How to Improve Sports Fans' Attitudes Toward the Sponsor Through Brand Management? A PLS and QCA Approach

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Abstract

The aim of the article is to explain attitudes towards the sponsors of a sporting event from brand management, especially considering the perceptions of congruence with the sponsor, quality, value, and two less common variables of innovation and popularity. The analysis has been carried out using two methodological approaches: a Partial Least Squares (PLS) model and a Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA). PLS results indicate that congruence, innovation and popularity significantly predict attitudes towards the sponsor, explaining up to 61% of it. On the other hand, QCA analysis shows nine interactions capable of producing the expected result, where congruence, quality innovation and popularity have shown a relevant role. This study has implications at a theoretical and practical level, contributing to understanding consumer behaviour in the context of sporting events and providing marketing managers with valuable information to help improve the performance of their sponsorships.

Keywords: Sporting events, sponsorship, branding, sport management, consumer behaviour

Introduction

In recent years, the analysis of sponsorship has attracted increasing interest from researchers (Cornwell, 2019; Djohari et al., 2019; Farrelly & Quester, 2005; Tyrie & Ferguson, 2013). Globally, sponsorship spending continues to rise, from an investment in 2014 of $55.3 billion to an investment of $77.69 billion in 2022, with expectations of reaching $116 billion by the year 2027, according to the Sports Sponsorship Market Research Report (2023). According to the same report, most of this investment corresponds to the area of sports sponsorship, since this sports context groups 70% of world investment in sponsorship.

In this sense, Rifon et al. (2004) explain that sponsorship could be compared to the process by which a corporation generates a link with an external element, trying to influence people through that connection. The link established between the sponsored event and the sponsoring brand is understood as a benefit for those being sponsored, who receive the associations that the sponsoring brand has already won (Cornwell & Humphreys, 2013). In addition, the financial injection that is arranged it is also important. We can also understand that it is beneficial for the brand that sponsors it, since, in the specific case of sport, it has some values that could be interesting for any brand. This fact has been demonstrated, proving that there is a transference between the brand image and the sponsored event (Alonso-Dos-Santos et al., 2019). Thus, the objective of this transfer will be to generate favourable attitudes towards the sponsor, since it has been proven

that attitudes determine behaviour (Woisetschläger et al., 2017) and these positive attitudes will make those attending a sporting event more likely to engage in the desired behaviours. In order to generate these attitudes, users may have different reasons and criteria. Therefore, the same marketing action could form positive or negative attitudes, depending on this criterion, and considering the beliefs of users will be important in generating more or less favourable attitudes (Cheong et al., 2019). In this sense, every context has its peculiarities, and the sporting context certainly contains its own nuances. For this reason, generic marketing strategies do not serve as a solution for all fields. It is advisable to promote research focused on the sports field in order to analyse how these processes occur in sports sponsorship and to fill the gap in specific information. Therefore, it is interesting to analyze variables related to the process of sports sponsorship.

Specifically, the purpose of this study is to find out to what extent brand-related variables like congruence with the sponsor, innovation, popularity, quality, and perceived value can explain the attitudes generated towards the sponsor by fans. Therefore, this research deals with a topic that is not so common in the sporting context, analysing classic variables and recent ones. For this purpose, two methodological approaches have been utilised that will allow us to check the role of these variables from different viewpoints. These different approaches help to produce more complete information about the relationships and influences that are produced. Moreover, this type of analysis may provide insight into influences that would not be verifiable from a single methodological perspective. Therefore, the objective is not only to analyse the problem, but to do so in a more complete and varied way, allowing us to better explain the attitudes toward the sponsor in the sporting context.

Theoretical background

Congruence

Congruence is a concept that refers to the degree of fit that a sponsor has with the sponsored event in relation to aspects such as coherence and common sense (Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2006). Some authors indicate that congruence is essential for an image transfer to take place (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006), while others argue that a fit between the sponsor and the sponsored event is not always necessary, since sometimes a sponsorship relationship that initially has a low fit increases over time as users get used to that association (Woisetschläger & Michaelis, 2012). In the research literature, we find several studies that speak about the benefits of this congruence, establishing that if we achieve congruence in sponsorship,

not only does it facilitate the aforementioned transfer, but it also improves brand recall (Johar & Pham, 1999) and the attitudes that users will have towards the sponsoring brand (Ellen et al., 2000; Olson, 2010). Zdravkovic and Till (2012) establish that when we find a high degree of fit, the sponsorship process makes the connections of the associations stronger in memory, which favours the transfer of associations between both entities. To achieve this congruence, it is necessary to plan sponsorship activities in order to improve the desired effects for the participating brands (Kim & Kim, 2018). Moreover, Olson and Thjømøe (2011) stated that several factors could have an influence in achieving this sense of fit, such as the similarity that our target audience at a sporting event has with the audience of the sponsoring brand, as well as attitudes and geographical similarities. Once this has been achieved, another element to consider, which has received attention in the scientific literature, is the effectiveness of the sponsorship (Alonso-Dos-Santos et al., 2019). This will be related to an assessment made by the target audience that involves linking the sponsor and the sponsored event. This leads to the transference of the positive evaluation of users to the sponsoring brand (Crimmins & Horn, 1996). Congruence has been shown to be influential in consumer attitudes (Pradhan et al., 2016), where improved congruence should lead to improvements in attitudes and consequently purchase intentions (Bajac et al., 2018). This effect of congruence on attitudes has also been tested in the context of sports (Zhang et al., 2020), which leads us to consider H1:

H1. Congruence significantly influences brand attitudes

Attitudes toward the sponsor

The term attitude refers to a general assessments that an individual makes of an object or person (Mitchell & Olson, 1981; Wilson et al., 2003) being relatively enduring evaluations (Petty et al., 2003). This differentiates them from emotions, which tend to be transitory (Spears & Singh, 2004). Such an internal assessment could be made of a sponsor's brand, understanding that attitudes developed towards the brand can affect behaviour (Kotler & Levy, 1969, Woisetschläger et al., 2017); people tend to behave favourably towards what they like and unfavourably towards what they do not like (Petty et al., 2003). The generation of favourable attitudes towards sponsors by the target audience is a topic extensively discussed in the scientific literature (Alonso-Dos-Santos et al., 2018; Koo & Lee, 2018) as it is considered one of the priority objectives that should be pursued by sponsoring companies.

In order to achieve favourable attitudes towards the sponsor, brand positioning is fundamental, since it allows users to perceive differences between brands within a product category (Castañeda-García et al., 2019). To

Physical Culture and Sport. Studies and Research, 2023, 100, 61–74

63

achieve this purpose, brands use promotion and advertising, which are actions where we could include sponsorship and which aim to unify the associations of the product with a symbolic representation of it (Torres et al., 2008). In the same way, the strategic work of variables such as congruence, innovation, popularity, quality and value would help to achieve a positioning depending on our interests as a brand. According to Keller and Lehmann (2006), how brands work on this positioning will have an impact on users' associations with it, and this will influence their evaluation of the brand. However, on many occasions, brands focus only on the visual aspects, without taking advantage of the role that employees may play in reinforcing the meaning of the brand and trying to influence consumer attitudes (Sirianni et al., 2013). Therefore, in order to achieve a suitable positioning that promotes favourable attitudes towards the brand, we must pay attention to both the intangible aspects and the brand tangibility that workers or volunteers and the treatment of them imply.

Innovation and popularity

Brand innovation is a key element in making consumers of a service more loyal (Pappu & Quester, 2016), especially today, when there is so much competition between brands and so much similarity in certain products. We understand innovation in relation to the level of this quality that consumers perceive in a brand (Barone & Jewell, 2013). Such innovation is an aspect that, on the one hand, allows improving commitment to the brand (Eisingerich & Rubera, 2010) and, on the other hand, creates a better perception of quality for consumers (Boisvert & Ashill, 2011). In this sense, once these benefits of introducing innovation to our brand are known, we focus on how it can be generated. In the field of marketing, innovation has often been introduced in brand extensions, trying to include innovative aspects within its product category, so that the changes do not endanger the main brand (Loken et al., 2010). Among other strategies, companies have encouraged co-creation as a way of adding value and contributing to the generation of positive perceptions of brand innovation (Stam, 2009). In this regard, in recent years the concept of co-innovation (Lee et al., 2012) has also emerged, and is defined as a process that arises from dynamic interactions between resources, actions and participants (Russo-Spena & Mele, 2012). Therefore, it is a process that considers the collaboration of consumers and brands, and allows the generation of new value with respect to services, products or processes. Co-innovation is an element that is often used with the aim of effectively accelerating innovation by creating a collaborative network between co-creators (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). This innovation creation in brands is mainly enhanced thanks to the role of social networks (Füller et al., 2013), which

allow quick and easy interaction when carrying out the process. If we manage these strategies to improve the perceived innovation of our brand, we will also improve the perceived quality of what we do (Safon, 2009), as well as brand loyalty through improved satisfaction (Kunz et al., 2011). The same can be said about the relationship between innovation and attitudes, because if we improve innovation in our product, we will improve consumers' attitudes (Olsen et al., 2014), since brand innovation influences their evaluation of the brand (Hetet et al., 2019). This allow us to propose H2:

H2. Innovation significantly influences brand attitudes

Popularity is a concept that is understood as an intangible element that is possessed by a brand, and which influences its performance (Lopez & Leenders, 2019). In this sense, Kim and Chung (1997) established that popularity involves the acceptance of a brand over time, improving the perception of its performance, both in the short and long term, through allowing a more favourable perception of brand image, which has proven to be an antecedent in considering a recommendation or word-of-mouth promotion (Alguacil et al., 2018). Besides favouring this more positive brand perception, popularity is also an element that motivates social consumption, thus making consumer attitudes towards the brand more positive (Gil et al., 2017). This is why H3 is proposed:

H3. Popularity significantly influences attitudes towards the brand.

Perceived quality

Perceived quality is one of the aspects that has attracted most interest in the analysis of service performance (García-Fernández et al., 2018). This concept refers to consumers' judgment of the excellence or superiority of one product over another (Zeithaml, 1988), and is therefore logically a key aspect of brand choice. Other classic definitions emphasize that the concept of perceived quality is based on a comparison between the expectations we have and what we finally receive (Grönroos, 1984), so the aim must clearly be to work towards meeting the expectations that users have and not to create false expectations that we cannot subsequently meet. Obviously, this concept is particularly problematic, since the criteria of defining whether a product is of quality or not are different for each customer, so we must also know their opinions about it.

According to Reeves and Bednar (1994), quality is the excellence of a product, as a concept linked to the value perceived by the user, as a fit between the standards established by the brand and the objectives it finally achieves. Service quality, therefore, will be the judgment of superiority related to one service over others (Parasuraman et al., 1988), as well as the satisfaction of expectations that customers had about the service (Mundina

& Calabuig, 1999). Therefore, if the quality perceived by users is more positive, this will influence their attitudes towards it (Boisvert & Ashill, 2011; Carlson & O'Cass, 2010). This has also been observed in the context of sports (Alonso Dos-Santos et al., 2017), which leads us to consider H4.

H4. Perceived quality is significantly related to attitudes towards the brand.

Perceived value

The study of perceived value has been widely discussed in sports services (García-Fernández et al., 2018), as well as in other market contexts (Jones et al., 2019; Wu & Li, 2017). This topic has become more important, especially within the field of marketing studies on other aspects such as price or strategy (Gil et al., 2006) as an element for companies to maintain their importance (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). In addition, perceived value is also influential because of the relationships it has with other important variables, such as perceived quality or satisfaction (Cronin et al., 2000).

At the conceptual level, perceived value has been defined using different approaches. We find, for instance, those that focus attention on the relationship between value and price (Gil et al., 2006), or those that focus on exchange, understanding perceived value as a global assessment by consumers between what they receive and what they give (Bigné et al., 2000). On the other hand, we also find those who define value as the relationship that exists between the supply and the price the consumer perceives with respect to the prices of the competition (Kothandaraman & Wilson, 2001), or those who speak about value in terms of the exchange produced between the quality or benefits perceived and the sacrifice carried out (Wu & Hsing, 2006), who reinforces the idea of exchange of Bigné et al. (2000) in terms of value as the assessment between what consumers perceive that they contribute and what they receive. In the sports context, as in other areas, value will be an objective to be pursued, and users will not only seek value at a utilitarian or hedonic level, but also at a social level, which allows value to be related to their behavioural intentions (Gan & Wang, 2017). Regarding sponsorship, if we can make it successful, we can generate positive perceptions for the sponsoring company (Tyrie & Ferguson, 2013). To achieve this success, it is important that both the sponsoring and sponsored brands share similar objectives, so that their commitment can be greater (Johanson & Roxenhall, 2009). This commitment, generated from a common vision, will make the relationship between sponsor and sponsored more profitable (Sharma et al., 2015) as both parties will work together and be able to generate more value. Regarding the hypotheses, over time the literature has supported the positive connection between

consumers' impressions of advertising and the formation of their attitudes (Olson & Thjømøe, 2003; Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2013). Within these perceptions, we find the perceived value; therefore, if viewers perceive a cost in a favourable way, their attitudes towards the brand will also be favourable (Kumal & Kaushal, 2017). This leads us to propose H5:

H5. Perceived value significantly influences brand attitudes.

Method

Sample

Data collection was carried out through convenience sampling after the 2018 FIFA World Cup and lasted two days. 422 fans from 21 countries answered a survey hosted on LimeSurvey via a link on Amazon Turk, with a response incentive of 1.5 euros. Responses were processed and filtered based on server IP to avoid duplication. Also, the total time spent to complete the survey was taken into consideration. Finally, outliers were eliminated using the Mahalanobis indicator (1936). The final sample consisted of 409 fans with a provenance as follows: Nigeria (7%), Poland (8%), Costa Rica (12%), England (34.7%) and other countries, such as Australia, Argentina, Mexico, Spain, Italy and Ecuador, with a representation of less than 5%. This wide representation of countries helps to reduce the bias that local aspects of each country might cause (Alonso-Dos Santos, Calabuig, Prado-Gascó, and Cuevas-Lizama 2020). The final sample had a mean age of 33 years, with the most frequent range being 18–48 years, and a standard deviation of 10.8. Male participation was 73% and female 27%.

Instrument

The Brand Leadership Scale (BLS) proposed by Chang and Ko (2014) was used to collect the information. This scale aims to measure brand leadership through the variables of perceived quality, value, innovation, and popularity of the sponsor's products. The four variables mentioned above have been extracted from the data. Each of the scales of these variables is made up of three items, making a total of 12 statements referring to BLS. On the other hand, the variable of congruence is based on Roy (2011) and Speed and Thompson (2000), and has previously been used in the academic literature (Alonso-Dos Santos et al., 2020; Silva & Veríssimo, 2020). Finally, the attitude towards the sponsor scale was adapted from Dees, Bennett and Villegas (2008) and subsequently assessed by Dess, Bennett, and Ferreira (2010). Following, in Table 1, the items that make up the instrument and the source from which they have been obtained are shown in detail:

Table 1. Measurement scales

Factor	Item
Quality	Are higher in quality standards
	Are superior in quality standards
	Offers higher quality golf course features
Value	Are reasonably priced
	Have better course features for the price
	Offers more benefits for the price
Innovation	Are more dynamic in improvements
	Are more creative in products and services
	Are more of a trendsetter
Popularity	Are more preferred
	Are more recognized
	Are better known
Congruence	There is a logical connection between the event and this sponsor
	The image of the event and the image of the sponsor are similar
	The company and the event stand for similar things
	The sponsor and the event fit together well
	It makes sense to me that this company sponsors this event
Attitudes Sponsor	I think favourably of companies that sponsor this 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia
	Companies that sponsor 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia are successful
	Companies sponsoring 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia provide quality products/services
	Companies that sponsor 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia are professional

Statistical analysis

This research proposes a statistical analysis in which two methodologies are utilised. First, an analysis is carried out by creating a structural model using the SmartPLS software. This analysis allows the reliability and validity of the scales to be assessed, as well as verifying the significance or not of the relationships proposed in this model. These relationships aim to explain the attitudes towards the sponsor. Subsequently, a comparative qualitative analysis was carried out using fuzzy sets, using the fsQCA software (fuzzy-set-QCA), which allows us to operate with both the variables (presence) and the negation (absence) of them. In other words, it allows us to include both the high values and the low values of a single variable in the analysis in order to try to achieve high values or low values of a result variable. Continuing with this comparative analysis, we find the possibility of knowing what variables are necessary and sufficient within a proposed analysis. In this sense, on the one hand, the analysis of necessity allows us to know if there is any necessary variable to explain the attitudes towards the sponsor; in other words, whether any of the variables that are part of the analysis should always be present so that high levels or low levels of the expected result are produced, and in this case of the attitudes towards the sponsor. On the other hand, the sufficiency analysis allows us to analyze the combinations of sufficient conditions that can achieve the expected result by different ways, considering, as we commented before, both the presence and the absence of the variables that are part of the analysis. In other words, the analysis considers high values and low values of each of the variables in order to try to find combinations that allow the achievement of high or low levels of attitudes towards the sponsor.

Results

First, regarding the assessment of the measurement model, we can see that the factorial loads were all significant (p<.001) with loads higher than .708 (Hair et al., 2019). This indicates that the items that are part of each factor have a significant weight within it, so there are no items that are part of the measurement scale without being relevant. As for the rest of the criteria for convergent validity, Cronbach's alpha values are higher than .70 (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2004; Hair et al., 2006), RHO

values are above .70 (Wertz et al., 1974), composite reliability is above .70 (Gefen et al., 2000), and AVE values are above .50 (Fornell & Larcker 1981; Henseler et al., 2014). The fulfilment of these different criteria indicates that the scales used are reliable; therefore, the subsequent measurements made are appropriate according to the data and the sample of this study.

Second, information related to the discriminant validity analysis can be found. The purpose of this analysis is to confirm that the different factors that are part of the analysis do not have very high correlations between them, so they are able to discriminate in the measurement. Otherwise, it would not be possible to confirm that the factors are not excessively similar to be measuring different issues. Thus, if this analysis meets the criteria discussed below, it is considered adequate. This discriminant validity was checked using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT), the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the cross-loading criterion. Table 3 shows that the HTMT coefficients are significantly lower than 0.90 and that the correlations between the constructions are lower than the square root of the mean variance extracted (Henseler et al., 2016).

In Table 4, we can see the cross-loads of each factor and it is possible to check how the mean variance that each construct shares with its indicators is greater than the variance values that one construct shares with the rest of the constructs that compose the model. Therefore, the existence of discriminant validity in the analysis performed is confirmed.

Table 2. Evaluation of the measurement model: CR - Composite reliability. AVE – Average Variance Extracted

Construct	Cronbach's alpha	rho_A	CR	AVE	Factorial loads
AttSponsor	.762	.765	.848	.583	.733 - .805***
Congruence	.800	.801	.862	.555	.723 - .769***
Innovation	.773	.773	.868	.688	.817 - .842***
Popularity	.759	.761	.862	.675	.805 - .847***
Quality	.748	.761	.855	.663	.792 - .842***
Value	.758	.759	.861	.673	.799 - .834***

Note. *** $p<0.001$

Table 3. Discriminant validity

	AttSponsor	Congruence	Innovation	Popularity	Quality	Value
AttSponsor	**.763**	.894	.848	.860	.757	.754
Congruence	.704	**.745**	.813	.698	.781	.816
Innovation	.654	.639	**.829**	.854	.873	.819
Popularity	.653	.545	.730	**.822**	.844	.778
Quality	.582	.604	.743	.644	**.814**	.828
Value	.578	.636	.702	.626	.759	**.821**

Note: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) above the diagonal; square root of the AVE in the diagonal (bold) and correlations between the dimensions under the diagonal (Fornell-Larcker criterion).

Table 4. Discriminant validity and cross-loads

	AttSponsor	Congruence	Innovation	Popularity	Quality	Value
Innovation1	.536	.539	**.817**	.577	.619	.587
Innovation2	.547	.535	**.842**	.655	.625	.612
Innovation3	.545	.515	**.828**	.584	.605	.548
Popularity1	.517	.491	.629	**.805**	.596	.600
Popularity2	.533	.397	.595	**.813**	.493	.437

	AttSponsor	Congruence	Innovation	Popularity	Quality	Value
Popularity3	.559	.457	.579	**.847**	.502	.510
Quality1	.448	.457	.552	.481	**.808**	.527
Quality2	.545	.524	.658	.615	**.842**	.689
Quality3	.413	.490	.598	.454	**.792**	.628
Value1	.476	.510	.572	.520	.579	**.834**
Value2	.452	.536	.597	.512	.645	**.800**
Value3	.493	.520	.562	.510	.645	**.827**
AttSponsor1	**.755**	.566	.551	.466	.500	.516
AttSponsor2	**.733**	.476	.432	.507	.365	.373
AttSponsor3	**.805**	.609	.549	.522	.487	.497
AttSponsor4	**.759**	.488	.455	.503	.415	.364
Congruence1	.487	**.740**	.495	.412	.501	.408
Congruence2	.514	**.732**	.491	.403	.476	.529
Congruence3	.498	**.760**	.463	.355	.475	.515
Congruence4	.576	**.769**	.504	.470	.455	.522
Congruence5	.540	**.723**	.426	.384	.350	.391

Regarding the assessment of the structural model, which shows us if the proposed relationships are significant and the explanatory capacity of the model on the variable of interest, in Table 5, we can see how three of the proposed variables have shown their significant influence on attitudes towards the sponsor. In decreasing order of weight in the relationship, these variables are: congruence with a weight of .44 ($p<.001$); popularity with a weight of .30 ($p<.001$); and innovation with a weight of .14 ($p<.05$). These variables are capable of explaining up to 61% of the variance of attitudes ($R^2adj=.608$). On the other hand, the Stone-Geisser test indicates that the model has predictive relevance ($Q^2=.324$) since it obtains values greater than 0 (Chin, 1998).

Once we obtain the results of the structural model obtained by means of Smart PLS, we move on to show the results of the qualitative comparative analysis (QCA). First, we show the descriptive results and the calibration values (see Table 6) that were calculated using the fsQCA software, which allows the qualitative comparative analysis of fuzzy sets. Following the indications of the calibration method proposed by the author of the methodology (Ragin, 2008), and with the intention of being able to maximize the variance, the calibration values have been obtained by multiplying the items of each of the scales that form the measurement instrument. This method has been followed by most of the literature (Barton & Beynon, 2015; Rey-Martí et al., 2016; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012; Woodside, 2013).

Table 5. Assessment of the structural model

Relationship-construct	Path	R^2	f^2	Q^2	SRMR
Congruence -> AttSponsor	.442***		.257		
Innovation -> AttSponsor	.142**		.016		
Popularity -> AttSponsor	.299***		.099		
Quality ->AttSponsor	.024		.000		
Value -> AttSponsor	-.008		.000		
AttSponsor		.608		.324	
Estimated Model					.070

Note: *** $p < 0.001$. ** $p < 0.05$.

Table 6. Descriptive analysis and calibration values

	AttSponsor	Congruence	Innovation	Popularity	Quality	Value
N Valid	411	411	411	411	411	411
N missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	262.87	907.35	60.99	67.64	57.84	56.18
SD	159.94	724.71	32.23	31.87	31.44	32.36
Min	1	1	0	0	0	0
Max	625	3125	125	125	125	125
Calibration values						
Percentile 10	72	108	16	24	16	12
Median	240	720	720	64	60	48
Percentile 90	500	2000	100	100	100	100

Subsequently, analysis has been carried out to check whether any of the variables included in the analysis are necessary. When a variable is considered necessary, it means that it must always be present for the expected result to occur. As we can see in Table 7, none of the variables can be considered necessary for the achievement of high or low levels of attitudes towards the sponsor, given that the consistency values do not exceed in any case the criterion established in .90 (Ragin, 2008). Therefore, in this study, combinations or configurations of variables are going to be found that allow the expected result without a specific variable to always appear.

Finally, a sufficiency analysis has been carried out (Table 7) in order to identify the combinations of variables that allow high levels of attitude towards the sponsor to be reached. The value of the cut-off frequency was .80, exceeding the criterion established at .74 (Eng & Woodside, 2012), as well as the consistency values exceeding .74 (Ragin, 2008). The fsQCA yielded nine combinations or configurations of sufficient conditions that explain attitude towards the sponsor. The analysis of fsQCA shows that the most relevant causal configurations are (based on raw coverage): congruence × quality ~ popularity ~ innovation ~ value, congruence × innovation ~ quality, and quality × popularity ~ congruence.

Table 7. Necessary conditions from fsQCA for the occurrence (and absence) of attitude towards the sponsor

	AttSponsor		~ AttSponsor	
	Consistency	Coverage	Consistency	Coverage
Congruence	.814	.822	.429	.452
~ Congruence	.457	.435	.831	.823
Quality	.765	.766	.452	.471
~ Quality	.472	.453	.775	.775
Popularity	.824	.739	.496	.463
~ Popularity	.402	.433	.721	.809
Innovation	.819	.778	.467	.462
~ Innovation	.434	.439	.776	.817
Value	.799	.732	.515	.491
~ Value	.443	.467	.719	.789

Table 8. FsQCA results

Configuration	Solution								
	Attitude towards the sponsor								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Congruence	●	●	⊗		⊗		●	●	
Quality	●	⊗	●		●		⊗	⊗	
Popularity	⊗		●	●		●		●	
Innovation	⊗	●		●	●				●
Value	⊗					●	●		●
Raw coverage	.744	.733	.725	.721	.719	.713	.709	.707	.689
Unique coverage	.017	.006	.006	.007	.013	.006	.003	.005	.005
Consistency	.838	.839	.811	.889	.879	.867	.831	.828	.881
Overall Solution consistency	.753								
Overall Solution coverage	.881								
Consistency cut-off	.803								

Note: ● = presence of condition, ⊗ = absence of condition

Discussion

The analysis of the same phenomenon from the point of view of structural models combined with comparative qualitative analysis is not a frequent methodological approach in scientific literature. In spite of this, we find some examples in the field of sports events (Prado-Gascó & Calabuig, 2016) and also in relation to the functioning of sports organizations (Escamilla-Fajardo et al., 2019; García-Pascual et al., 2020, Hebles et al., 2020). The interest in improving attitudes towards the sponsor and, in general, the topic of attitudes towards a brand has attracted the attention of marketing researchers over time (Faircloth et al., 2001; Gardner, 1985; Ko et al., 2017; Wolfsteiner et al., 2019). The results of this research show that congruence with the sponsor is relevant for the creation of attitudes. This statement is in line with findings in the sports context in other studies, such as Oshimi and Harada (2019) and Zhang et al. (2020). Continuing with the relationship of attitudes with other variables, we find contributions that study their relationship with variables like innovation, such as the study by Brexendorf et al. (2015), in which the relationship of innovation to improving perceptions and attitudes is sustained, with the idea that innovation can change brand awareness in the short term and have an effect on the success of future innovations in the long term. Similarly, the relationship between popularity and attitudes has been confirmed in the literature (Gil et al., 2017). These two relationships have also been supported in the present research, where innovation and popularity not only directly influence attitudes but are also part of the combinations with other variables to reach the expected result. By contrast, quality and value variables have not been shown to directly influence attitudes in the present study. This relationship has been supported by the literature on other occasions, showing a significant relationship between quality and attitudes (Jung & Seock, 2016) and with attitudes playing a mediating role in the relationship between value and purchase intentions (Lee et al., 2016). Thus, for future studies, it would be necessary to examine why this can happen and if there can be mediations or moderations of other variables that have not been considered.

This study provides useful information to managers in general and to event organisers and marketing managers in particular, since it provides them with knowledge about the relationships between the different variables and the strength of influence of some on the others. With that information, they know which aspects have a significant influence on users to generate a better attitude towards the sponsor and, therefore, they can transfer this scientific knowledge to their business reality, to effectively modify their strategies and to know where to focus their efforts to become more efficient.

Conclusions

The results allow us to conclude, firstly in relation to the partial least squares analysis, that for the prediction of attitudes towards the sponsor, congruence with the brand, popularity and innovation have a significant influence,

but perceived quality and perceived value do not. On the other hand, with regard to comparative qualitative analysis, we can conclude that the prediction of attitudes towards the sponsor interactions between variables such as congruence, quality, innovation and popularity make it possible to achieve the expected result. Therefore, we can confirm that from the two methodological approaches tested, it has been proven the importance of variables such as congruence, popularity and innovation for the achievement of favourable attitudes towards the sponsor. These variables are often not considered, since the models tend to focus on the classic service variables such as quality and value. Therefore, at a practical level, with this study we provide interesting information for marketing managers, to help them better understand the role these variables play in improving attitudes. This allows them to have more elements of assessment focused on their specific context and not on others, and also allows them to be able to carry out modifications in their strategies in order to be more effective in changing attitudes and achieving more favourable behaviours.

Managerial implications

The results obtained in this study help sponsors to evaluate the extent to which their sponsorship is successful, considering the internal variables that are associated with its management, so that they could anticipate to a greater extent the convenience or not of a certain sponsorship. To the managers of sport events in this case, these results indicate that variables such as congruence with the sponsor, popularity, or innovation contribute to creating more favourable attitudes towards the event. Similarly, combinations of variables have been shown to achieve the same objective of improving attitudes towards the event, so managers know what combinations of variables should be pursued to achieve this objective more effectively. Thus, managers can use this information to propose marketing strategies that address the functioning of these variables in the context of sporting events, such as how to activate and articulate the sponsorship of the event.

Limitations and future lines of research

The main limitations encountered in the study was that the sample selected should not be excessively homogeneous in terms of origin in order to avoid biases related to the local character of each location. In an attempt to reduce this possible bias, a varied representation of countries was taken. Nevertheless, it would be interesting if the number and variety of samples were higher in future studies. On the other hand, the age range of those responding was 18 to 48 years old, so that a part of the population under study did not answer the survey. Perhaps online surveys are more common for this population group, but for future studies a representation of the higher age ranges should

also be obtained, in order to be able to compare the results according to this variable and see to what extent the analyses proposed may vary according to age. In the same way, academics should propose future lines of research that will continue to provide information on sports consumer behaviour, analysing, among other variables, attitudes towards the sponsor, as in the case of this study. This will allow us to better understand how the variables operate in this specific context so that we can continue to advance on a theoretical and practical level in the understanding of consumer behaviour. This will also allow consumers to receive services better adapted to their needs.

Ethics approval and informed consent

Ethical approval not required.

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71

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