, should be carefully crafted to produce memorable content related to the sponsored event (Lough and Greenhalgh, 2019). However, in the early stages, the AIDA model was considered a traditional marketing communication rather than a theory applicable across various fields (Fortenberry and McGoldrick, 2020). Stakeberg and Stakeberg (2020) further emphasized that the AIDA model should be able to attract attention, hold interest, arouse desire, and prompt action in the sponsorship domain context to impact consumer purchasing behavior.

One critical aspect that the AIDA theory model focuses on is involving fans or supporters of specific teams in sponsorship contexts, particularly in creating messages that resonate with them (Brolin & Spångby, 2020). Fan attitudes play a vital role in the success of the sponsorship process, and messages that fans can relate to are crucial for creating the necessary awareness (Jiang et al., 2022). However, the AIDA model has faced resistance due to its perceived failure to address the long-term mutually beneficial relationship between sponsors and the sponsored event or company (Peters & Muller, 2023). Traditional marketing communication models like AIDA primarily concentrate on individual purchasing behavior. Hence, the model has been adopted to create short-term impacts on consumer decision-making while also establishing long-term relationships for the interest of both stakeholders (Shin and Perdue, 2018).

Therefore, while the AIDA model emphasizes the need to create awareness, it also considers the importance of appropriate messages and sufficient publicity, considering factors such as fans and customers of the teams. With the recent increase in interest in relationship marketing, there is a recognition of the need to retain customers and improve customer loyalty across different business segments (Akowuah, 2020). The AIDA model suggests that awareness, mutual relationships, and value creation are critical strategies for achieving customer loyalty and retention in the digital space. Customer retention is based on the relationship between products and customers, and awareness plays a significant role alongside relevant information (Angell et al., 2016).

According to Biscaia et al. (2017), the AIDA model theory highlights the importance of information in crafting appropriate messages for awareness. Insufficient information creates gaps in building relationships, leading to negative perceptions, mistrust, and hindered growth in the relationship. Conversely, as companies become familiar with customers, they can differentiate the quality of their offerings to attract potential and existing customers and drive profits. Such decisions are made based on the information exchanged with customers (Charlton and Cornwell, 2019).

The AIDA model theory not only emphasizes awareness but also the role of information associated with it and its impact on sponsorship or marketing performance. Al-Nsour and Al-Otoum (2020) noted that customer retention is crucial, and the model addresses the short-term goals of product development to build long-term relationships between products and customers. Customer attitudes are critical in developing an information model that enhances customer patronage. The AIDA model empowers organizations to personalize marketing communications based on available information and previous purchases to attract customers' attention (Weng, Huang, and Bao, 2021).

The AIDA model theory is relevant to this study as it helps evaluate the role of sports sponsorship as a promotional strategy through targeted information, aiming to build long-term customer relationships. Adopting the AIDA model theory provides detailed insights into the processes of informing and influencing customer purchasing decisions through awareness, information, desire, and action (Boronczyk and Breuer, 2020).

Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development

This section outlines the conceptual framework and underlying assumptions that establish the connection between sports sponsorship, purchase intention, and fans' attitudes.

A client's attitude refers to an individual's favorable or unfavorable feelings toward a product. People with a positive mindset are more likely to acquire an item, which influences their enjoyment or dislike of it. Behavioral intentions of consumers reveal how they intend to use products, although this is not always a direct outcome of their feelings. For example, a person may attend a particular event they dislike because it is a favorite hangout spot for their friends (Dhiman & Kumar, 2023). Shoppers often hold strong opinions about certain commodities or brands, based on specific beliefs that impact their sentiments and subsequently their intention to act. Previous research in branding and marketing has shown that attitudes toward advertisements have a significant and positive influence on attitudes toward the brand, indirectly affecting purchase intention by shaping buyers' attitudes toward the company (Nguyen &

Vu, 2022). It is also noted that the evaluation of sponsors by consumers can vary based on the type of event (Kang & Matsuoka, 2021). Companies and nonprofits collaborating in sponsorship may have different goals and motivations compared to business-to-business collaborations, focusing on public relations or ethical considerations (Lin & Bruning, 2023).

Analyzing the study of Blake et al. (2018), it becomes evident that several individual components contribute to the overall impact of fan attitude on the purchase intention of the sponsored brand. The study highlights that fans' loyalty and attachment to the sponsored team or club are determining factors of purchase intention, as they reflect the attitudinal approach of fans effectively. Loyalty and fandom in the context of soccer are often intertwined, with loyalty defined as "the outcome of a process by which individuals develop stronger emotional responses to, more functional knowledge about, and greater symbolic value for attributes and benefits associated with a sports team" (Tsiotsou, 2019). The personal experiences fans have with their favorite clubs or teams play a crucial role in generating loyalty. The study suggests that the emotional connections fans have with their clubs foster loyalty, benefiting the sponsor brands associated with those clubs. The loyalty of fans influences their connection with sponsoring brands and generates positive purchase intentions. Efficient relationship marketing by soccer clubs contributes to creating long-term, loyalty-based relationships with fans and increases brand awareness for both the clubs and sponsors (Close Scheinbaum, Lacey, and Drumwright, 2019). The concept of fan loyalty should be interpreted in both behavioral and attitudinal dimensions, focusing on fans' engagement with various soccer events. Behavioral loyalty supports sponsors as fans repeatedly make purchases, serving as a significant driver of purchase intentions and revenue (Delshab et al., 2022). Additionally, fan attachment, defined as the psychological connection fans have toward a sports club, further enhances loyalty and provides an opportunity for sponsors to generate positive purchase intentions (Ewanlen and Obeki, 2021).

Two core variables have been established to drive purchase intentions, as noted by Herzallah et al. (2022). The first variable is fans' or customers' attitudes, which have a significant impact on purchase intentions. Fans' attitudes toward a brand's image and their attributions toward purchasing products related to the brand have a positive influence on brand attitudes. Therefore, fans' attitudes indirectly affect the purchase intentions of the brand's products. When companies or brands sponsor specific sports events or teams, they generate positive fan attitudes (Nguyen & Vu, 2022). The second variable is fans' involvement in diverse ways in the purchase of a brand's product. Fan involvement is related to the personal connection and relevance fans feel toward the brand. Some fans consider themselves directly accountable or involved with a specific sports event or team and believe they should support the sale or purchase of products associated with it, particularly if the team has provided social support in various ways. Customer involvement is closely linked to inherent attitudes, interests, and needs, and the level of involvement influences the amount of information customers process, which directly affects purchase intentions (Moura & de Souza, 2020; Klaus and Zaichkowsky, 2020; Trivedi, 2020; Park and Sihombing, 2020; Rai et al., 2021). The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) further explains how involvement can influence customers' engagement with purchasing decisions (Müller and Christandl, 2019; Jung, Cho, and Oh, 2020). Cause-related marketing messages and social causes can have a positive impact on customers' purchase intentions, as they perceive the company's support for social causes as a positive influence (Riva et al., 2019). Fan involvement can manifest in various ways, including engagement with sponsorship messages, advertisement, and purchase decisions, along with support for social causes (Liu et al., 2022). Thus, both fans' attitudes and involvement play integral roles in purchase intentions.

Based on the above conceptualization, this study proposes the following:

H1: Sports sponsorship has a significant positive influence on fans' purchase intention.

H2: Sponsorship has a significant positive influence on fan attitude.

H3: Fan attitude will positively influence purchase intention.

H4: Fan attitude mediates the relationship between sponsorship and purchase intention.

These hypotheses depicted in Figure 1 below, form the foundation for examining the relationship between sports sponsorship, fan attitude, and purchase intention.

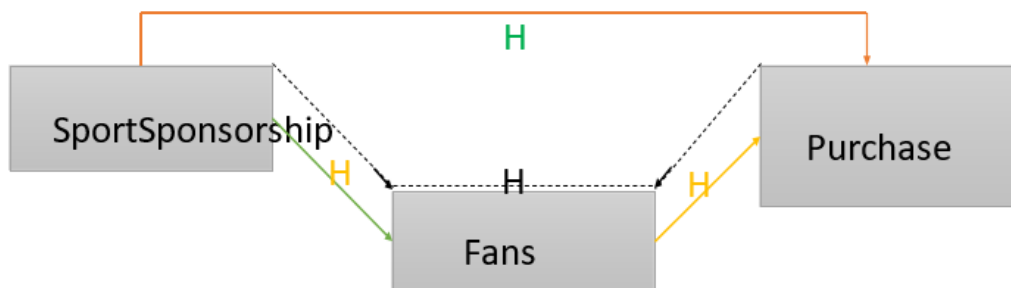


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3. METHODOLOGY

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the influence of sports sponsorships on purchase intention among soccer fans in Ghana, specifically focusing on the official supporter groups of Kumasi Asante Kotoko SC (Circles) and Accra Hearts of Oak SC (Chapters). To achieve this, a questionnaire-based survey was conducted among registered members of these supporter groups. The measurement items for the main constructs, namely sponsorship and attitude toward the sponsor, were developed and adapted from previous research studies. A Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used to rate the items. The questionnaire included eleven items to measure sponsorship, eight items to assess attitude toward the sponsor, and five demographic questions. The measurement items were evaluated following established standards for scale development (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994, as cited in Slaton & Pookulangara, 2022). The data collection process involved administering the questionnaire to the targeted participants over a specified period.

4. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The demographic characteristics of the participants were displayed in this section. The results are presented in Table 1 below. From the data, 21.4% of the participants were within 18-19 years, 71.4% were within 20-29 years, 3.8% were within 30-39 years, 2.8% were also within 40-49 years and 0.8% of the remaining were within 50-59 years. The data also shows that 2.8% of the participants had senior high school certificates, 96.5% had tertiary certificates and 0.8% had vocational/technical certificates. The data also shows that 5.3% of the participants were private sector workers, 5.0% were public sector workers, 13.3% were self-employed and 76.4% were unemployed. From the data, 54.3% of the participants were females while 45.7% were males. The data also shows that 6.5% of the participants were married while 93.5% were single. The data also shows that 16.1% of the participants indicated they have supported their teams for about 11-20 years, 1.3% of them indicated between 21-30 years, 1.5% indicated 31-40 years, 0.8% indicated 41-50 years, 29.9% indicated 5-10 years, 0.3% indicated 51 years and above and 50.3% also indicated less than 5 years.

Table 1 Demographic Information

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Age of respondents		
18-19 years	85	21.4
20 -29 year	284	71.4
30-39 years	15	3.8
40-49 years	11	2.8
50-59 years	3	0.8
Level of Education		
Senior High School	11	2.8
Tertiary	384	96.5
Vocational/Technical	3	0.8

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Occupation		
Private Sector Worker	21	5.3
Public sector worker	20	5.0
Self Employed	53	13.3
Unemployed	304	76.4
Gender		
Female	216	54.3
Male	182	45.7
Marital Status		
Married	26	6.5
Single	372	93.5
How long have you supported your football team?		
11-20 years	64	16.1
21-30 years	5	1.3
31-40 years	6	1.5
41-50 years	3	0.8
5-10 year	119	29.9
51years+	1	0.3
Less than 5 years	200	50.3
Total	398	100.0

Data Analysis

Our model was tested using M Plus version 7. The software is a covariance based which employs the maximum likelihood estimation technique. The result of the data analyses is presented in two main phases. The first section of the analysis presents a test for model measurement and model fit indices as produced by the M Plus. The subsequent phase presents the structural model evaluation (hypotheses testing) using the moderated regression method.

Test for survey biases

A cross-sectional design has been recognized as a potential source of common method bias (CMB) (Podsakoff et al., 2012, as cited by Lai et al., 2020). To mitigate CMB, we took measures to ensure respondents' privacy and confidentiality (Gabriel et al., 2019). We also ensured clarity of the survey items by utilizing well-established scales and conducting pre-testing of the survey instrument. Additionally, we organized the survey sections based on the constructs in the model (Akbar et al., 2016). To investigate the presence of common method bias, we followed recommended statistical remedies.

To assess the potential non-response bias in our survey-based research, we employed two strategies. First, we conducted a test recommended by Armstrong and Overton (1977) to compare the responses between the early and late participants. Independent sample t-tests were performed on various indicators such as age, gender, and the main constructs. The results revealed no significant differences between the two response waves, indicating that the timing of the response did not introduce bias in this study. Furthermore, we compared the ages and genders of the respondents with those who did not respond to the survey, finding no statistically significant differences. This provides further evidence of the absence of non-response bias in our study.

Reliability and validity (EFA &CFA)

Preliminary checks were performed to assess the quality of the data. Univariate and multivariate normality assumptions were evaluated to ensure the distribution of the dataset. The results indicated that all skewness and kurtosis indices fell within the recommended range of (-2 to +2), as suggested by Kline (2011). These findings provide evidence that the data used in this study did not exhibit any normality issues. We also conducted outlier analysis using Mahalanobis distance and Cook's distance measures, which revealed no influential outliers in the dataset (Field, 2009).

To further validate the measurement items used in our model, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed. The EFA, employing Principal Component Analysis with varimax rotation, confirmed the structure and unidimensionality of the dataset. Bartlett's test demonstrated statistical significance ($\chi^2 = 2870.665$, df: 105, $p < 0.001$), indicating the appropriateness of the sampling strategy (Hair et al., 2019). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy yielded a value of 91.9%, further supporting the factorability of the data.

The EFA resulted in the extraction of three factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, explaining a variance ranging from 9.446% to 47.716%. All items exhibited high indicator loading (>0.7), providing evidence of unidimensionality, discriminant validity, and convergence validity. Reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha (α) and Composite Reliability (CR) demonstrated high internal consistency, as indicated in Table 2 (Hair et al., 2019). Moreover, the results confirmed that our three-factor model fit the data well, with $\chi^2 = 211.750$, DF = 87, normed $\chi^2 = 2.43$, RMSEA = 0.057, CFI = 0.956, TLI = 0.947, SRMR = 0.006, meeting the recommended thresholds for a good fit (Bagozzi and Yi, 2012; Hair et al., 2019). Table 2 also displayed Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeding 0.5, indicating high convergent validity (Bagozzi et al., 1981).

Finally, to evaluate the study's hypotheses, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted using SPSS 25.0 software.

Table 2: Item statistics and reliability and exploratory factor analysis results

Construct/Item code	Item statistics				Exploratory factor analysis								Reliability & Validity (CFA)		
	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Component and loadings						Eigen-value	% of variance explained	CA	CR	AVE
					1	2	3	4	5	6					
Sports Sponsorship															
SS 1	3.96	0.832	-0.903	3.96	.839	.083	.195	.199	.041	.132	17.076	26.297	.749	.925	.711
SS 2	4.07	0.752	-0.535	4.07	.816	.035	.236	.223	.040	.083					
SS 3	4.13	0.768	-0.439	4.13	.870	.100	.132	.153	.013	.035					
SS 4	4.16	0.751	-0.647	4.16	.841	.119	.196	.158	.002	.100					
SS 5	4.13	0.768	-0.654	4.13	.848	.187	.246	.146	-.012	.119					
Purchase Intention															
PI 1	3.92	0.868	-0.759	1.104	.130	.055	.251	.783	.058	.199	2.066	7.619	.886	.909	.665
PI 2	3.93	0.794	-0.384	0.107	.222	.088	.078	.820	.103	.223					
PI 3	3.80	0.893	-0.481	0.073	.212	.018	.129	.848	.090	.153					
PI 4	3.89	0.843	-0.506	0.249	.311	.136	.020	.816	.128	.158					
PI5	3.93	0.802	-0.518	0.535	.222	.088	.078	.810	.103	.146					
Fun Attitude															
FA 1	3.91	0.877	-0.666	0.578	-.037	.087	.085	.130	.856	.041	1.78	7.047	.946	.926	.713
FA2	3.93	0.818	-0.728	0.859	.041	.083	.195	.199	.839	.040					
FA3	4.03	0.787	-0.486	0.225	.040	.035	.236	.223	.816	.013					
FA 4	3.95	0.810	-0.687	1.015	.013	.100	.132	.153	.870	.002					
FA 5	3.92	0.850	-0.475	0.116	.002	.119	.196	.158	.841	-.012					

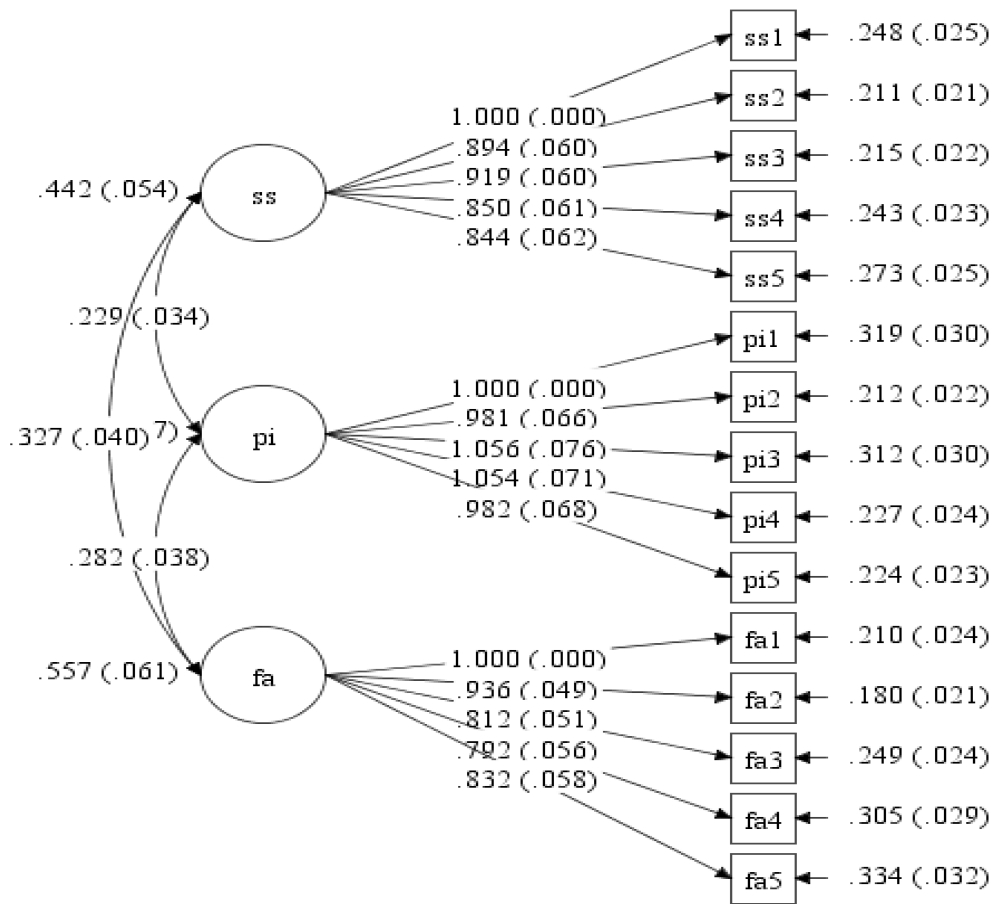


Figure 2

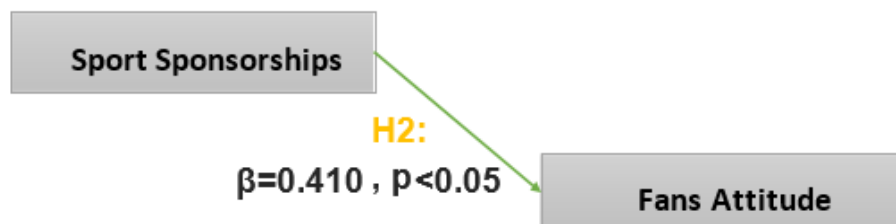
Structural Model Evaluation

Figure 2 displays the regression estimates obtained. The results indicate a significant positive association between sports sponsorship and purchase intention ($\beta=0.216, p<0.05$), supporting the first hypothesis. This finding suggests that sports sponsorship has a significant influence on the purchase intention of sports products.

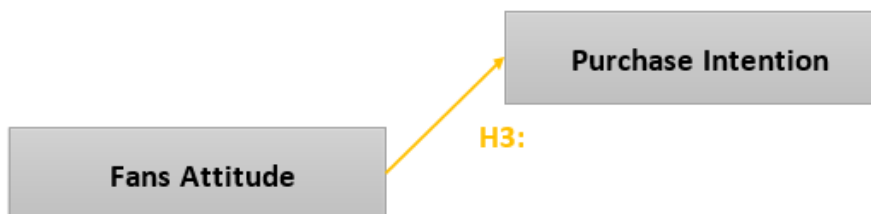
H1: $\beta=0.216, p<0.05$



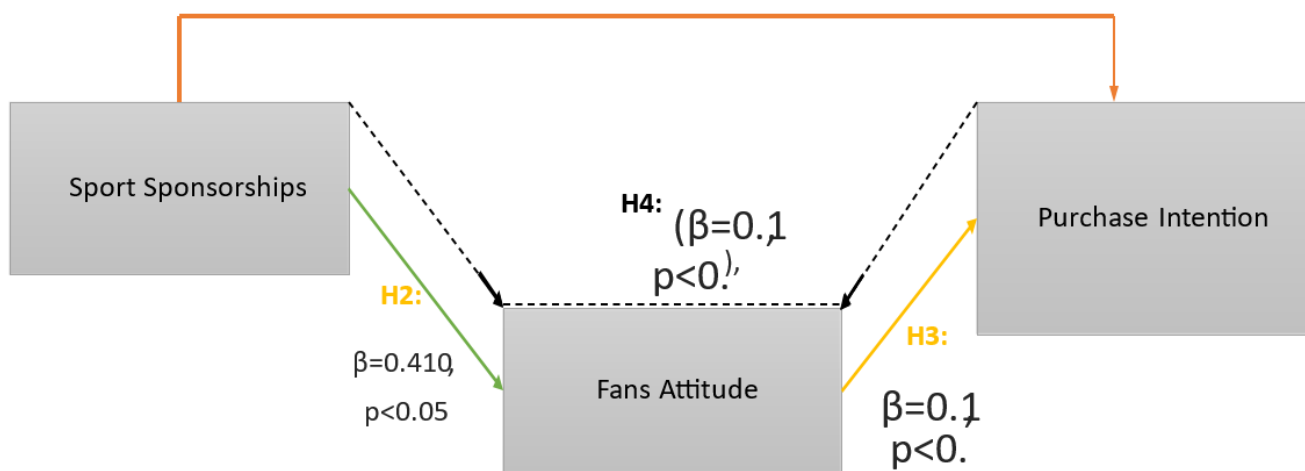
Furthermore, a significant positive effect of sports sponsorship on fans' attitude is observed ($\beta=0.410, p<0.05$), confirming the second hypothesis. This indicates that sports sponsorship significantly shapes fans' attitude towards the brand or product.



In addition, fans' attitude is found to have a significant positive impact on purchase intention ($\beta=0.115$, $p<0.05$), supporting the third hypothesis. This implies that fans' attitude plays a crucial role in influencing the intention to purchase sports products.



Finally, the study reveals that fans' attitude significantly mediates the relationship between sports sponsorship and purchase intention of sports products ($\beta=0.106$, $p<0.05$), supporting the fourth hypothesis. This suggests that while sports sponsorship directly affects purchase intention, the influence of fans' attitude further strengthens the intention to purchase sports products.



5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study was carried out on the assumption that sponsorship plays an important impact when it comes to football fans' intentions to buy products related to sports. As a result of this, the research focuses on Ghanaian football fans to investigate the impact that sponsorship has on the intention to purchase sponsors product. In addition to that, the research included the mediating role fans attitude between sports sponsorship and purchase intention of sports products. The study sampled 398 participants from the Ghanaian football fans fraternity and employed the partial least squares structural equation modeling to test the hypotheses of the study. The key findings can be summarised as follows:

First, the results revealed a significant and positive association between sports sponsorship and purchase intention, supporting the hypothesis that increased sponsorship enhances fan intention to purchase sports products. These findings are consistent with the findings of Knight and Young Kim (2007), who observed that positive sponsorship influences consumers to make purchase decisions. Furthermore, the results support Tomalieh's (2016) assertion that sponsorship offers an affordable and effective means of reaching target markets, allowing direct exposure to the audience during events and delivering a unique message. The study also aligns with the work of Madrigal (2000), who explored the impact of fans' team loyalty on their propensity to purchase merchandise from sponsoring companies. Madrigal's research highlights the advantage of sponsorship in connecting brands with items that hold personal significance for consumers. Additionally, Meenaghan's (2001) sponsorship model emphasizes the influence of consumers' positive perceptions of the sponsor on their purchase intentions. Overall, these findings contribute to the understanding of the positive relationship between sports sponsorship and consumers' inclination to purchase sponsored products.

Secondly, the study unveiled a significant and positive relationship between fan attitude and purchase intention. This finding emphasizes the pivotal role of fans' attitude towards sponsors in shaping their intentions to purchase sports products. It aligns with previous studies, such as Sallam and Algammash (2016), who highlighted the influential impact of consumers' attitude towards advertisements on brand opinions and purchase intentions. Similarly, studies by Li and Peng (2021) and Weismueller et al. (2020) have consistently shown a strong and positive correlation between attitude and purchase intent for brands. Within the realm of soccer, the significance of the fan base cannot be underestimated, especially in emerging countries like Ghana where soccer holds immense popularity and boasts a passionate local club following. In this context, the attitudes and engagement of fans exert a profound influence on the purchase intentions towards sponsored brand services or products. This underscores the critical role of effective marketing strategies employed by soccer clubs to foster deeper connections with their fans, which, in turn, facilitate enhanced purchase intentions towards sponsor brands. Furthermore, the study by Trivedi and Yadav (2020) highlights that assessing the effectiveness of sponsorship extends beyond mere factors like product sales and stock prices. Attitudinal elements are equally essential indicators for measuring the success of sponsorship initiatives. Therefore, considering and evaluating fans' attitudes as an integral component of sponsorship effectiveness provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics between sponsors, soccer clubs, and consumer behavior.

Thirdly, the research findings indicate that fan attitude plays a mediating role in the relationship between sports sponsorship and purchase intention. These findings are consistent with the study conducted by Khuong and Chau (2017), which explored the effects of event sponsorship on customers' immediate purchase intent and the subsequent impact on brand image. This study makes a valuable contribution to the sports marketing literature, particularly in the area of sponsorship and consumer behavior. It is worth noting that purchasing behavior has received limited academic attention in emerging economies like Ghana, and existing studies on sponsorship have paid little attention to fans (Yeboah, 2019). Therefore, this study stands out as one of the few attempts to elucidate the influence of sponsorship on soccer fans' behavioral responses, offering insights that enhance our understanding of consumer attitudes towards sponsors. By adopting a sponsorship-centric approach to the consumer decision-making process (CDP), this study provides a deeper understanding of sponsorship response, presenting novel perspectives that diverge from previous research in the field of sponsorship literature.

The study contributes to the sports marketing literature by providing insights into the impact of sponsorship on consumer behavior, particularly in the context of Soccer and its fan base. It fills a gap in the literature by focusing on the influence of sponsorship on fans' behavioral responses and providing a better understanding of consumer attitudes towards sponsors. The study also contributes to the existing sponsorship literature by employing a sponsorship-centric approach to the consumer decision-making process, offering a unique perspective. Moreover, the study has practical implications. It highlights the importance of the relationship between sponsors and Soccer clubs in shaping customer attitudes and behaviors towards sponsors. It also underscores the significance of fan attachment to a team in influencing their attitudes towards sponsors and purchase intentions. The findings suggest that sponsoring a Soccer team can have a significant impact on brand perception and attitudes, regardless of the type of sponsor. This knowledge can guide Soccer teams and businesses in their sponsorship strategies and help them understand the dynamics of consumer attitudes and behaviors. Overall, this study advances the understanding of sponsorship's impact on Soccer fans' purchase intentions and provides valuable insights for both research and practice in the field of sports marketing.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research aimed to examine the mediating role of fans' attitude in the relationship between sponsorship and the purchasing intention of Ghanaian football fans. The study utilized inferential statistics to analyze a representative sample from the general population, enabling valuable insights into the research problem. By employing an explanatory research design, we gained a deeper understanding of the factors influencing fans' purchasing intention. The target population consisted of the official supporter groups of Kumasi Asante Kotoko SC (Circles) and Accra Hearts of Oak SC (Chapters), ensuring a comprehensive examination of the research context. Through convenience sampling, a random selection of 398 participants from the official supporter groups was included in the study, ensuring a diverse representation of football fans in Ghana. The data was analyzed using structural equation modeling, providing robust evidence for the relationships under investigation. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the data, offering a comprehensive overview of the key findings. The results revealed a

significant and positive effect of sponsorship on the purchasing intention of football fans, indicating the influential role of sponsorship in shaping fans' attitudes and behaviors. Moreover, the findings demonstrated that fans' attitude mediates the relationship between sponsorship and purchasing intention, highlighting the importance of fans' perception and evaluation of sponsorship in driving their purchasing decisions. These findings contribute to the existing body of literature in sports marketing and offer practical implications for both football clubs and sponsors. By shedding light on the mediating role of fans' attitude, this research provides valuable insights into the mechanisms through which sponsorship influences fans' purchasing intention. It emphasizes the need for football clubs and sponsors to carefully cultivate positive attitudes among fans by implementing effective sponsorship strategies that resonate with their preferences and values. Additionally, the findings underscore the significance of considering fans' attitudes and perceptions as pivotal factors in sponsorship effectiveness. Overall, this study enhances our understanding of the complex dynamics between sponsorship, fans' attitude, and purchasing intention, particularly in the context of Ghanaian football fans. It serves as a foundation for further research in the field and provides practical guidance for marketers seeking to leverage sports sponsorship as a powerful tool for engaging and influencing football fans' behavior.

7. LIMITATIONS AND AVENUE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As with any research, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study, which in turn provide opportunities for future research. Firstly, it is worth noting that this study relied on cross-sectional survey data, which limits our ability to establish causal relationships. To gain a deeper understanding of the long-term implications of sports sponsorship on purchase intention, it would be beneficial for future research to employ longitudinal or experimental designs that can capture changes over time and establish causal relationships more effectively. Additionally, the use of surveys introduces the possibility of cognitive biases and social desirability effects. Therefore, future studies could consider incorporating alternative research methods, such as qualitative interviews or mixed methods approaches, to complement and strengthen the findings.

Secondly, the current study focused specifically on soccer fans, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to fans of other sports. Future researchers could broaden their investigations to include fans of different sports and even consider conducting comparative analyses to examine potential differences and similarities across sporting contexts. This would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships between sports sponsorship and purchase intention within diverse fan bases. Furthermore, while this study explored fans' attitudes as a mediator in the relationship between sports sponsorship and purchase intention, there are other variables that could serve as moderators or mediators in this relationship. Future research could explore the influence of additional factors such as brand loyalty, perceived value, or social influence to gain a more nuanced understanding of the underlying mechanisms and boundary conditions.

In conclusion, while this study offers valuable insights into the impact of sports sponsorship on purchase intention and the mediating role of fans' attitudes, it is crucial to acknowledge its limitations. Future research should strive to address these limitations by employing more robust research designs, expanding the scope of investigation to different sports and fan bases, and considering additional variables that can further elucidate the dynamics of sports sponsorship effects.

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