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The Effect of a Pandemic and Lacking Live Sporting Event Attendance on Perceived Sponsorship Value

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Lacking Live Sporting Event
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Value

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Introduction

Sponsorship as marketing communication measures increased rapidly in popularity over the last three decades before the turn of the millennium, together with a more sophisticated marketing industry (Meenaghan, 1998). After that, sponsorship was viewed as an alternative to more traditional advertising and have taken many different forms (Lardinoit & Derbaix, 2001; Cornwell, 2019). Since then, sports have been the dominating domain of the growing market of sponsorship agreements (Woisetschläger, Backhaus, & Cornwell, 2017). These agreements have been applied by corporate organizations to reach specific, diverse, and large target audiences with objectives of creating brand awareness, enhanced brand images, and sales (Lardinoit & Derbaix, 2001; Cornwell & Maignan, 1998). In widely accepted definitions of sponsorship, the commercial potential of sport entities is accessed and utilized to achieve these objectives in exchange of rights fees of cash or in-kind (Yang & Ha, 2014; Wakefield, Wakefield, & Keller, 2020). This study seeks to examine the effect of the impact related to the pandemic outbreak of a new type of coronavirus in late 2019, with the associated disease COVID-19, on the sports domain of sponsorship value in Norway. The sport industry here, was among other industries worldwide, highly affected by this pandemic. The impact involved several governmental rules, restrictions, and recommendations to minimize, map, and control spread of the virus, but it also involved the fear of infection among people (Ahorsu, et al., 2020). For the sport industry, this mainly led to cancellations and postponements of planned sporting events, closed gyms and training facilities, and the lack of live sporting event attendance (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020).

The main purpose was to map how management of organizations engaged in sport sponsorship activities perceived sponsorship value, with the related assessment and measurements of effect, when exposed to a pandemic with the following impact. Contributions to the literature on sponsorship can then be provided because of the new prominent context which occurred in the sponsorship environment. A qualitative research design with interviews of employees in relevant Norwegian organizations with positions involving assessment of sponsorship value was utilized. The findings revealed in this study indicate a drop in the perceived sponsorship value, changes to the assessment of this value, but little alteration to the measurements of effect. The decrease in value is mainly observed among sponsoring firms, not sport entities. Still,

the sport entities agreed upon a reduced sponsorship value in general but because these organizations were to a large extent able to collect the same fees as before the impact, their own perceived sponsorship value remained almost intact. The lack of live sporting event attendance evidently served as a cause of the lower sponsorship value together with less exposure and less possibilities to activate sponsorship and offer hospitality services to customers and clients. Sponsoring firms had developed a higher importance to the fees and performing corporate social responsibility (CSR), while having little emphasis on attendance in their assessment processes. Measurements remained to a large extent unchanged and future beliefs supplemented the study, indicating that sponsorship value would increase in the future.

Literature Review

Sponsorship is a widely researched topic within the field of marketing and business. What sponsors hope to achieve with sport sponsorship agreements have been identified to be connected to the objectives of organizational strategies. Literature on sponsorship agreements has emphasized that brand awareness and enhancement of brand image traditionally have been two of the most important sponsorship objectives (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999). These objectives are potentially important when entering new markets or creating new products (Yang & Ha, 2014) but other objectives exist as well (Meenaghan, 1999; Cornwell & Maignan, 1998). Sponsorship has been argued to be an important marketing communication tool contributing to achieve favorable publicity and associations within certain target audiences or to reach narrow target segments, also a common objective of sport sponsorship agreements. It is also used as a measure to boost a corporation's sales or to successfully achieve a combination of several objectives (Bennett, 1999). Based on the literature on sponsorship value, it is assumed that value increases when achieving objectives related to the agreement. The basis for this assumption is value being perceived as the assessment of perceived sacrifices and perceived benefits with the influence of behavioral intentions and satisfaction (Boksberger & Melsen, 2011). For sponsoring firms, fees paid to sport entities are the sacrifices, and achieving objectives through exploiting the commercial potential of sport entities are the benefits. For sport entities, the opposite is then true with the level of exploitable commercial potential exclusively devoted to partners as the sacrifice,

versus the benefits of obtaining desired fees from the sponsors. This aligns with Farrelly, Quester, and Burton (2006), on their definition of successful sponsorship agreements being when satisfaction is accomplished in terms of the related objectives, and their statement of sponsorship value emerging from various sources, e.g., naming of a sports league or sponsoring athletes as product endorsers.

By attaching value dimensions and consider the influence of additional factors, Boksberger and Melsen (2011) support a multidimensional construct of value, in accordance with their findings of multidimensional scales explaining the concept of perceived value better than unidimensional scales. This multidimensional construct is supported by other studies as well (Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007) and Heinonen (2004) have stated contextual dimensions related to time and location to be more important than outcome and elements of the process of perceiving value. Farrelly, Quester, and Burton (2006) presented the influence of time on value as they reported that sponsorship value had apparently shifted substantially over recent times, indicating a dynamic perception of value in this environment. They explained in their study that sponsorship value is intangible in its nature and perceived as challenging to quantify. Since sponsorship value is dynamic and this value likely depend on contextual factors, it is relevant to check for how a pandemic impact affects the sponsorship value, and a dynamic approach to perceived value is necessary to capture any evolvement over time (Ravald & Grönroos, 1996).

Brand awareness is among other aspects a consequence of exposure, and one of the two most common objectives in the sponsorship environment according to Walliser (2003). The term refers to whether consumers know about a brand, and the degree to which consumers can recognize the brand or recall it. By activating memory nodes in the mind of the consumer, the decision-making process is influenced together with brand recall (Huang & Sarrigöllü, 2014, p. 113). Brand awareness significantly affects both consumer and business settings. Business settings by driving market performance (Homburg, Klarmann, & Schmitt, 2010), and the value processes by consumers (Oh, 2000). Given the documented impact of brand awareness on consumer decision-making, a well-known brand has a substantial higher probability of being chosen or bought by consumers, compared to an unknown brand (Hoyer & Brown, 1990). Building on this, Walliser (2003) has stated that a combination of sponsorship and other

techniques of communication increases companies' marketing impact. It then relates to sponsorship value, as research have shown, there is a positive correlation between brand awareness and market performance, and outcome. If a firm's objective is to achieve more sales, focusing on brand awareness through sponsorship could therefore be a sufficient measure to achieve that objective.

Additionally, as brand awareness is part of the concept of brand equity, it has been explained that both business and academic scholars have confirmed that the role sponsorship have in developing and building brand equity is important, by Cornwell, Roy, and Steinard II (2001), with their reference to Keller (1993). These researchers specifically stated that sponsorship of sports had become an established marketing communication tool perceived as helpful in building both brand awareness and corporate brand image, potentially building sponsorship value. Enhancement of brand image is, as mentioned, the other most common objective of sponsorship in the corporate landscape and therefore a potential substantial source of sponsorship value. Sponsors try to accomplish desirable perceptions and subsequent behavioral changes among target audiences by changing their image when utilizing the image of sport entities, in the form of defining the image, enhance, or re-establish it. On the other hand, sport entities try to achieve main benefits from substantial fees (Farrelly, Quester, & Burton, 2006; Yang & Ha, 2014). Smith (2004) presented multiple definitions mainly surrounding brand perceptions with different wording that have been developed about brand image in the past. It is stated that brand awareness as an effect of the sponsorship agreements has previously been more emphasized in the literature than the effect on brand image. Still, there was presented an increased support to image transfers of sponsorship agreements. Meenaghan (1999) has pointed out the same emphasis on brand awareness rather than brand image in previous literature but this is understandable considering the challenging nature of evaluating brand image.

Considering the process of achieving brand image transfer through sponsorship, the duration, composition, status, and the domain of the agreements, a sports domain in this study, influence the transfer, and potentially the sponsorship value if the objectives relate to brand image (Smith, 2004). By having an increased perceived fit of the sponsorship relationship, combined with higher perceived quality, brand image transfer is reinforced through sponsorship agreements (Zdravkovic & Till, 2012). Walliser

(2003) substantiates this by stating that sponsorship can likely modify a company's brand image, and this can presumably create sponsorship value if a firm successfully manages to transfer or enhance desired brand image through sponsorship, in accordance with the set objectives. Additionally, sponsorship can be used to reach specific target audiences (Crompton, 2004), not reached through traditional advertising. As sponsorship activities have previously experienced a substantial growth before the introduction of modern digital tools of communication (Meenaghan, 2013) with a consistent increase (Walliser, 2003), the literature has become more extensive accordingly (Cornwell & Kwon, 2020). It is commonly acknowledged in the literature on sponsorship presented here that total expenditures of sponsorship agreements have steadily grown, and the use of sponsorship as a marketing measure has intensified over several decades. What this literature does not account for, is how the perceived sponsorship value is affected by the possibility to achieve sponsorship objectives during the impact of a pandemic.

Research Agenda & Research Questions

The possibility to achieve objectives related to brand awareness and brand image, as well as other sponsorship objectives, might be influenced by the pandemic impact, as this forced changes to the sports environment. The influence of unexploited commercial potential on the perceived sponsorship value among relevant management should therefore be examined, and implications accounted for, since pandemics are expected to occur again in the future (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). The first research question is formulated to account for this gap in the literature. Besides potential changes in sponsorship value, changes in the value assessments were necessary to map because the importance of metrics could be adjusted for to account for potential higher, lower, or unchanged perceived sponsorship value. To exemplify, due to a lack of live attendance, sponsoring firms may alter the value assessment of their sponsorship agreements to adapt for restrictions which entails prohibition of having crowds at sports arenas. The second research question was formulated to map potential changes to the assessment of sponsorship value and changes to the importance of metrics.

RQ1: How does the impact of a pandemic outbreak influence the perceived value of sport sponsorship agreements?

RQ2: How does the assessment of sport sponsorship value change by the impact of a pandemic outbreak?

Meenaghan and O’Sullivan (2013) explain a “measure deficit” within sponsorship agreements as awareness and media exposure are the most used metrics, in terms of evaluating effectiveness. They raised concerns about measurements of sponsorship agreements regarding credibility and effectiveness. From sponsorship literature, a satisfaction paradox regarding outcomes of sponsorship agreements without any measurements of these outcomes were observed by Thjømmøe, Olson, and Brønn (2002) and referred to by Meenaghan (2013) when sensing that the success of sponsoring firms is almost universally assumed among sponsors. Factors affecting sponsorship effectiveness are, among other aspects, exposure, fit, cohesiveness, and awareness (Kim, Lee, Magnusen, & Kim, 2015). Little is known on how measurements have changed during a pandemic. If organizations experienced a drop in sponsorship value due to this impact, measurements would potentially contribute to detect such a change, or the absence of measurements could make the detection challenging. Additionally, measurements must be mapped to comprehensively account for changes in the sponsorship environment and a third research question is therefore formulated.

RQ3: What measurements of sport sponsorship effects have undergone a change in importance due an altered sponsorship environment?

To make additional contributions to the literature on sponsorship value, another research question was included. This also served the purpose of limiting findings related to potential changes in value, assessments of value, and measurements of effects of the sport sponsorship agreements to the desired condition with the pandemic impact. This increases the reliability by ensuring that the findings are not permanent changes to the sport sponsorship environment, while giving valuable data on the potential future structural and value related changes.

RQ4: What are the expectations to future value of sport sponsorship agreements after experiencing a pandemic and a lack of live sporting event attendance?

Research Methodology

Research Design & Data Collection

Given the lack of previous research covering the topic of changes in assessment of value, perceived value, measurements, and the future value beliefs of sport sponsorship agreements when experiencing the impact of a pandemic, a qualitative research design was selected. Other studies with similar purpose have also argued that this design is appropriate when examining a broad and complex research area like for the value of sponsorship with limited contextual literature, using Zaltman, LeMasters and Heffring (1982), cited in Farrelly, Quester, and Burton (2006). When considering the topics surrounding the impact of a pandemic, specific literature is acknowledged to be limited, and the presented argument is therefore relevant for this specific research area. By approaching a qualitative design, a meaningful understanding of the topics by studying the beliefs, opinions, and experiences of the participants and comparisons of these were enabled (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019, p. 179), necessary to answer all four of the research questions. With a qualitative mono-method study, research interviews were decided upon due to its ability to comprehensively explore the subjects and to produce data manageable to properly perform thematic analyses. The purpose of the study determined the structure of the interviews, and the data collection was conducted with the use of semi-structured interviews on all participants to adequately guide the course of the interviews. This, in addition to ensuring full anonymity facilitated for participants to speak their mind, contributed to ensure valid responses (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019, p. 435), related to the pandemic impact experienced in the sport sponsorship environment. Semi-structured interviews allowed for convenient comparisons of responses by the participants on themes surrounding sponsorship value in the relevant context.

The conduction of two trial interviews with participants of each type of organization represented in the study substantiated the qualitative approach with research interviews and were performed after developing an interview guide. This guide addressed the research questions across four different themes that were presented to the participants before the conduction of the interviews and was differentiated based on type of organization the participants represented. The questions, not presented beforehand,

were to a large extent similar and covered the same themes, but the wording was adjusted to facilitate the nature of their core operations. Four themes were covered in different sections of the interviews: (1) the participant, (2) the perception of sport sponsorship value, (3) changed perceived sport sponsorship value, and (4) future beliefs. The first section, covering the subjects related to the theme surrounding the characteristics of the participants served two purposes. It established knowledge about operations of the organizations, considered to be valuable regarding upcoming sections requiring a greater understanding of the assessment of sponsorship value, in addition to filter prospects by their decision-making authority to ensure that they were members of the desired population. In the following section, the perception of sport sponsorship value, a series of questions were prepared to capture the participants' valuation processes of sport sponsorship. To provide answers on all four research questions, it was necessary to get participants to reflect about assessing and measuring sponsorship value and express how these usually took place with normal conditions in the sponsorship environment. Specific sport sponsorship agreements were utilized in the questioning to ease how participants could relate to the questions.

Building on the same specific sponsorship agreements and participants' reflections, the third section covered the subjects related to the theme of a changed perceived sponsorship value. Another series of questions were prepared to detect changes to the perceived sponsorship value due to the pandemic impact, more directly linked to the three research questions covering changes in assessment, measurements, and perceived value. The participants were asked if sponsorship value had changed, if the assessment process had changed, and if the measurements had changed. On this theme, participants were for the first time asked about the influence of attendance on a potentially changed sponsorship value. The subject of lacking live sporting event attendance was avoided before to check if participants mentioned it without guidance or probing. The final section, future beliefs, addressed beliefs about future sponsorship value in accordance with the last research question, in addition to map beliefs about future measurements and permanent structural changes to sport sponsorship. They were asked about their expectations to ensure valid answers on beliefs to the sponsorship environment after the pandemic impact had surpassed. All prospects completed the sections covering the four themes, but questioning was adapted to their answers and the nature of the

interviews. While it resulted in participants not being presented with every planned question of the interview guide, all participants made contributions on all themes.

Sampling Technique & Recruitment Process

The population from which it was desirable to draw findings from was employees within sponsoring firms and sport entities in Norway that held an organizational position involving assessments of potential and realized value of sport sponsorship agreements. They had experienced rapid and frequent changes to the restrictions affecting the sports environment. Whether these employees were the ones executing decisions, had a team mandate regarding sponsorship agreements, or assessed value of potential agreements, they were appropriate to include in the sample. It was crucial to thoroughly define the population of which participants were to be drawn from to enable the possibility of answering all four research questions, and cases in the described population were the only ones that could provide valid and meaningful responses to generate the necessary findings. The population also included sport entities as previous research have mainly focused on the sponsors' achieved effect of sponsorship agreements, not the sponsorship effect on sport entities (Olson, 2010). With little emphasis on this aspect of sport sponsorship agreements, the sport entities are included here to give an additional perspective, providing another element to the research. Additionally, as sport entities should scrutinize the terms and implications of the sponsorship when considering potential sponsorship agreements (Toscani & Prendergast, 2018), these organizations ought to be included in the research. To determine the sample, a non-probability sampling approach had to be utilized and a purposive sampling technique made sure only relevant prospects were requested to participate, as this allowed for subjective assessments of their suitability (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019, p. 315). A sample size of 15 participants substantiated this approach (Henry, 1990, p. 13), and to recruit participants who were able to provide responses relevant to produce answers on all research questions, it was necessary to focus on a few cases that withheld an abundant amount of information (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019, p. 321).

Suitability of prospects was assessed based on the organizations they represented and how these made substantial contributions to the sponsorship environment and to

diversity of the sample. Applicable sponsoring firms and sport entities were reached out to by use of email to request internet mediated interviews. With a combination of maximum variation and typical case sampling, extreme and special cases were excluded to increase credibility (Henry, 1990, p. 8; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019, p. 322). Recruiting prospects to the sample and collecting data were continuous processes performed simultaneously, and after collecting data from 15 participants, the basis of data necessary to answer each of the research questions was sufficient. One of the participants representing a sport entity had to be excluded for further analyses because of an atypical unapplicable sponsorship structure. By only receiving means in the forms of gifts and prizes to award attending athletes at events, a comparison of the experienced sponsorship value before and after the pandemic impact was unfeasible when the number of such events was limited. This structure stood out from the other cases, and even if implementing events, there was no evident possibility to identify changes in perceived value. As a result, the case was removed from the sample and analysis. By doing so, all 14 remaining cases in the sample had similar sponsorship structures, feasible to detect changes in sponsorship value.

Sample Description

The remaining 14 participants in the sample consisted of eight employees in sponsoring firms and six employees in sport entities, all involved in management decisions regarding valuation of sport sponsorship agreements. The sampling technique was deemed successful, and a satisfactory sample was obtained in accordance with population characteristics. Diverse contributions to the sample were accomplished and characteristics of the organizations represented by participants are further described in the following paragraphs. The biggest contribution to the sample, in terms of number of participants based on type of organizations included, were the eight sponsoring firms. Here, a wide diversity of characteristics in terms of geographical affiliations, size, business sectors, core business operations, organizational structures, target markets, use of market communication, and sponsorship objectives were observed. The energy sector had the highest representation with employees of four different actors. Of these actors, two were electricity providers on a national level with broad target markets, one was an energy company distributing, developing, and producing renewable energy with higher local geographical affiliations, and the last actor was

another considerably sized energy company. Financial services was the sector with the second highest representation. There were two actors, distinguished by one being a local savings bank providing private banking services and the other one being an investment bank providing financial services. Concerning geographical affiliations, the local savings bank naturally had high local affiliations, while the investment bank provided financial services to a broad international target market. The two remaining sponsoring firms represented came from different sectors. One was a commercial radio station broadcasting nationally, and the last company specialized in repairing specific car parts with a national target market and catchment area.

The employees representing sport entities also contributed to diversify the sample. Similar differences were observed here as among the sponsoring firms, concerning geographical affiliations, size, and core activities. Due to the nature of sport entities, there are high local affiliations. Differences in organizational structure and sponsorship objectives were also apparent. Two sport entities in the sample were considered to be top soccer clubs in Norway, referring to clubs with men's team playing in the top two divisions. The club from the top division naturally had a wider catchment area and different sponsorship objectives than the club from the second highest division did. Building further on diversity in the sample, two ice hockey teams were also represented by participants in the study. In this sport, there was a greater difference in sporting performance between the two teams, than between the soccer clubs. One team played in the top division and the other team played in a subsection of the third division, and differences in the organizational structure were observed accordingly. One considerably large confederation of sport was represented, with a nationally broad catchment area. Lastly, a gymnastic association with a high local geographical affiliation and a narrow catchment area was represented.

Professional organizations accounted for a large proportion of the complete sample. Simultaneously, a risk was present that this could illustrate an incorrect picture of the sport entities in general. The sports environment in Norway has arguably been characterized by the recreational sports organizations with voluntary capacities behind the operations. Still, professional actors were assessed to be necessary due to their established knowledge regarding valuation, accomplished by having commercial incentives. The need for this became evident during the trial interview of a sport entity,

where the participant represented an organization closer to practicing recreational sports rather than professional sports. It was still desirable to collect statements from commercially oriented organizations as well as recreational sport entities, to provide relevant implications suited to facilitate and prepare all organizations for similar situations in the future. In total, the sample represented organizations with high presence in the Norwegian sport sponsorship environment, among other aspects, accounting for both sponsors with high visibility and attractive sponsorship objects in the sport entities. The geographical locations of the various organizations in the sample extended from the very south to the far north in Norway, covering main parts of the country.

Analysis

Transcripts of all research interviews were created as participants completed their interviews and after the data collection, a thematic analysis of the data took place to facilitate detection of possible findings suited to answering the four research questions individually. The thematic analysis was necessary because of its flexibility to handle a recursive procedure with continuous analyses of the transcripts after recording any relevant observations. Data was analyzed for themes by coding the transcripts to identify any recurring patterns, in accordance with the steps of this type of analysis (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019, pp. 651-653). Responses relevant to answer one of the research questions, were coded on one or more of the nine different predetermined categories, that each was facilitated to capture recurring patterns. These categories were: (1) the participant, (2) value assessment, (3) changed value assessment, (4) changed perceived value, (5) measurements, (6) changed measurements, (7) future measurements, (8) future value beliefs, and (9) permanent structural changes. For the first research question covering a potential change in the perceived sponsorship value, only one of the coding categories was utilized, the changed perceived value. Here, statements from participants on how sponsorship value became either higher or lower, or remained unchanged after experiencing a pandemic impact, were coded. The statements were coded differently based on referring to changes in value of the organization the participants represented or on referring to the value of other organizations in general. Examples of statements for this category are “we got like everyone else a punch in the face in March, which led to a drop in revenue

of NOK one and a half to two million, not just in sponsorship income,” and “it is safe to say that the value has probably somewhat dropped over the last year.”

The coding category covering a changed value assessment and the category of initial assessments of sponsorship value before the pandemic impact, value assessment, were used when statements could contribute to answering the second research question. This research question addressed a potential change in the assessments of sponsorship value, and statements within the first of the two categories were coded if any changes to the value assessment were observed. One quote illustrating these statements is “I do not believe anyone has changed their assessments of value during this pandemic but that could be because one has always thought it would disappear.” These statements were also differentiated based on being about participants’ own organization or in general. The other category, the value assessment, was coded when stating assessments of sponsorship value in a normal sponsorship environment, without the influence of the pandemic impact. The statements in this category enabled comparisons of previous assessments and potential changes in the assessment, illustrated, “hard cash agreements are not the only beneficial type of agreement, barter agreements in the form of providing services we normally would pay for are also valuable.” For the third research question, formulated to answer if measurements of sport sponsorship effects had undergone a change in importance due to the pandemic impact, two out of the three coding categories addressing measurements were utilized. Measurements and changed measurements worked in the same way as the categories of assessment and changed assessment on the previous research question. Measurements were coded on statements about measurements of sponsorship effects before the pandemic impact like, “we received measurements (on brand exposure) every six months,” while changed measurements on statements like, “the number of television viewers has become more important now.”

Future beliefs about sponsorship value were addressed by the fourth and last research question. This was covered by the coding categories of future measurements, future value beliefs, and permanent structural changes. Here, all statements contributing to answer on what expectations the participants had to the future sponsorship environment were recorded. Future measurements on statements like, “it will be more measurements on the exposure value in the future,” future value beliefs on statements like, “when

things are back to normal, I can see that the value is at least going to be the same as before and maybe even higher because people feel a great need to go out at events and do activities,” and permanent structural changes on statements like, “it will be more activation to get the most out of the sponsorship agreements.” More than 460 relevant statements by participants were recorded among all categories, contributing to answer each of the four research questions as presented, and the recurring patterns are described with illustrated frequencies and typical quotes. All quotes presented are translated from Norwegian, some with minor adjustments for sake of illustrating the meaning.

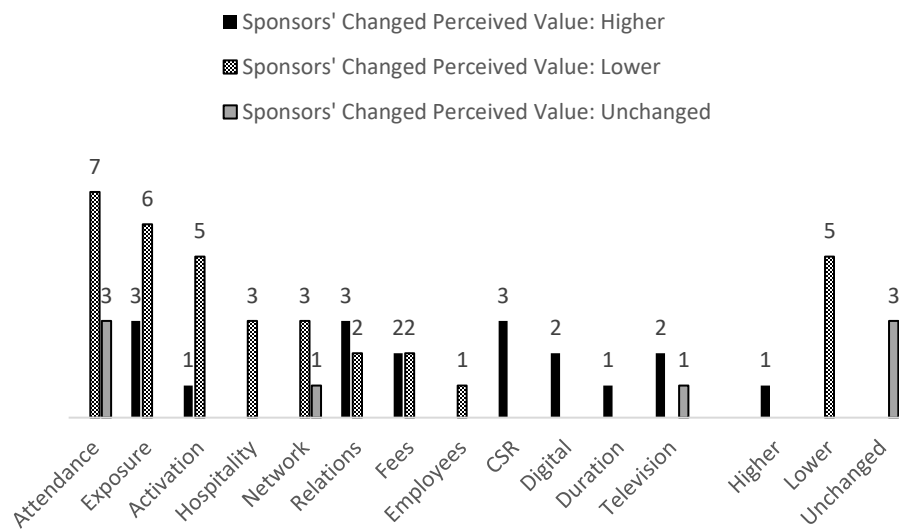
Results

After analyzing the data provided by the interviews, the codes gave an extensive set of data connected to answering the four research questions, with use of the respective coding categories presented. In this section, the results are reported before these are commented on in the following discussion together with differences, contradictions, and the implications. Data related to each of the four research questions are presented separately with frequencies of statements related to the respective research question together with typical and illustrative quotes from the data collection. Results are largely focused around the high-frequency statements because the semi-structured interviews were differentiated based on the course of the interviews, and low-frequency statements therefore does not necessarily give correct impressions of participants not taking a recorded stand.

Changed Perceived Value of Sport Sponsorship Agreements

Close to 130 statements within the category of changed perceived value due to the pandemic impact were observed, with sponsorship value being either positively or negatively changed, or unchanged. Among participants representing sponsoring firms it could be seen that *Attendance* constituted the most stated reason for a negative influence of the pandemic impact on sponsorship value, but the probing for attendance must be acknowledged. What is noteworthy, only one of these participants originally stated attendance as influencing the sponsorship value assessment, while most of the participants admitted it to influence a changed value. The differences in assessments of value and influences of a change in value were not the only deviations observed

during the interviews. Conflicting statements were recorded regularly, seen in this category with only eight participants in the group of sponsoring firms and 10 recorded statements on attendance’s influence on sponsorship value, illustrated below. The same can be seen on unspecified statements and on the second most frequent influence on a change in value, *Exposure*. One participant even stated a lower level of exposure without admitting an effect on value, saying, “put somewhat extremely, we are still in a place where I think value is the same, but there is no doubt it is less exposure.” Statements on lower sponsorship value due to less exposure were in addition coded on statements such as, “they only play a few matches and from this we receive little exposure value” and, “what we see is that of course we would have been more present at events and exposing ourselves with activities.” Statements on an increased value were recorded as well, due to a higher level of exposure achieved through media coverage of cancelled sporting events and sporting performances by sponsor objects, while simultaneously experiencing a pandemic impact. One example is, “simultaneously, (...) has performed well so we get a lot of media coverage there.”

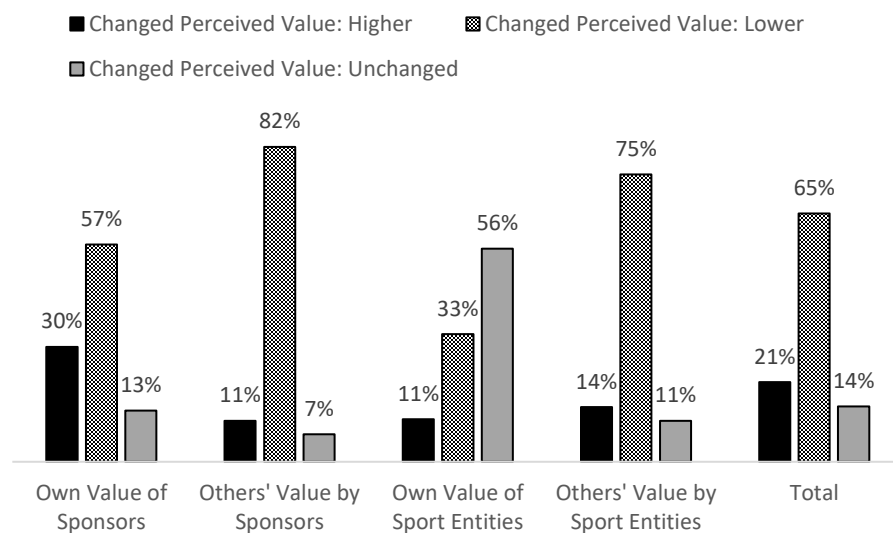


Activation followed as illustrated with statements recorded among six participants representing sponsoring firms. While statements on attendance and exposure were somewhat expected due to probing and brand awareness objectives being commonly associated with sponsorship agreements, activation played a bigger role in changing sponsorship value than anticipated. Additionally, five participants representing sponsors initially stated activation as contributing to assessing sponsorship value, three

of them were the same as stating it to negatively influence changes in this value. Among the sponsoring firms, activation referred to activities and interactions with audiences or viewers of sporting events to increase sponsorship effect, related to objectives. One participant recorded to perceive a lower value with the influence of both attendance and activation said, “it means that we cannot communicate physically with the audience, we cannot be present with a stand, we do not get to activate, we cannot talk to the athletes, nor produce video clips with them.” Another example is the second quote used to illustrate *Exposure*, as some statements have been recorded on multiple codes and categories in the analysis, with activities contributing to the exposure. The one participant among the sponsors that stated activation to increase the value was a special case involving released funds from other partners due to cancellations of sporting events, that they could use for activities. For *Hospitality* and *Network*, three participants of sponsoring firms each stated this to negatively influence sponsorship value, referring to the weakened opportunity to offer hospitality to their customers and clients, and to interact with other partners within the sport entities’ sponsorship networks. For *Relations*, between partners, more participants representing sponsors stated this to influence value positively rather than negatively because some organizations felt that their relation had been enhanced by experiencing the pandemic impact together. The same was seen on *CSR* with sponsors viewing the impact of the pandemic as an opportunity to engage in CSR towards sport entities. One participant stated, “we have decided to continue to give the same support to all partners to show that we will be there through challenging times and that we are a robust partner.” Other influences were as illustrated also affecting the sponsorship value of sponsors after experiencing the pandemic impact, but with lower frequencies.

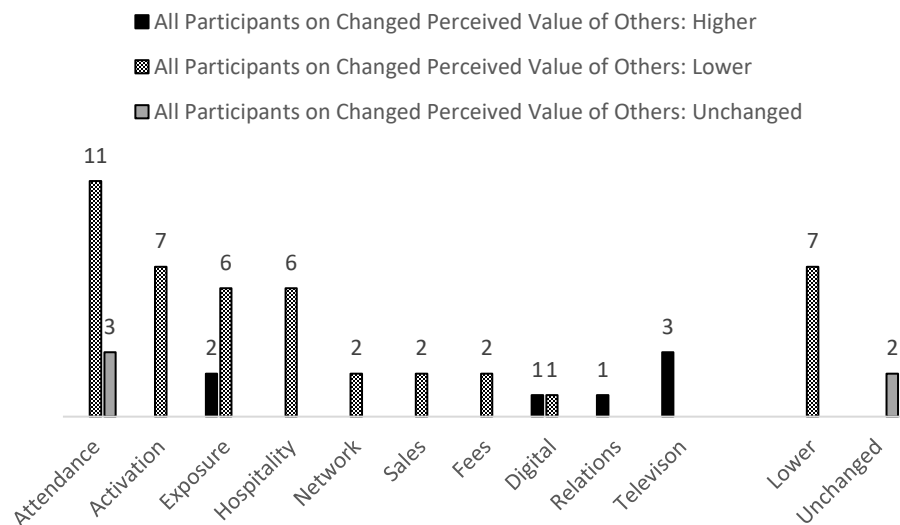
For sport entities, the situation was different with a widespread consensus that the pandemic impact did not influence the sponsorship value in any way, as most participants in this group stated unchanged value. There was one exception, and this participant experienced a decreased ability to collect the same fees as before the pandemic impact due to economic problems among sponsors. An additional case was observed but with conflicting statements as the participant also indicated unchanged value. With another participant representing a sport entity, duration was stated to positively influence the sponsorship value. They argued the use of duration in their

initial assessment of value and even when considering a pandemic impact, duration of agreements had been extended and a higher value was therefore achieved. It seemed obvious that the value of sport sponsorship agreements had taken a hit from the impact of a pandemic. For sponsoring firms, negative influences on the value recurred and exceeded the number of stated positive and neutral influences with more than 30% higher frequencies. This could be because the fees paid to sport entities remained mostly unchanged while the commercial potential of the sport entities was impossible to fully exploit. To gain deeper insights about changes in the sponsorship value, beliefs and experiences the participants had about other organizations were mapped, and a decrease in value was further observed by the proportion of observations stating to negatively influence sponsorship value. When making statements about other organizations, there was a higher tendency to state negative influences of the pandemic impact rather than positive or neutral, as illustrated below. This was also the case for sponsors on their own value, while a distinction could be seen when sport entities took a stand on their own value versus the value of others.



Of the reasons stated by the participants to influence the sponsorship value of others, *Attendance* was most frequent, and on this subject, there was no clear distinction between sponsoring firms and sport entities. The frequencies presented below therefore include all participants. Being unable to activate the sponsorship had the second highest frequency, mostly viewed by sponsors, followed by *Exposure* and *Hospitality*, not considering unspecified statements. When participants talked about the sponsorship

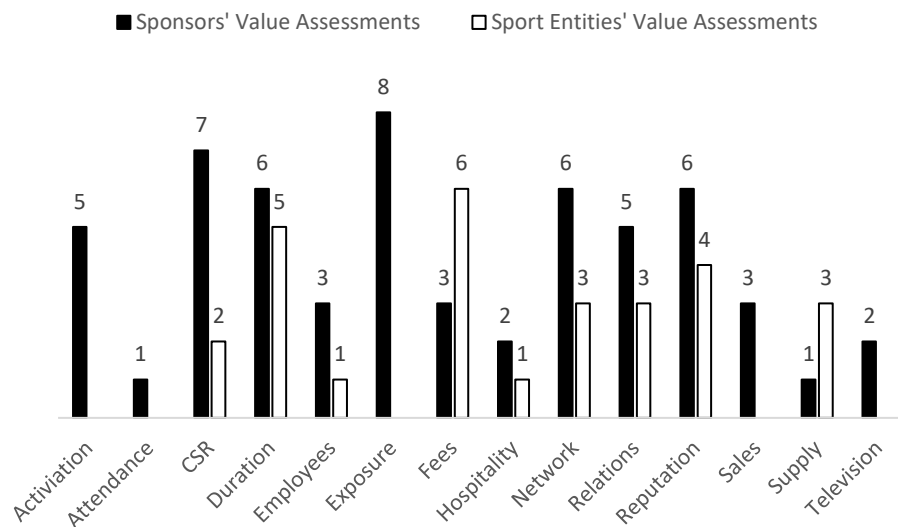
value of others and how it had changed due to less activation, some were reluctant to admit a decrease in value like, “I do not believe they lose their value, although you can say that partners cannot use them sufficiently in their activation.” Others were more direct, saying, “when you cannot activate on site you have to think differently” and one participant representing a sport entity said, “activation in the sponsorship is gone but maybe exposure have become more important in the form of more television viewers than normally, due to the pandemic.” The last quote was also viewed as an increase of value due to a higher number of television viewers, with another example being, “television has been viewed more than ever, people have spent more time at home, so if you have a sponsor object with a clear profile, you probably have achieved a lot.” Participants also established a certainty of less exposure stating, “it has been less activity on every possible area, so it has been less exposure than before” and for hospitality with, “there is probably bigger sport entities more dependent on the income generated by attendance, that cannot offer their hospitality services.”



Changed Assessment of Sponsorship Value

On the coding categories surrounding the second research question, just under 190 statements were recorded. Without concerning the pandemic impact, sponsors’ statements of assessing sponsorship value were somewhat reflected in their statements about influences of changed value, with *Exposure* most frequently stated. For this assessment, all participants representing sponsoring firms mentioned exposure as contributing to the assessment with statements like, “first and foremost we can check

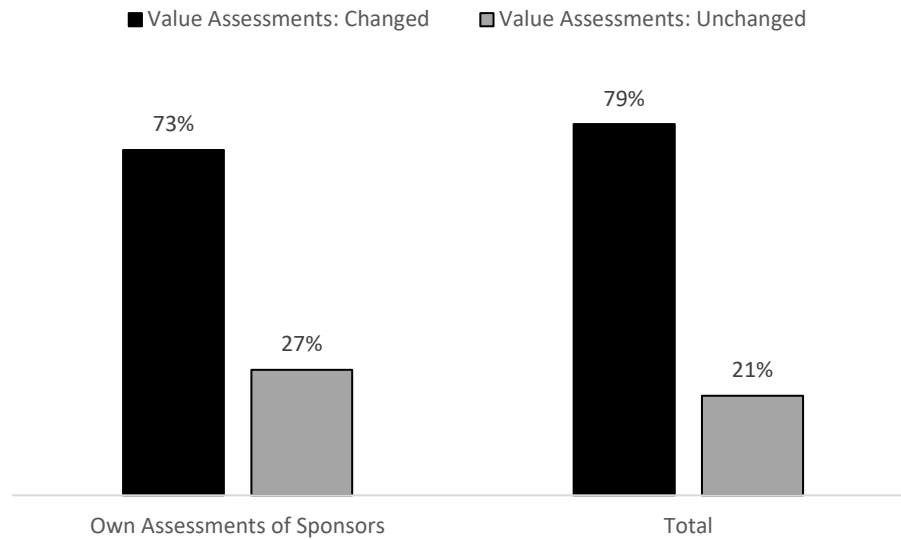
off good exposure value with this agreement,” “the activation is an important part of the agreement but also that we are exposed locally,” and, “I would say that network is maybe at top but also the exposure as well of course.” As shown below, *CSR* followed with all participants representing sponsors expect one, before *Duration*, *Network*, and *Reputation*, with six statements on each. Regarding duration of agreements, a common understanding by most participants, independent on representing a sponsoring firm or a sport entity, was that duration contributed to the assessment of sponsorship value. This was recorded on 11 out of the 14 participants in total. *Activation* and *Relations* were recorded on five of the participants representing sponsoring firms, and these assessments corresponded to the meaning of the influences of a changed perceived sponsorship value. *Activation*, with possibility to activate the sponsorship and *Relations* concerning the relationships with the partners. *Activation* illustrated by, “we look at what we get in return, how we can extract activation that leads to a benefit. This is the most important part of the agreement,” and *Relations* was recorded when influencing the process of assessing sponsorship value. Again, there were other assessments influencing the sponsorship value among sponsors but with lower frequencies.



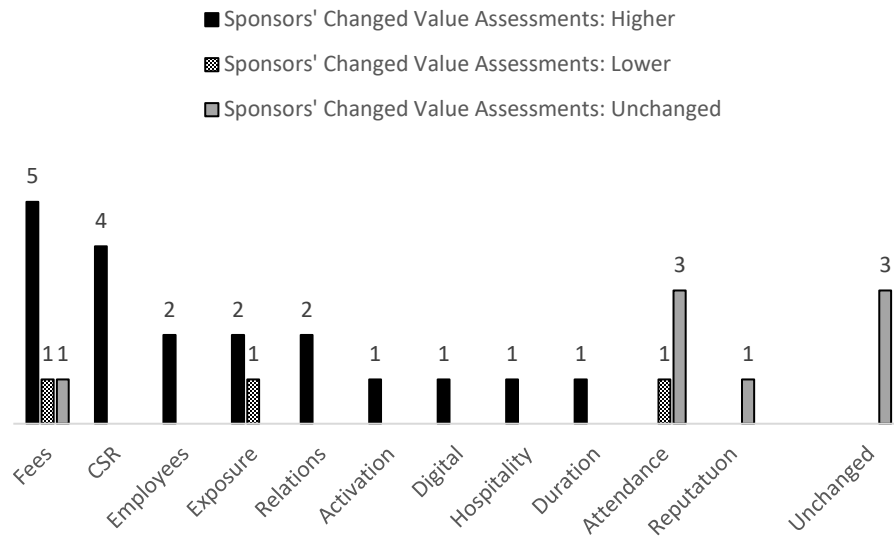
Of the assessment on sponsorship value among sport entities, the fees paid by sponsoring firms to exploit the commercial potential of the sport entity had the highest frequency, with all participants mentioning this. With the common objective of sponsorship agreements among sport entities being to collect substantial fees, as

mentioned in the literature, this result was expected. When asked about the most important assessment, one participant simply stated, “money talks.” As mentioned, *Duration* was observed with a high frequency among sport entities as well, with just one exception. As illustrated above, *Reputation* followed and important to note for this assessment is the different meaning detected among sponsoring firms and sport entities. For sponsoring firms, reputation involved getting desirable associations, while for the sport entities it was desirable to avoid negative ones. Illustrated by, “their reputation must be good, and if they have been criticized in the local newspaper or involved in some shady business they will not be accepted.” Assessments related to *Network*, *Relations*, and *Supply* had three observations each. Network was also assessed differently for sport entities because they assessed what contributions the potential partner would bring to their network, while sponsors assessed the quality and quantity of the network in terms of members and how it was operated. One participant representing a sport entity stated, “we have always focused on an objective of having the best sponsorship network in the region.”

The sport entities also stated their experience and beliefs about the process of other organizations regarding assessment of sponsorship value. Aligned with the assessments stated by sponsoring firms, all sport entities stated exposure to be part of the sponsorship value assessments of others, and *CSR*, *Relations*, and *Reputation* were also mentioned by most of the sport entities. To provide an answer to the second research question, statements on changes to the assessment of sponsorship value after experiencing a pandemic impact were recorded. Based on statements concerning assessments either being changed or unchanged, more observations were in favor of a changed assessment process, rather than unchanged. Among the sport entities, changes to the process of assessing value were approximately nonexistent, with few and even conflicting statements. One sport entity devoted lower importance to fees, stating higher emphasis on maintaining relationships rather than collecting the same fees as before the impact.

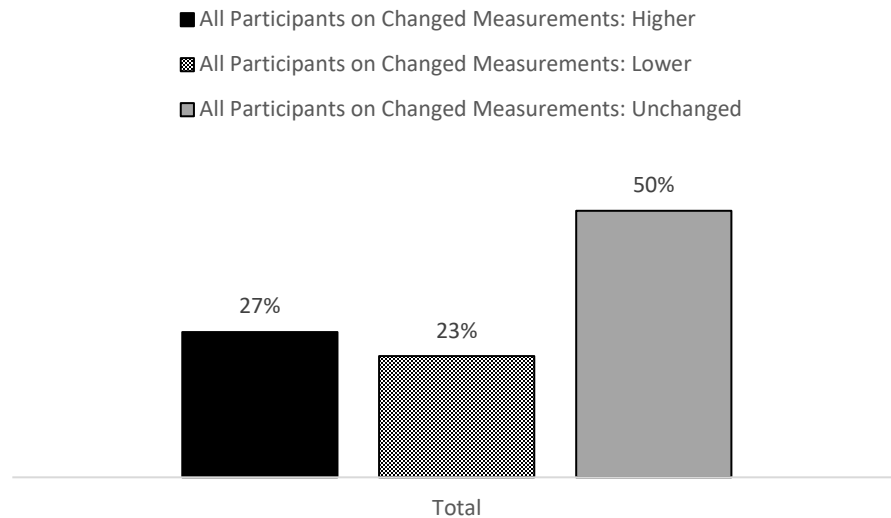


In total of all recorded statements regarding changes to the value assessment, there was a substantial proportion indicating lower or higher importance on different influences on the value assessment, compared to unchanged. This is illustrated above, together with sponsoring firms' statements on their own value assessment. The total included some statements on a changed value assessment of others, explaining why it is higher in total, than for sponsors on their own changes. To examine how the assessment of sponsorship value have changed due to the pandemic impact, the statements of sponsors are illustrated below. Sport entities are not accounted for because of few statements and assessment changes. Sponsoring firms had developed higher importance to the fees paid to sport entities and CSR. Two sponsoring firms made contradicting statements illustrating this. One said, "we must support them in difficult times," and the other one, "they have less to offer, they cannot offer network activities, nor do they host matches and there is uncertainty regarding when they can do this again, so they have been pretty selective in terms of entering agreements. It is a sponsor's market". Among other influences of changed importance, these had the most frequent observations, but one participant also stated lower importance of the fees, because this was not the time to withhold resources as sport entities were struggling with generating income. Few statements were recorded with a lowering importance.



Changed Measurements of Sponsorship Effects

When examining the measurements of sponsorship agreements and the potential changes to these measurements due to a pandemic impact, sport entities have to a large extent been excluded based on few statements and no recorded measurements. While giving some statements about the measurements of others, sport entities seemingly did not execute any measurements of sponsorship effects. When presenting the proportions of all statements on changes in the measurements of sponsorship effects, the few statements by sport entities are still included. Illustrated below, the statements concerning changes to the measurements were to some extent neutral to any changes, unlike the changes in assessment. Some changes were recorded on few participants, all sponsoring firms, expressing higher importance on using the number of television viewers and lower on exposure. The illustration also includes beliefs and experiences about other organizations, but few statements were recorded here as well.

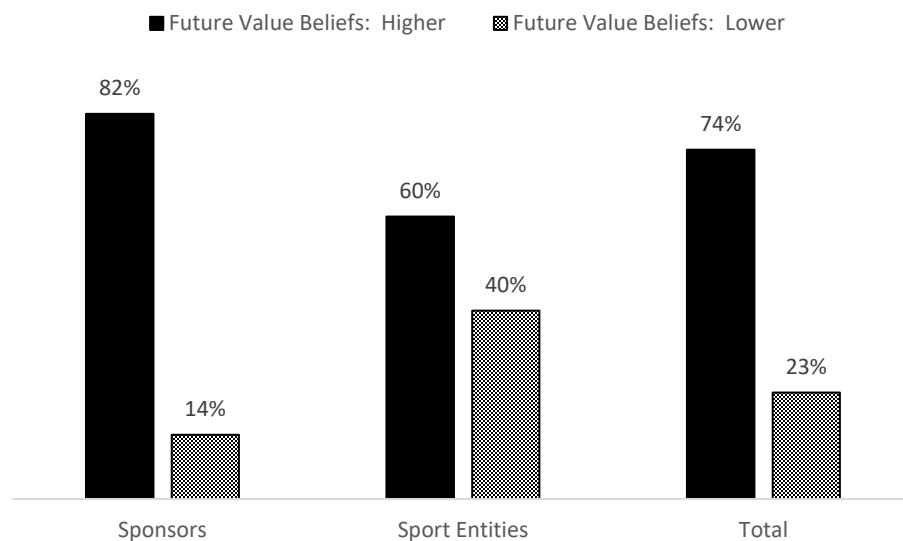


The initial measurements of sponsorship effect among the sponsoring firms were closely linked to their assessment of sponsorship value. Exposure was measured by six out of the eight participants, mainly using external measurements performed by consulting companies, followed by network and number of television viewers. Measuring network involved counting the number of existing partners present in the relevant network and the number of new partners entering. One participant representing a sponsoring firm stated, “we are part of the B2B-network; thus, we measure the number of new entrants in the network.” Periodic measurements of reputation were observed but these were not necessarily directly linked to measuring the effect of sponsorship agreements, rather measuring the reputation and associations of the entire company involving all marketing communication measures. Sales numbers were also measured by three sponsoring firms, among firms having consumer target markets. Activation measures in these sponsorship agreements were utilized to directly increase sales and therefore measured. Only one sponsoring firm did not perform any type of measurements related to sponsorship agreements because their objectives related to these agreements were difficult to measure concretely.

Expectations to Future Sponsorship Value

The future value of sport sponsorship agreements was expected to increase after returning to a normal and stable sponsorship environment, compared to when experiencing a pandemic impact. Results on the future value beliefs indicated that the value would be somewhat restored or even become higher than before. This is because

the sport entities did not perceive any severe drop in sponsorship value but most statements regarding future value were positive for this group. Few statements were recorded but the sport entities stated higher future value due to the return of attendance, activation possibilities, and increased fees, combined in the illustration below. Increased fees were expected because the vast majority of the participants was able to collect the same fees as before, during the pandemic impact, but this was also viewed the opposite way by some sport entities. These participants stated a belief of sponsoring firms requesting to be compensated due maintaining the support without receiving the possibility to fully exploit the commercial potential. One participant representing a sport entity stated that “I think it rather would be opposite, that the sponsors would like to be compensated or get more value for the money since the year turned out as it did” when confronted with the presented view of increased fees.



The increased possibility to perform sponsorship activation was the most frequently stated reason for an increased future sponsorship value among the sponsoring firms, and in this group the number of positive statements also exceeded the negative ones. After activation, the return of the attendance and larger fees followed, same as for the sport entities, in addition to enhanced relations. One participant explained enhanced relations by, “I believe those who have gone through this together have built a relation based on supporting each other in tough times and this will have a positive effect on further cooperation.” Additionally, one participant stated unchanged future sponsorship value, excluded from the illustration above. With the value of sport

sponsorship agreements being expected to change and increase based on all statements regarding the future, it must be assumed that findings on the research questions concerning changes due to the pandemic impact was successfully limited to the specific context. Together with the future value, beliefs about permanent structural changes to the sponsorship environment and future measurements were mapped but few statements were recorded. On future measurements, most statements were related to a general increase in measurements of the effect of sport sponsorship agreements, a few statements related to unchanged measurements, and no statements regarding a decrease in measurements. For the permanent structural changes, higher digital emphasis was expected to affect the sponsorship environment, closely followed by higher emphasis on activating the sponsorship agreements among the participants. Other permanent structural changes were expected with lower frequencies and higher relevance to specific agreements and participants. Lastly, all participants except one expressed an optimistic view on utilizing sport sponsorship agreements as a marketing communication measure and source of income among their organizations in the future.

Discussion

Given the results of this study, it was evident that the environment of sport sponsorship agreements had experienced a contextual alteration due to the rules, restrictions, and other consequences of the pandemic impact. The results implied a substantial decrease in the perceived sponsorship value because of an unstable situation preventing normal conduction of sporting events and fans from attending, but this was mainly observed among sponsoring firms. Sport entities on the other hand, did not experience a similar severe drop in value but admitted beliefs about a decrease in the value of others, substantiating a decreased perceived sponsorship value. A potential drop in the sponsorship value of sport entities would likely be difficult to detect with no specific statements on performing sponsorship effect measurements. For the sponsoring firms, more measurements were performed but changes to the assessment of value may have contributed to limit potential losses or improve potential gains of the perceived sponsorship value, as the importance of metrics have changed over the course of the pandemic impact. Future beliefs about sponsorship value entailed that the findings concerned the desired contextual pandemic impact and these implied expectations of a

higher future sponsorship value. The section covers a discussion of differences between the results of the participants, contradicting results, and adherent implications.

Differences between Organizations

Differences occurred to a large extent between the sponsoring firms and the sport entities on changes to the perceived sponsorship value due to the pandemic impact. The sport entities mostly stated no changes to their sponsorship value, while the majority of sponsors stated a lower perceived value. When making statements about others' sponsorship value, the sport entities agreed on a decreased value among sponsoring firms. Therefore, the drop in value was seemingly uneven distributed among the organizations, with sponsors taking virtually the entire cost because the fees paid to sport entities remained unchanged, but sponsors could not fully exploit the commercial potential. Since the sponsors did not get to exploit the commercial potential normally offered by the sport entities, less value for the money was presumably achieved. Another observed difference between the sponsoring firms and the sport entities was their viewpoint regarding changes to value in the future, after experiencing the pandemic impact. Some sport entities expected to compensate their sponsors by accepting lower fees or allocate a greater commercial potential to the sponsors. Some sponsoring firms imagined increased fees because of their willingness to maintain the amount during the pandemic impact with less commercial potential than expected in the future, also viewed by a few sport entities. The different perspectives presented, potentially gives unchanged future conditions of the sponsorship environment subject to balanced relationships.

For the future beliefs, sponsors were more positively stating an increased value in total compared to sport entities. Not surprising, as they experienced a larger perceived loss due to the pandemic impact. Few differences were observed between the sponsoring firms on the changed perceived sponsorship value but in assessment of value, different approaches were used. As the sport entities did not state changes to the perceived sponsorship value, differences among these participants were not possible to observe. Sponsoring firms and sport entities had different influences on their value assessments. Respectively, exposure and fees were clearly most important in the assessment of sponsorship value, without the influence of a pandemic impact. For sponsors, this

aligned with the traditional objective of brand awareness and for sport entities on the objective of benefitting from substantial fees, accounted for in the literature on sponsorship value. Both types of organizations utilized duration of the agreements and reputation in their value assessments, with an evenly distributed high proportion of the sample on these. As mentioned during the results, organizations defined the assessments related to reputation differently. Sponsoring firms pursued positive associations through sponsorship agreements, aligned with the other common objective of sponsorship agreements related to brand image. Sport entities emphasized avoidance of capturing negative associations, well-illustrated by the quote presented with the results on sport entities' assessment of sponsorship value.

The changes in the sponsorship value assessment were also to a large extent different for the represented organizations. For sport entities, the assessment did seemingly not change in any way, potentially leaving fees as most important. In comparison, the sponsors made major changes to how sponsorship value was assessed. Among the sponsoring firms, the changed assessments of value were somewhat differentiated, depending on the sponsorship objectives being strictly commercial or involving CSR aspects. Most statements indicated a change in the assessment, devoting higher importance to the fees and CSR in particular, as previously illustrated. On the measurements performed by the organizations of sponsorship effects, few overall types of measurements were observed, especially among sport entities. There, no measurements were recorded at all, while for the sponsors, measurements occurred more frequently. No recorded measurements among sport entities arguably made it difficult for them to detect any potential changes to the sponsorship value other than the fees due to the pandemic impact.

Contradictions

Beside the differences that occurred between and within the different types of organizations, contradicting responses were recorded on multiple participants on several occasions within different categories of the analysis. Contradictions in this setting referred to participants providing multiple answers within one of the coding categories, with ambiguous meanings. Of several potential reasons to provide contradicting answers, respondents that had not previously reflected on the topics were

assumed to be one plausible explanation. An illustrative repetitive quote represented this, “I have not really thought so much about that.” Both sponsoring firms and sport entities did in their evaluation of a changed sponsorship value due to the pandemic impact, provide answers indicating an unchanged value while simultaneously stating different influences on either a higher or a lower sponsorship value. There was an impression that participants showed some reluctance towards admitting a changed value on their own agreements but when reflecting on the pandemic impact, reasons for changes were elaborated on. When talking about others’ agreements, some but fewer contradictions were made as well, potentially affecting the results by having a smaller change to the perceived value than actual change. Another plausible explanation for contradicting responses was prospects not being informed about or prepared for the questions of the interview in advance. Questions regarding changes to the assessment of own sponsorship value included contradictions, as some sponsors expressed an unchanged value assessment process, but like with the topics not reflected on, influences on a changed value assessment surfaced. Participants continuously stated throughout the interviews on multiple sections that the questions were challenging, saying, “that was a difficult question,” before quickly trying to provide a sufficient answer without necessarily giving a valid response. The results were then indicating artificially less changes to the value assessment processes.

Evidently, contradictions also occurred to a large extent across the coding categories linked to the respective research questions. The sport entities utilized several assessments of value, but none of these assessments were apparently measured, neither with nor without the impact of the pandemic. In terms of the beliefs and experiences of the sponsorship value assessment of others, the sport entities proved to be aware of exposure as an important assessment among sponsors without the pandemic impact, but no measurements were performed to map what scope of exposure they could provide. This means that sport entities had the possibility to be more aware of their potential contribution to the sponsorship agreements, in terms of measuring exposure. The same applies to reputation as another quantifiable measurement compared to relation and CSR, all frequently mentioned by sport entities to be part of the assessment process of sponsoring firms.

The most prominent contradiction observed on different research questions was among sponsoring firms on the influence of attendance. Clearly, attendance was stated as a substantial factor affecting both a changed perceived sponsorship value among sponsoring firms and the beliefs and experiences about the changed sponsorship value of other organizations. Initially, the influence of attendance on the value assessment was stated by only one sponsoring firm, therefore attendance's influence is highly contrarian. In addition, attendance was nearly ignored by the participants in the changes of the sponsorship value assessments. Given the high frequency results on a lower perceived value when experiencing the pandemic impact and higher future value, due to attendance, a surprisingly low number of statements included attendance as an initial influence on the value assessment without probing. This could imply that the results about changes to the perceived sponsorship value are influenced by the guidance towards lacking attendance or there was higher unstated importance devoted towards attendance in the valuation. The lack of attendance had the largest influence on the changed perceived value and the return of attendance contributed to higher expected future sponsorship value, indicating that attendance influences the process of achieving sponsorship value.

Another less prominent contradiction among sponsors was observed on the utilization of television measurements. Between the sponsoring firms, little variation was evident and exposure together with network and number of television viewers were the most utilized measurements. While exposure and network initially were frequently stated influences on the assessment of sponsorship value, and mentioned as negatively affecting the value, the number of television viewers appeared not to be accounted for in these processes. The data of measured television viewers was seemingly remaining somewhat unused by sponsoring firms, but still influencing the perceived sponsorship value positively. Regarding measurements of sponsorship effects in general, half of the statements indicated unchanged measurements and with prominent differences in the perceived value and value assessment of sponsorship agreements, more changes to the process of measuring effects were expected. Especially for the sponsoring firms as they apparently experienced the biggest changes both in perceived sponsorship value and the process of assessing value due to the pandemic impact.

A different observation was done on the future value beliefs and future measurements. Participants emphasized a higher future value of sport sponsorship agreements and of the few statements recorded on future measurements, most concerned a higher degree of measurements in the future. Consistent with little initial emphasis on live sporting event attendance in the assessment of sponsorship value and with few changes to the measurements after experiencing the pandemic impact, attendance was ignored in the measurements accordingly. For the expected permanent structural changes in the future, higher digital emphasis had the only noteworthy frequency. Still, the vast majority of participants was optimistic regarding sport sponsorship agreements as a marketing communication tool in the future.

Implications

The implications of the observed differences between the organizations and the contradictions recorded with the research questions, together with the results, indicates how the sponsorship environment will be altered in the future. When experiencing changes to the sponsorship environment, similar to the changes created by the pandemic with the connected impact of fewer sporting events conducted and less accessibility for live audiences, a decrease in the value of sport sponsorship agreements should be expected by actors engaging in such activities. Impacts related to less attendance, fewer activation possibilities, less exposure, and less possibilities to offer hospitality services make the biggest contributions to a decrease in sponsorship value. At the same time, when experiencing such impacts, enhanced relationships, greater opportunities to perform CSR, and a higher number of television viewers, can to some extent compensate for the loss in sponsorship value. Of the partners involved in sponsorship agreements, the sponsoring firms will be mostly affected by an altered sponsorship environment, if no changes to the characteristics of these agreements are improved in favor of the sponsors. Especially concerning the characteristic of accepting a lower possibility to exploit the commercial potential of the sport entities without providing any financial consequences in terms of adjusting fees accordingly. At the same time, sponsoring firms apparently have the exclusive opportunity to benefit from impacts related to compensating or increasing sponsorship value. Assessments could also be adjusted to facilitate positive influences on the sponsorship value, with higher

importance on relations, CSR, and television, or other organizational-specific influences.

Changes to the characteristics of the sponsorship agreements in the favor of the sponsors could be to make the agreements adjustable with dynamic fees. As the sport entities evidently cannot constantly provide a consistent level of commercial potential, predetermined fees sustaining the same level, could be beneficial to reject. Of existing sponsorship relationships with static fees, renegotiations of the terms of the agreements are then suggested because dynamic fees could lead to costs related to decreased sponsorship value being more evenly distributed among the involved parties. Increased sponsorship value could then also potentially benefit all parties with higher fees when greater commercial potential than expected is exploited, making organizations' relationships interdependent. Another implication of the experienced impact was related to duration as an influence of the perceived sponsorship value. Duration plays a central role in the assessment of sponsorship value and apparently maintains its importance throughout the course of a pandemic impact. Prolongation of the agreements, by adding another period to the span, will regardless of any impacts related to a pandemic, presumably provide increased sponsorship value in most cases. Long-term agreements could therefore be beneficial for all actors engaging in sponsorship activities and a way to minimize losses during pandemic impact or impacts with similar consequences to the sponsorship environment. The optimistic views on sponsorship in the future substantiates having long-term agreements.

Like the importance of duration, measurements of the effect of sport sponsorship agreements do not change because of a pandemic impact. Initial measurements of these effects are facilitated to a normal sponsorship environment with the connected assessments of value. An altered environment does not influence the measurements even with changes to the processes of assessing sponsorship value, which potentially give errors to the changes in perceived sponsorship value, as measurements are not facilitated to cover changed assessments. To accurately capture changes in perceived sponsorship value, due to similar impacts, measurements of effects should potentially be changed or added to suit changes to the assessments accordingly. Few measurements of effects in general might make it challenging to detect any changes to the value of sport sponsorship agreements, as sport entities appear to refrain from performing any

type of measurements and with few observed changes to the sponsorship value due to a pandemic impact. There is no established certainty that changes to the sponsorship value of these organizations would be observed, but more measurements on the relevant assessments could increase the possibility to detect such changes. Anyhow, there is a void in the measurements of the effects of sponsorship agreements among the sport entities in particular. With evident knowledge on how sponsors assess sponsorship value and which metrics are utilized, it is inexplicable that no measurements are performed by sport entities to familiarize themselves with market insights concerning their own exposure value, and other quantifiable measurements that can be utilized in negotiations of sponsorship agreements. This presupposes that sponsors have commercial rather than philanthropic motives. Additionally, these measurements can be used as basis for comparisons of fees across their agreements.

There is seemingly little relevance of measured effects of sport sponsorship agreements, in accordance with sponsorship value assessments, without any impact on the sponsorship environment. Measurements relates to a large extent on few easily quantifiable measurements like exposure with use of external data and number of television viewers, while the utilized assessments of sponsorship value are far more extensive. Exposure is relevant, but regarding number of television viewers, the opposite is observed. Many perform measurements accounting for television viewers, while simultaneously it is close to not affecting their perceived sponsorship value nor the assessment of value. Beside measurements of sponsorship effects, future beliefs on sponsorship value give implications to the sponsorship environment. Different conflicting viewpoints on how to compensate for decreased possibilities to exploit commercial potential imply that both types of organizations could benefit by approaching the counterpart in the relationship correctly when similar impacts occur. Both parties involved are inclined to compensate by receiving less of the cocreated sponsorship value to maintain relationships, sponsors by willingly increasing fees and sport entities by accepting lower fees or increasing commercial potential to exploit.

Implications of this study are also related to future research on sponsorship value, not just the organizational operations. Methodological limitations affecting the results and the connected findings contribute to provide a future research agenda on the impacts leading to altered sponsorship environments. Using a framework of meaningful

empirical measurements of sponsorship effects to detect any changes to sponsorship value and the assessment of this value, could make more accurate contributions to the literature on sponsorship value. Additionally, this could allow for more generalizable results with the use of quantitative research designs with larger sample sizes on wider geographical areas. It would require exploratory research for mapping widely utilized metrics to serve this purpose but a broader understanding of the effects of an altered sponsorship environment, like when experiencing the impact of a pandemic, could be achieved. Further research performed on examining the effect of impacts making changes to the sponsorship environment, or on supporting the results presented here, the research design should consider how to approach the limitations present in this study. The sample is geographically limited to one country when examining a worldwide phenomenon and local restrictions and regulations related to the impact might influence results. In addition, an even more diversified sample could be appropriate. Actors of the energy sector made big contributions but as stated by the participants representing sport entities, these actors are attractive sponsors to cooperate with because of the firms' good financial prerequisites compared to other business sectors in Norway. Another local influence could be the economical aftermath of such an event, related to the governmental management. The limitations imply that further research should be performed to examine if results can be generalizable and give corresponding implications to the sport sponsorship environment when experiencing similar impacts.

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