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An analysis of what factors may reduce the potential harm to Coca-Cola's corporate image as a result of sponsoring the FIFA World Cup 2022.

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Abstract

This study examines factors that may reduce the potential harm to Coca-Cola's corporate image caused by sponsoring the sportswashed event FIFA World Cup 2022. A multiple regression analysis was conducted to investigate whether the factors perceived fit, brand involvement, football involvement, and moral decoupling significantly affect the consumers' justification of the sponsorship. Furthermore, comparisons were made between Coca-Cola fans, and football fans to explore potential differences. Additionally, moderation analyses were conducted to investigate whether Coca-Cola's explanation of the sponsorship had a significant effect on the results. This study's main implication is that consumers claim to have negative associations with the sportswashed event; however, are not necessarily willing to change their attitude towards the brand. Our results indicate that moral decoupling is the only tested factor that minimizes the potential harm to Coca-Cola's corporate image. Nevertheless, we obtained other valuable findings and discussions of consumers' apprehension of news and attitude formation, which we claim provide the new area of sportswashing literature an important pointer for sponsor effects.

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1.0 Introduction

Sportswashing occurs when governments in authoritarian countries use global sporting events to improve their image and reputation (Språkrådet, 2021). The phenomenon directs attention away from a country's human rights violations (Simpson, 2021). As football is the most popular sport in the world, it has become an attractive area for countries aiming to improve their image (Krzyzaniak, 2016). In recent years, sports and politics have become increasingly intertwined. As a result, the financial opportunities and political image from buying and selling sporting events have become highly valued, and the sports sponsorship industry is constantly growing (Kim, 2010). In 2022 the FIFA World Cup will be arranged, and the selection of Qatar as the host nation has caused international dissension due to human rights violations (Buckingham, 2022). However, global brands continue sponsoring the World Cup, regardless of Qatar's prominent use of sportswashing.

During the World Cup, international athletes and supporters gather to create iconic sporting moments to the delight of millions of people globally, building an image of the host nation as a successful and technologically prominent country. Simultaneously, critics imply that human rights abuses occur behind the glorious facade (Søyland, 2020). Nevertheless, large global brands and market leaders aspire to become sponsors and improve their image by being present on one of the most influential international marketing platforms, and by positively affecting brand attitudes through associations with the important event (FIFA, 2022). It can be a bold balancing act for prominent brands to be associated with a regime like Qatar in times where consumers are highly concerned with human rights (Stavrum, 2021). Although consumers claim to be concerned about human rights, the continued sponsorships of controversial events suggest this might not be so.

Coca-Cola is one of the main sponsors of the FIFA World Cup 2022. They are one of the longest-standing corporate partners, with stadium advertising at every tournament since 1950 (FIFA, 2022). Coca-Cola was previously criticized for sponsoring the Olympics in Beijing, and the brand was accused of putting profits ahead of accusations of genocide in China (Martina, 2021). However, their Human Rights Policy states, "*Our aim is to help increase the enjoyment of human rights within the communities in which we operate.*" (Coca-Cola Company, 2017). This appears contradictory to their decision to sponsor the World Cup. At the same time,

placing their logo at the football stadium efficiently communicates brand identity to a global audience and leverages positive brand associations (Brochado et al., 2018).

To build the World Cup's infrastructure, Qatar's government has employed between 500,000 and 1.5 million foreign workers (Ganji, 2016). In 2014, over 900 of these workers died during the construction. This number is estimated to reach 4000 (Eveleth, 2014). Over 90 percent of Qatar citizens are migrant workers without legal citizenship. Human trafficking, forced labor, and indefinite detention are common conditions for foreign workers in Qatar (Ganji, 2016). However, Qatar conveys the World Cup as an incentive to improve its labor laws. Is sponsoring a controversial event harmful to Coca-Cola, or will consumers justify the sponsorship?

Previous research has investigated the effect of sports sponsorships on purchase intention and consumer behavior among fans and non-fans (i.e. Biscaia et al., 2013). Additionally, Søyland (2020) explored how Qatar uses sportswashing and conducts sports diplomacy through heavy investing in global sports and its connection to building brand image. Some of the most studied sponsorship outcomes are increased awareness, enhanced brand image, and attitudes towards the sponsors (Tsordia, Papadimitriou & Parganas, 2018). Research has also explored the impact of congruence between a sports team and its sponsors, the brand effects of sports sponsorship, and its effect on brand equity (i.e. Simmons & Becker-Olson, 2006). Although international sporting events receive global appeal and fan interest, there is little research on sportswashed events' sponsorship and why global companies continue to sponsor such tainted events. Thus, we advocate a gap in the literature regarding consumers' justification of sponsorships that support controversial, sportswashed events.

In this study, we take a contrarian viewpoint and aim to address a theoretical research gap by uncovering how sponsoring a controversial sporting event affects the sponsors' corporate image. Thus, we have developed the following research question:

What factors are likely to reduce the potential harm to corporate image caused by sponsoring a sportswashed event?

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Sportswashing

Previous research on sportswashing is scarce. Today, the term has mainly been used in the media and by human rights groups to address and explain how large and authoritarian nations use sportswashing to launder their global reputation (Søyland, 2020). However, some research has explored how Qatar's sports strategy is a case of sportswashing, by how they attempt to change the country's global reputation by affiliating with the global appeal of sports while trying to divert attention away from its internal politics (Søyland, 2020). Further, other studies have investigated whether companies should advertise at events held by regimes implicated in human rights violations (i.e. Dooley, 2022). However, current research mainly focuses on the actual sportswashed event and its host nation's responsibility. Thus, to our knowledge, significant research has not yet explored the potential negative impact on the sponsors' image due to support of a sportswashed event, and what factors which may potentially reduce these effects.

Previous research has also explored how sponsoring controversial athletes harmed the sponsor (i.e. Gwinner & Eaton, 1999). When consumers associate a specific famous person with a bad reputation, this negatively affects the sponsor's image (Pornpitakpan, 2003). This happened with Tiger Woods in 2009 when it was revealed that he was involved in scandals that severely harmed his reputation. Thus, even though brands are engaged with sponsorships to improve their image, this example illustrates the potential negative effects that can contaminate the sponsor in the case of transgressions (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999). Several studies have examined the impact of sponsoring a popular event with perceived fit to the sponsor (Cornwell et al., 2006; Johar & Pham, 1999). And so, Simmons and Becker-Olson (2006) found that consumers' perceptions of perceived fit affect their evaluations of brands and products.

Additionally, research has studied how articulating sponsorships and audience participation can improve incongruent sponsorships (Coppetti et al., 2009). Research has also focused on how consumers use moral decoupling to justify their transgressions. For instance, in the case of Tiger Woods, consumers using moral decoupling would justify his transgression by claiming that his sporting performance is not related to his personal life (Lee et al., 2015). Thus, existing

research has focused on the controversial acts of athletes, their effect on the sponsors, and how congruency affects sponsorship acceptance. However, we observe a gap in research that has yet to explore the impact of sponsoring a sportswashed event and what can potentially reduce the harm to the sponsors' image. Based on these gaps in the existing literature on sportswashing, we have developed the following hypotheses through a conceptual model:

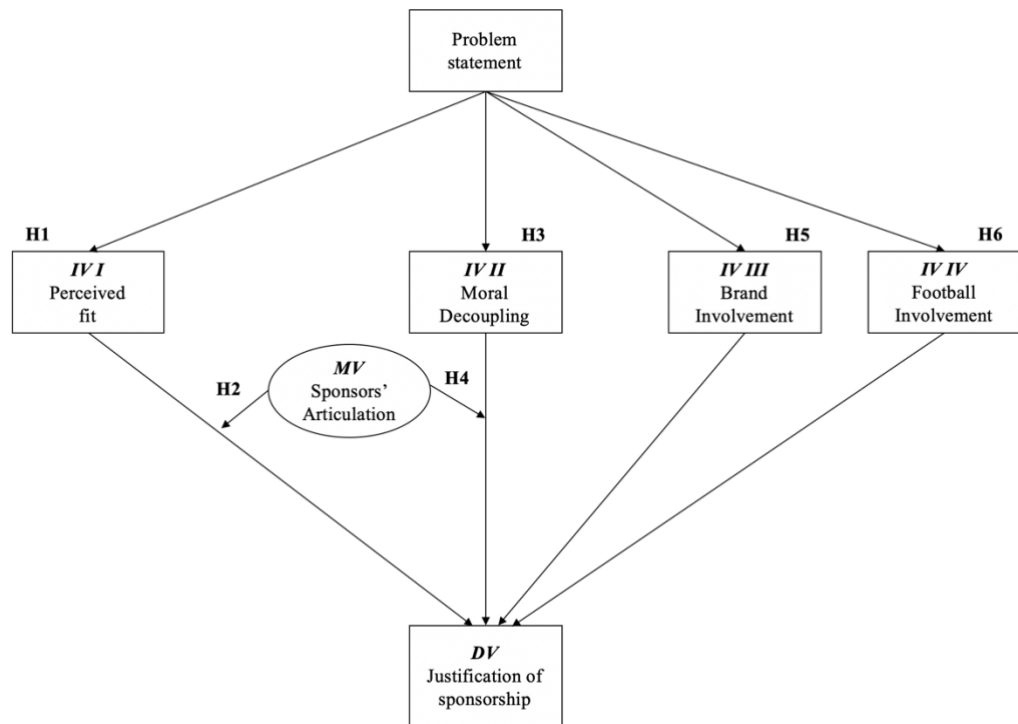


Figure 1: Conceptual Research Model

2.2 Different Aspects of Heider's Balance Theory

The impact of sponsorship effects and attitudes towards sponsors can be connected to Heider's balance theory. Heider (1958) states that people generally prefer balance, order, and harmony in their lives. Hence, whenever there is an imbalance, consumers change their attitudes or behavior to reinstate balance. This results in consumers tending to like what is associated with what they already like, and dislike what is associated with what they already dislike; otherwise, there will be no balance (Dalakas & Levine, 2005).

Dalakas and Levine (2005) argue that companies increase their sponsorship spending to adopt the positive emotions of the object (e.g., sporting events or sports teams), and thus improve brand attitude. Accordingly, Hummon and Doreian (2003) explain that Heider's P-O-X model comprises the elements *person*, *other*

person, and *object*. Each element influences the other. However, Dalakas and Levine (2005) argue that when fans have a solid link to a sports team, an athlete, or an event, the same positive attitudes are transferred to the sponsor. They further claim that the stronger the attitude is towards the sponsored object, the more likely it is to transfer onto the sponsor associated with the object (Dalakas & Levine, 2005). Thus, highly involved consumers may balance their attitudes towards the sponsor based on their attitude towards the sponsored event. This balancing could explain previous findings which connect fans and identification to positive attitudes toward sponsors. Furthermore, Dalakas & Levine (2005) argue that a matching process is expected to happen when fans strongly dislike the object.

There is limited research on how sponsoring a sporting event can potentially alienate consumers and see the sponsorship company less favorably. Thus, studies suggest further research by acknowledging that fan identification can evoke negative attitudes towards sponsors of rivals, especially relevant in cases where fans or consumers' strong identification with a sponsor can provoke dissatisfaction with the event they sponsor (i.e. Dalakas & Levine, 2005). This suggestion illustrates the requirement to address the research gap related to whether sponsoring controversial sporting events is harmful to the sponsor, and if balance theory could justify the effects of factors such as articulation and moral decoupling.

2.3 Congruence in Sponsorships

Sports sponsoring is the most popular sponsorship category, accounting for 70% of the total sponsorship expenditures in 2016 (International Event Group, 2017). IEG (2000) defines sponsorships as “cash and/or in-kind fee paid to a property (typically sports, entertainment, non-profit event, or organization) in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that property.” Thus, sports sponsorships aim to influence consumers to prefer sponsors' products (Biscaia et al., 2013). Examples are achieving exposure towards the brand and association with the event, organization, or individual related to a sport, cultural, or non-profit organization. However, Wakefield et al. (2020) treat sponsorships as a synergy between three compound entities with different stakeholders; brands, consumers, and properties. Each entity has features that can impact sponsor effectiveness (Wakefield et al., 2020). At the same time, Cornwell and Kwon (2020) argue that sponsorships apply to an increasing number of consumers, as marketers have

discovered a new and effective marketing communication channel in sponsoring sporting events. This could indicate that consumers are more prone to be affected by sponsorships and their utilization.

Wakefield et al. (2020) argue that sponsorships provide a method for brands to improve their image. Thus, they indicate that elements such as the brand's customer franchise, how consumers perceive the brand, and the consumer-brand connection, are critical to sponsorship success. They further argue that consumers interact with well-known brands such as Coca-Cola over time and form opinions about the brand and its image. This mechanism is reinforced by Chen, Nelson, and Hsu (2015) who argue that consumers assign personality traits and other intangibles to brands. The purpose is to distinguish them from one another in response to marketing stimuli. This might indicate that brands can use sponsorship as a way to assign new intangibles, and thus positively improve the brands' image.

According to Simmons and Becker-Olson (2006) congruence is the level of perceived similarity between the sponsor and the sponsored event, and this similarity can be based on functionality, attributes, image, and additional aspects. As outlined by Olson (2017), a high sponsor-sport congruence is a perception that an association between a brand and a sponsored entity is meaningful. Thus, the positive associations of sponsored athletes or teams and the sponsoring brand are stronger when congruence is high (Olson, 2017). Sponsorships that align with consumers' expectations can thus increase brand equity. Therefore, low-fit sponsorships can result in brand confusion and dilution of brand equity (Becker-Olson & Simmons, 2006). At the same time, Ahluwalia, Burnkrant, and Unnava (2000) examined consumers' responses to negative publicity and found that consumers with low commitment to the brand indicated a greater negative attitude change when exposed to bad publicity. This research might indicate the requirement to address a research gap exploring whether consumers develop more positive attitudes towards the sponsor brand when the brand is perceived to have high congruence with a sportswashed event.

Olson and Thjømmøe (2011) explored how consumers determine the overall fit between a sponsor and the sponsored object. Consumers use logic to determine whether the sponsor's products are used by event participants and the fit between

the sponsor's target market, similarities of attitudes, and target audience of the object. They argue that an appropriate fit may lead to a more seamless acceptance of the sponsor's altruistic motives and a more seamless transfer of an object's image and emotions to the sponsor because of stimulus generalization. Hence, if an object and its sponsor are perceived to be similar, it is easier to transfer images or attitudes because a way of avoiding cognitive dissonance is to transfer positive feelings towards the sponsor (Olson & Thjømmøe, 2011). Thus, to cover the research gap within the literature, the first hypothesis in this study is:

***H1:** A perceived fit between a sponsor and a sportswashed event allows consumers to justify the sponsorship.*

2.4 Sponsor's Use of Articulation

Cornwell et al. (2006) argue that congruence could be created by articulating the meaning of a sponsorship. Accordingly, the researchers define "articulation" as how a brand explains why it makes sense that they sponsor an object. Thus, articulation can create a link between the event and the brand and can suffuse an otherwise incongruent sponsorship relationship with an applicable meaning (Cornwell et al. 2006). Rifon et al. (2004) argue that fit influences consumers' attributions and emotions regarding the sponsor's purpose or motivation for supporting the product. Researchers including Simmons and Becker (2006) and Roy and Cornwell (2004) have examined articulation and how fit functions as an important predictor for sponsorship effects. The findings of these researchers could indicate that by explaining the meaning of a sponsorship through articulation, consumers might be more accepting of the otherwise low congruent sponsorship. However, their emphasis is mainly on sponsor recall and attitude rather than improving the overall perception of fit.

Becker-Olsen and Simmons (2002) found that explaining incongruent sponsorships improved sponsorship recognition and attitudes toward sponsors. According to Olson and Thjømmøe (2011), several sponsorship researchers find that the perceived overall fit between the sponsor and the object is crucial to measuring the effectiveness of sponsorships. The authors hypothesized that using articulation could shift the overall fit perceptions in either a positive or negative direction. Thus, they argue that sponsors should consider the importance of overall fit to explain

sponsorship effects. Furthermore, Olson and Thjømmøe (2011) argue that firms' sponsorship of a particular object can be at least partially overcome if they communicate its purpose effectively. This could indicate a demand in literature to address whether using articulation in new sponsorship areas has an impact on sponsorship acceptance. Therefore, to cover the limitations within the existing literature on articulation, the second hypothesis in this study is:

H2: An articulation element stated by the sponsor influences the perceived fit of the sponsorship.

2.5 Moral Decoupling in Sponsorships

Previous studies uncover instances of public figures who have done immoral acts that adversely affected their reputations (i.e. Lee and Kawak, 2016). These authors found that the moral reasoning of consumers determines the unethical behavior of public figures and their effects on brands (Lee and Kawak, 2016). On the other hand, Bhattacharjee et al. (2013) argue that consumers decouple moral judgment from the actions of public figures who have acted immorally. Moral decoupling is “a psychological separation process by which consumers selectively dissociate judgments of morality from judgments of performance” (Bhattacharjee et al., 2013, p. 1168). Thus, consumers can support the performance of a transgressor while also condemning the transgression. Bhattacharjee et al. (2013) also found that moral decoupling occurs when consumers selectively dissociate moral judgments from judgments of performance rather than reduce judgments of immorality. In addition, they argue that moral decoupling might be more accessible in the athletic field because the performances are measured objectively and are thus more observable (Bhattacharjee et al., 2013). This could indicate that moral decoupling might be present for consumers learning of sponsorships of sportswashed events.

Consumers can reduce their discomfort by reconstructing unethical behavior to make their morality and ethics believable. Such actions are further studied in the research of Thomson et al. (2005), explaining how transgressions cause dilemmas for loyal consumers and fans who hold a deep emotional attachment to public figures and the brands they support. They found that having a personal attachment to a brand strongly motivates consumers to maintain a positive view of them. On the other hand, Baumeister (1998) argues that people try to keep their moral

standards high and maintain a positive self-image. Bandura (1991) claims that people avoid behavior that possibly breaches their moral standards. At the same time, Graham et al. (2009) argue that moral decoupling is likely to vary for each individual, as consumers have different values and moral standards and might view moral transgressions differently (Graham et al., 2009). These findings could indicate a need to address whether moral decoupling allows consumers to justify a sponsorship. Thus, the next derived hypotheses are:

***H3:** Moral decoupling allows consumers to justify the sponsorship.*

***H4:** An articulation element stated by the sponsor influences moral decoupling towards the sponsor.*

2.6 Brand Involvement

Existing research has explored brand involvement and how it leads to satisfaction and loyalty. As defined by Day (1969), involvement refers to the level of interest or importance an object has for an individual. Accordingly, the level of involvement is likely to establish the importance of a decision in the buying process. According to Quester and Lim (2003) and Kim et al. (2008), brand involvement leads to high loyalty levels under low and high interaction. However, other studies show that consumers' level of involvement determines the intensity of their information search (Bei & Widdows, 1999), and those with low involvement consider the product trivial and spend less time processing the information obtained (Heath, 2001). These arguments could indicate a need to address whether the level of brand involvement affects consumers' acceptance of a sponsorship.

Sephapo and Erdis (2016) argue that attitudes are an internal factor that affects consumer behavior. Kardes et al. (2011) define attitude as to how consumers judge a person, place, thing, or issue in terms of how good, bad, favorable, or unfavorable they find it. The authors argue that evaluating judgments consists of two primary components: direction (positive, negative, or neutral) and extremity (weak, moderate, or strong). Beliefs usually form consumers' attitudes. Hence, they argue that consumers will be more likely to develop favorable attitudes toward a new product if they believe it has features that meet their needs. Several studies treat loyalty as an attitude (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978; Odin et al., 2001). Thus, in this study, consumer attitude and loyalty are treated as a part of brand involvement.

According to previous studies, attitudes towards sponsors serve as crucial indicators of sponsorship effects. A consumer's attitude is determined by their tendency to react to marketing-related stimuli towards a specific product or idea (Kardes et al., 2011). Sephapo and Erdis (2016) argue that marketers should consider how consumers develop attitudes when considering sponsorship opportunities. Although, Olson (2008) argues that for an attitude to change, multiple exposures are a requirement. This illustrates the importance of attitude formations in sports sponsorship management, and a need to further explore the effects of brand involvement in sports sponsorship contexts. Therefore, to explore current research gaps, the next hypotheses are:

***H5:** A consumer's degree of brand involvement influences the justification of the sponsorship.*

***H6:** A consumer's degree football involvement influences the justification of the sponsorship.*

This focused literature review has discussed the research gaps we have identified in a selective sample of existing research. We have identified and discussed different factors that potentially is likely to affect the effects of a sponsorship. Based on this discussion, we have developed six hypotheses. We aim to operationalize the research gaps through these hypotheses and thus be able to answer our main research question.

3.0 Methodology

To best address the derived hypotheses, we conducted a survey to test the relationships in the conceptual research model (Figure 1). Analyses were conducted on the independent variables perceived fit, moral decoupling, brand involvement, and football involvement (H1, H3, H5, H6), and their effects on the dependent variable, justification of the sponsorship. Comparisons were made of the different groups of respondents to explore potential differences. Furthermore, we tested whether the independent variables perceived fit and moral decoupling were moderated by the sponsors' articulation element (H2 and H4). A pretest was conducted in order to improve structure and language.

3.1 Subject Recruitment

We aimed to obtain the responses of several different consumers. Thus, choosing a quantitative research design through convenience sampling was appropriate. The data obtained through an online survey had target respondents between 18 to 90 years. The questionnaire examines respondents' behavior, intentions, attitudes, awareness, and demographic characteristics. We defined our target population as the general Norwegian population with all genders and demographics and with a general knowledge of the sponsorship of Coca-Cola. We collected data during the first three weeks of May 2022 through an anonymous Norwegian survey in Qualtrics distributed through a link on the social media channels Facebook and LinkedIn. Because of our study's context, the survey was published in several football groups on Facebook to ensure that some respondents were football fans. Thus, we were able to sufficiently verify that the target population provided the data we needed (Reynolds & Diamantopoulos, 1998). After the data collection, we obtained 132 complete survey responses representing our target group. Our sample consisted of 51 females and 81 males, all Norwegians.

3.2 Survey Development

We developed the survey using Malhotra's (2010) Questionnaire Design Process (Appendix 1). The first question in the survey was a screening question, mapping whether the respondents belong to our target group (Brace, 2018, p. 38). If they answered incorrectly, they were sent to the end of the survey. This enabled us to eliminate respondents without a general knowledge of Coca-Cola's sponsorship. We chose to use a 5-point Likert scale for the majority of the questions. In addition, we included one text entry question to map respondents' knowledge of the controversies. We showed one articulation element for half of the respondents to potentially explore if this element affected the answers. We determined the order of the blocks based on the articulation element. Thus, before the articulation, we screened the respondents' attitudes towards Coca-Cola as a company and its products, football, and the FIFA World Cup. Thus, after the articulation element, we asked questions regarding perceived fit, moral decoupling, and buying intention for Coca-Cola. Lastly, we asked demographic questions. Table 1 illustrates the order of the blocks in the survey. The survey is found in Appendix 2.

Table 1: Survey Overview

Block	Measure
Block 1: Introduction	
Block 2: Screening Question	Nominal
Block 3: Brand Involvement	Ordinal
Block 4: Football Involvement	Ordinal
Block 5a: Articulation element	
Block 5b: Neutral element	
Block 6: Perceived Fit	Ordinal
Block 7: Moral Decoupling	Ordinal
Block 8: Intent	Ordinal
Block 9: Demographic Questions	Gender, Age

3.3 Validity and Reliability

The questionnaire was pre-tested with a convenience sample of people similar to our sample to determine if there were any issues with question understanding of content, wording, sequence, format, difficulty, and instructions (Malhotra, 2010, p. 322). Minor adjustments were made based on the feedback. We wanted to ensure that differences in the respondents' answers reflect actual differences instead of systematic or random errors (Malhotra, 2010). We aimed to obtain reliability by providing consistent results so that other researchers can replicate similar results in the future (Fink & Litwin, 1995). Moreover, we aimed to develop understandable questions and included the screening question.

3.4 Data Cleaning

We followed the data-preparation procedure by Malhotra (2010) (Appendix 3). We collected 279 total responses. During the data cleaning process, we checked for consistency and treatment of missing responses. 100 respondents answered incorrectly on the screening question and were removed from the analysis. We also removed 3 respondents from the preview. Additionally, 44 responses contained missing values, with survey progress from 6-69%. These were also excluded from the analysis. Furthermore, we checked for consistency to determine possible deviations in the data and logically inconsistent data (Malhotra, 2010, p. 429). Finally, we looked for extreme values to identify possible inconsistencies but did not identify any. We collected descriptive statistics from each item to explore other reliability threats to our data. We were not able to identify any potential outliers in the data. After data cleaning, we were left with a total of 132 respondents. Therefore, N = 132.

3.5 Data Analysis Approaches

In order to simplify our analysis, we computed constructs for the different sets of items: PercFit (perceived fit), BrandInv (brand involvement), FootbInv (football involvement), and MorDeco (moral decoupling). The purpose was to simplify our analysis. We computed the variables by adding the related items and dividing them by the number of items added to create a variable representing the average values of each item. In addition, we labeled the item measuring the respondents' change in intention to buy Coke after learning of Coca-Cola's sponsorship of the World Cup as "Intent." Thus, in our analysis, when we refer to the item "Intent," we use this as an indicator of the respondents' justification of the sponsorship.

We conducted a multiple linear regression analysis to test H1, H3, H5, and H6. In all these hypotheses, the constructs PercFit, BrandInv, FootbInv, and MorDeco are the predictor variables, and we wanted to determine their contribution to the dependent variable, Intent. Additionally, we conducted independent t-tests to compare the differences between the groups. In addition, we performed a moderation analysis to measure whether the articulation element influences perceived fit or moral decoupling (H2 and H4) (Baron & Kenny, 1986). We performed the analysis using model 1 in PROCESS in SPSS (Hayes, 2012, p. 4). Hence, we tested whether the relationship between PercFit (X) and Intent (Y) is moderated by Articulation (W) (Figure 2). Secondly, we tested whether the relationship between MorDeco (X) and Intent (Y) is moderated by Articulation (W) (Figure 3) (Memon et al., 2019).

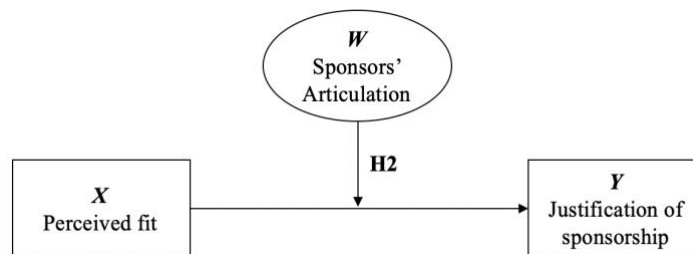


Figure 2: Moderation Effect (H2)

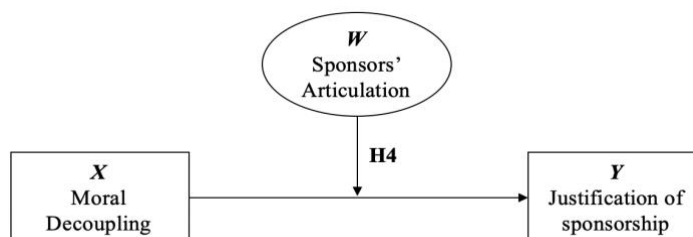


Figure 3: Moderation Effect (H4)

4.0 Results

4.1 Sample Summary

Table 2 illustrates a summary of our survey sample. Our N = 132 represents both genders, with the majority between 18-34 years old. Because H5 and H6 involve measuring the effect of involvement on the justification of the sponsorship, computing the football and Coke fan groups is adequate for our study purpose. These groups simplify our analysis and enable us to examine groups that represent fans of either football or Coca-Cola. To separate the football fans and Coke fans, we recoded the respondents into different variables. Those responding on average 1-2.9 on the construct FootbInv were labeled “No_Football_Fan,” and those responding between 3.1-5 were labeled “Yes_Football_Fan.” Hence, the respondents with an average score of 3 on this construct were not included in this variable; thus, N = 124 on football fan groups.

Accordingly, those with average scores of 1-2.9 on the construct BrandInv were labeled “No_Coke_Fan,” and those between 3.1-5 were labeled “Yes_Coke_Fan.” Again, the respondents with 3 on average on this construct were not included. Thus N = 119 on Coke fan groups.

Table 2: Sample Summary

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	51	39 %
	Male	81	61 %
	Total	132	100 %
Age	18-24	43	33 %
	25-34	45	34 %
	35-44	17	13 %
	45-54	18	14 %
	55-64	4	3 %
	65-74	3	2 %
	75-84	1	1 %
	85-94	1	1 %
Football fan groups	Yes_Football_fan	79	64 %
	No_Football_fan	45	36 %
	Total	124	100 %
Coke fan groups	Yes_Coke_fan	89	75 %
	No_Coke_fan	30	25 %
	Total	119	100 %
Articulation groups	Yes_articulation	79	60 %
	No_articulation	53	40 %
		132	100 %

4.2 Analysis and Results by use of Descriptive Statistics

Before combining the items into constructs, we performed descriptive statistics analyses for all items. Table 2 shows the items belonging to the constructs. All items are measured on a Likert scale of 1-5, ranging from 1=completely disagree to 5=completely agree. Both the means and the standard deviations of the items vary. Respondents are highly aware that Coke is a sponsor of major sporting events (m=4.52) and are familiar with the Coke brands (m=4.49). Additionally, most respondents somewhat disagree with getting a better impression of Coke because they sponsor the World Cup (m=2.20) and somewhat disagree that seeing the Coke logo at the stadium will make them want to buy Cola (m=2.45). The standard deviations of the items in FootbInv are relatively high, indicating a lower agreement with the respondents, especially for the item “I am rooting for a specific team in the FIFA World Cup” (std. dev=1.639).

Table 3: Variables and Descriptive Statistics

Construct	Measurement	Mean		
		Mean	Std. Error	Std. Dev
BrandInv	I am familiar with the Coke brands (Sprite, Fanta, BonAqua etc.)	4.49	0.09	1.03
	Coke is my preferred choice of soft drinks.	3.05	0.13	1.56
	I choose Coke because it is what I usually choose.	2.83	0.13	1.53
	I believe Coke is a responsible company.	3.14	0.08	0.93
	I know that Coke is a sponsor of major sporting events.	4.52	0.07	0.86
FootbInv	I am interested in football.	3.73	0.13	1.53
	I will actively follow the FIFA World Cup.	3.40	0.13	1.50
	I am rooting for a specific team in the FIFA World Cup.	3.00	0.14	1.63
PercFit	Coke and FIFA World Cup have the same values.	2.75	0.09	1.05
	It makes sense that Coke sponsors the 2022 FIFA World Cup.	3.20	0.10	1.20
	Coke has the best interest of FIFA World Cup at heart.	2.95	0.09	1.06
	Coke is involved with FIFA to support the sport and athletes.	2.66	0.10	1.23
MorDeco	The FIFA World Cup has made me more aware of the challenges in Qatar.	4.19	0.09	1.05
	I see the FIFA World Cup as an important global event.	4.31	0.08	1.02
	I get a better impression of Coke because they sponsor the FIFA World Cup.	2.20	0.08	1.02
	I believe seeing the Coke logo at the stadium will make me want to buy Cola.	2.45	0.11	1.32
	I believe it is positive that Coke is sponsoring the FIFA World Cup 2022.	2.48	0.10	1.20

4.3 Internal Consistency and Correlations

Table 3 illustrates the internal consistency analysis performed on the constructs. This enabled us to analyze the extent to which all of the items in our questionnaire measure the same concept and thus to see the inter-relatedness of the constructs (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). We conducted a Cronbach’s alpha analysis on the constructs to describe the q measurements’ reliability (Cronbach, 1951).

Table 4: Cronbach's Alpha

	PercFit	BrandInv	FootbInv	MorDeco
Cronbach's Alpha	.659	.686	.840	.600

As our variables represent multiple items, we measure our internal consistency reliability (Bonett & Wright, 2015). For the MorDeco variable, the subscale's alpha level was .482, indicating that the subscale did not have an adequate level of inter-item reliability. However, the analysis revealed that if we deleted the item "I believe that the sponsors of the FIFA World Cup are responsible for the implementation of the event," the alpha would increase to 0.600 and achieve an acceptable reliability level (Malhotra, 2010). Thus, we deleted the item. Then we could continue our analyses, as all variables were considered reliable.

Additionally, we conducted a Pearson correlation analysis to examine the relationships between the constructs (Fu et al., 2020). This enabled us to see whether the variables were correlated (Schober et al., 2018). We found that $p > .05$ for the correlation between PercFit and FootbInv; thus, there is no significant relationship between these constructs. However, as $p < .05$ for the other variables, there is a significant relationship between the other variables. PercFit was more strongly correlated to MorDeco ($r = .553$, $p = <.001$), compared to BrandInv and FootbInv. This indicates that MorDeco ($r = .553$) explains more of the variability in PercFit than BrandInv and FootbInv. Thus, if we perform a linear regression, we will get a significant result if adopting just one variable. According to Dormann et al. (2013), the threshold of correlation coefficients between predictor variables of $r = 0.7$ is a good indicator of when collinearity begins to distort the model estimation. None of our variables correlate above 0.7. Thus, it is improbable that we will encounter a multicollinearity problem (Paul, 2006).

Table 5: Pearson Correlations

		PercFit	BrandInv	FootbInv	MorDeco
PercFit	Pearson Correlation	1	.278**	.125	.553**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001	.153	<.001
	N	132	132	132	132
BrandInv	Pearson Correlation	.278**	1	.282**	.343**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001		.001	<.001
	N	132	132	132	132
FootbInv	Pearson Correlation	.125	.282**	1	.314**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.153	.001		<.001
	N	132	132	132	132
MorDeco	Pearson Correlation	.553**	.343**	.314**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	
	N	132	132	132	132

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.4 Summary Statistics

Tables 6, 7, and 8 below illustrate the summary statistics of the Coke fans, the football fans, and the articulation groups. The variable Controv (controversies) explains the average score on the item “I am aware of the controversies regarding the FIFA World Cup 2022”. Thus, we observe that for Coke fans, there is a higher awareness regarding the controversies (m=4.24) compared to non-fans of Coke (m=3.97). Accordingly, we observe the same trend for football fans, where fans (m=4.60) have higher awareness than non-fans (m=3.47). For the two articulation groups, the group presented with the articulation element had a slightly higher controversy awareness (m=4.33) than the group not presented with the articulation (m=4.04).

Table 6: Summary Statistics Coke fans

Coke fan groups		Controv	PercFit	BrandInv	FootbInv	MorDeco	Intent
No_Coke_fan	Mean	3.97	2.70	2.52	2.97	2.92	2.70
	N	30	30	30	30	30	30
	Std. Dev.	2.45	.76	.36	1.40	.77	.70
Yes_Coke_fan	Mean	4.24	2.96	4.05	3.51	3.24	2.72
	N	89	89	89	89	89	89
	Std. Dev.	1.17	.83	.53	1.30	.68	.70

Table 7: Summary Statistics Football fans

Football fan groups		Controv	PercFit	BrandInv	FootbInv	MorDeco	Intent
No_Football_fan	Mean	3.47	2.85	3.32	1.72	2.90	2.71
	N	45	45	45	45	45	45
	Std. Dev.	1.51	.69	.67	.64	.71	.72
Yes_Football_fan	Mean	4.63	2.92	3.78	4.35	3.25	2.63
	N	79	79	79	79	79	79
	Std. Dev.	.77	.86	.84	.55	.68	.77

Table 8: Summary Statistics Articulation groups

Articulation groups		Controv	PercFit	BrandInv	FootbInv	MorDeco	Intent
No_articulation	Mean	4.04	2.97	3.52	3.35	3.15	2.72
	N	53	53	53	53	53	53
	Std. Dev.	1.41	.84	.91	.14	.79	.76
Yes_articulation	Mean	4.33	2.83	3.65	3.39	3.11	2.61
	N	79	79	79	79	79	79
	Std. Dev.	1.10	.77	.74	1.31	.63	.74

In addition, we included a text question asking the respondents to describe their impression of the reasons for the controversies. We observe that the majority of answers were *human rights violations*, *poor working conditions*, and *corruption in the host country*. Thus, most respondents appear to have general knowledge of the controversies.

4.5 Multiple Regression Analysis

The multiple regression analysis aimed to evaluate the contribution of the predictors by explaining the variation in the dependent variable and observing each predictor's contribution to the model, as illustrated in Table 9. The results reveal that $F(5, 126) = 6.942$, $p < 0.001$. Thus, the independent variables significantly predict the dependent variable, indicating that our regression model fits the data well. We observe that adjusted R-square = 0.185, meaning the independent variables explain 18.5% of the variance in the justification of the sponsorship.

Table 9: Multiple Linear Regression

Model Summary					
	R Square	Adjusted R Square			
	0.216	0.185			

ANOVA			
	df	F	Sig.
Regression	5	6.942	<0.001
Residual	126		
Total	131		

a. Dependent Variable: Intent
b. Predictors: (Constant), Articulation, FootbInv, PercFit, BrandInv, MorDeco

Coefficients					
	Unstandardized B	Std. Err.	Standardized B	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.169	0.341		3.426	<0.001
PercFit	0.032	0.090	0.034	0.357	0.722
BrandInv	0.050	0.080	0.054	0.619	0.537
FootbInv	-0.065	0.047	-0.117	-1.377	0.171
MorDeco	0.475	0.108	0.443	4.401	<0.001
Articulation	-0.092	0.122	-0.060	-0.757	0.451

a. Dependent Variable: Intent

Table 9 illustrates that for MorDeco, $p = <.001$, meaning the results are significant. Thus, we observe a positive predictor relationship between MorDeco and Intent ($B = .475$). $Beta = .443$, meaning that intent increases by .443 standard deviations for every 1 standard deviation of movement we see in MorDeco. Hence, moral decoupling minimizes the potential harm to Coca-Cola's corporate image when sponsoring the FIFA World Cup, and H3 is confirmed. For PercFit $p = .722$, thus no significant effect was found on the effect of perceived fit on intent, and H1 is not confirmed. For BrandInv, $p = .537$, thus no significant effect was found on the effect of brand involvement on the intent, and H5 is not confirmed. For FootbInv, $p = .171$, thus no significant effect was found on the effect of football involvement on intent, and H6 is not confirmed.

4.6 Moderation Analysis

A complete summary of the moderation analysis is found in Appendix 4. The moderation analysis of the interaction effect of Articulation on PercFit, adjusted R-square=0.0882, meaning our model explains 8.82% of what intent is composed of in this data set. However, PercFit is an insignificant predictor (p=.1137). Articulation is also insignificant (p=.3425). The overall interaction effect of the articulation is insignificant (p=.409). Thus, we do not find statistical evidence in our data on the moderation effect of the articulation element, and H2 is not confirmed.

Table 10: Moderation Analysis for PercFit

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	2.1556	.3663	5.8853	.0000	1.4309	2.8804
PercFit	.1889	.1186	1.5927	.1137	-.0458	.4236
Articula	-.4586	.4813	-.9528	.3425	-1.4109	.4938
Int_1	.1319	.1592	.8284	.4090	-.1831	.4468

Adjusted R-Squared = .0882

From table 11, we observe that adjusted R-square=0.2075, and our model explains 20.75% of what intent is composed of in this data set. MorDeco is a significant predictor (p=.0011). However, Articulation is not significant (p=.2706). The overall interaction effect of the articulation is insignificant (p=.338). Therefore, we do not find statistical evidence in our data on the moderation effect of the articulation element, and H4 is not confirmed.

Table 11: Moderation Analysis for MorDeco

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	1.4718	.3851	3.8215	.0002	.7097	2.2338
MorDeco	.3952	.1186	3.3316	.0011	.1605	.6299
Articula	-.5997	.5420	-1.1066	.2706	-1.6721	.4726
Int_1	.1622	.1687	.9611	.3383	-.1717	.4960

a. Adjusted R-Squared = .2075

4.7 Independent T-Test

In addition to observing the results of the regression analysis, we wanted to compare the computed groups (football fans, Coke fans, and articulation groups) in an independent t-test to explore whether the variance of scores is different between the groups. Firstly, exploring the differences in the articulation groups on PercFit in table 12, we observe that No_articulation has N=53, and Yes_articulation has

N=79. We find that $p=.353$, $p>.05$. Thus, variances between the articulation groups are not significantly different. Thus, again H2 is not confirmed.

Table 12: Independent t-test

Articulation_groups		N	Mean	Std. Dev.	F	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
PercFit	No_articulation	53	2.97	.848	.157	.931	130	.353
	Yes_articulation	79	2.63	.771		.915	104.545	.363

Additionally, we tested whether the articulation groups had a significant difference in MorDeco in table 13. We observe that $p=.767$, $p>.05$. Therefore, variances between the articulation groups are not significantly different for these groups either. Thus, again H4 is not confirmed.

Table 13: Independent t-test

Articulation_groups		N	Mean	Std. Dev.	F	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
MorDeco	No_articulation	53	3.15	.791	.702	.296	130	.767
	Yes_articulation	79	3.11	.638		.284	95.262	.777

We also compared the Coke fan groups to explore the same potential difference in variance in table 14. The Yes_Coke_fan group has N=89, and the No_Coke_fan group with N=30. We observe that $p=.898$, $p>.05$. This means that the variances between non-fans and fans of Coke are not significantly different. This shows again that H5 is not confirmed.

Table 14: Independent t-test

Coke_groups		N	Mean	Std. Dev.	F	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Intent	No_Coke_fan	30	2.70	.70	.000	-.128	117	.898
	Yes_Coke_fan	89	2.72	.70		-.129	50.265	.898

The Yes_football_fan group has N=79, compared to the No_football_fan group with N=45. From table 15, we observe that $p=.580$, $p>.05$. Thus, equal variances are assumed, and the variances between non-fans and fans are not significantly different. Thus, this again confirms that we reject H6.

Table 15: Independent t-test

Football_groups		N	Mean	Std. Dev.	F	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Intent	No_football_fan	45	2.71	.727	.771	.554	122	.580
	Yes_football_fan	79	2.63	.771		.563	96.179	.574

5.0 Discussion

5.1 Findings

This study aimed to understand better what factors are likely to reduce the potential harm to a brand's corporate image caused by sponsoring a sportswashed event. Even though researchers before us have studied the effect of controversial behavior in sponsorship contexts, and what factors affect a sponsorship's success, no researcher has to our knowledge yet studied the potential effects of sponsoring a sportswashed event. Hence, our objective has been to extend existing research toward the new and under-researched field within the sportswashing literature. Even though the majority of our hypotheses were not confirmed, we still argue that there are valuable findings to be drawn from our research regarding the effects of sponsoring a sportswashed event, and pointers for why consumers might not have been affected.

Our most important finding is that moral decoupling reduces the potential harm to corporate image caused by sponsoring a sportswashed event, and thus allows consumers to justify the sponsorship. This could indicate that consumers avoid behavior that breaches their moral standards or the thought that their behavior might be morally wrong (Bandura, 1991). Nevertheless, even though consumers have become aware of the challenges in Qatar because of the World Cup, the majority see the World Cup as an important global event. Thus, they are willing to ignore the human rights abuses, and the potential harm to Coca-Cola's corporate image is therefore reduced. This supports the research of Bhattacharjee et al. (2013), arguing that moral decoupling is more accessible in the athletic field as the performances are potentially more observable compared to other areas (Bhattacharjee et al., 2013). Most respondents did not get a better impression of Coca-Cola because they sponsor the event, nor believed that they would want to buy more Coke after seeing their logo at the event (Table 3). Therefore, even though consumers wish to keep their moral standards high (Baumeister, 1998), our findings indicate that this does not negatively affect Coca-Cola's corporate image.

Another important aspect is that most independent variables were insignificant. These results may indicate why controversial sponsorships continue, and as such, a logical explanation may be that football fans only care about the sport and not that much about the political controversies of the host nations. Additionally, some

consumers tend to be uncertain about news media content, making it challenging to verify news sources with non-media sources (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). Thus, even though the media has written some headlines about the happenings in Qatar, football fans might be skeptical of this or might not even care. People are not capable of exposing themselves to all news sources. Thus, they might ignore political information or choose not to get involved. Hence, for many consumers, selective exposure to the available political information is a rational response (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003).

In addition, people may have difficulty processing information from the environment because they are tired of seeing constant negative news, especially after dealing with COVID-19 for over two years (Lupia & McCubbins, 1998). This could potentially affect consumers' understanding of the controversies. Further, because social media platforms and the Internet have created an open and democratic digital public sphere, they are also prone to spreading false and misleading information. Such information is also prevalent on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Kalsnes et al., 2021). Thus, an increased skepticism towards "fake news" could potentially have impacted our results as people might be skeptical about charges of human rights abuses in Qatar. At the same time, they might be tired of how every issue today is politicized by special interest groups when most consumers are likely only to want to enjoy watching football.

Providing explanations for an incongruent sponsorship will improve recognition of the sponsorship and sponsor attitudes, according to Becker-Olsen and Simmons (2002). However, several factors may explain why there was no significant difference in the effect of articulation on neither perceived fit nor moral decoupling (Table 10-11). Becker-Olsen and Simmons (2002) argue that consumers often perceive social sponsorships as mechanisms for boosting sales when a brand announces or explains it itself. Consumers may respond more positively to low-fit sponsorships if the sponsorship is explained through the sponsored cause. Thus, one could argue that the articulation element was presented in a way that was understood as a mechanism for increasing sales more than a humble explanation for the sponsorship. Consequently, some articulation messages can lead to negative outcomes compared to not saying anything at all (Olson and Thjømmøe, 2011). We

observe a slight difference in the articulation groups (Table 8), as the group that did not see the element had a less changed attitude compared to the other group. Thus, one could argue that the articulation is without value and that Coca-Cola would be better off not explaining its sponsorship through articulation.

An important finding is that we did not find support in claiming that perceived fit allows consumers to justify the sponsorship (Table 9). Coca-Cola is a global brand with high brand knowledge, and the perceived fit might not matter in this context. This is supported by Wakefield et al. (2020), claiming that for well-known brands, consumers interact with them over time and thus form opinions of their image. Therefore, even though research argues that a sponsorship that fits the consumers' expectations of fit increases brand equity, consistent consumer opinions and intangibles made towards the brand might mean more to consumers than the brand's perceived fit with the sponsored event (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006; Chen, Nelson, & Hsu, 2015). Most respondents do not find Coca-Cola to have a high congruence with the FIFA World Cup (Table 3). Nevertheless, after learning of the sponsorship, the majority have not changed their intent considerably to buy Coca-Cola products. This could indicate that it is difficult for consumers to change their attitude and behavior towards a well-known brand even though they know the brand supports a controversial event. The reason could be that most consumers are not directly affected by the abuses in Qatar.

Brand involvement did not significantly affect the justification of the sponsorship (Table 9). Thomson et al. (2005) argued that the transgressions of brands cause dilemmas for loyal fans as their attachment motivates them to favor them. Our results could indicate that some respondents encountered such dilemmas based on their loyalty to Coca-Cola. Thus, even though they are fans of the brand, they might have answered based on what is thought to be most ethically correct and not what they genuinely believe.

Olson (2008) argues that multiple exposures are necessary for an attitude to change, which might be regardless of brand involvement levels, because, as our results show, the consumers' general attitudes have not changed much. Accordingly, Dalakas and Levine (2005) claim that being fans or loyal to a sports team, athlete, or event will make them transfer these positive attitudes to their sponsor – and the

stronger loyalty, the more it is likely to impact the sponsor associated with it. Thus, our findings could potentially indicate that some highly involved respondents with the World Cup or a specific football team might have balanced their attitudes towards Coca-Cola based on their original loyalty.

5.2 Managerial Implications

Qatar hosting the FIFA World Cup 2022 has led to allegations of sportswashing, corruption, and several reports about migrant workers being abused (Søyland, 2020). Research on sponsorships associated with sportswashed events is still a new research field, although the phenomenon is not. Sports sponsorship is a common marketing tool today, at the same time as companies are expected to behave ethically and socially responsible now more than ever (Uhrich et al., 2014; Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2007). However, our findings only suggest that the respondents use moral decoupling when justifying the World Cup in Qatar (Table 9) while simultaneously being aware of the human rights violations. Nevertheless, consumers' purchasing decisions and attitudes toward a company are influenced by various factors, and this study consists of results from the B2C market. Hence, our findings can help companies better understand and predict essential factors when sponsoring future events.

Furthermore, our findings indicate that the FIFA World Cup has made respondents more aware of the challenges in Qatar. However, most respondents will still actively follow the World Cup (Table 3). Hence, their awareness of the challenges is not enough to boycott the event or stop buying Coke. The respondents seeing the World Cup as an important global event may also affect their justification of Coca-Cola's sponsorship. Our findings indicate that the majority did not get a better impression of Coca-Cola because they sponsored the World Cup, nor wanted to buy more Coke after seeing their logo on the event (Table 3). Consequently, companies should consider our findings to develop marketing strategies that meet consumers' preferences.

The media and several human rights organizations have brought attention to Qatar's human rights violations. Accordingly, it has created awareness and encouraged reflection on being a part of the World Cup. The national team of Norway and its supporters have protested against the World Cup in Qatar (Bergh, 2021).

Nevertheless, as consumers want to behave more ethically and socially responsible, companies must be able to show action and prove that they are contributing positively. Our findings show that most respondents did not think Coke has the best interest of The World Cup at heart, nor that the company is involved with FIFA to support the sport and athletes (Table 3). Additionally, we also discovered that most respondents did not believe that it is positive that Coca-Cola is sponsoring the World Cup. Thus, our findings suggest that companies should strive to prove how socially responsible they can be, benefitting the company and the community.

6.0 Study Limitations and Future Research

6.1 Limitations

Our research faces several limitations that need to be addressed. Firstly, the schedule has been relatively short, which has made it difficult to carry out an extensive, time-consuming survey. There have also been financial constraints, meaning we have not been able to carry out expensive examinations. Additionally, this study is limited by its relatively small convenience sample size. Our findings are therefore not generalizable to a broader population. However, our exploratory nature can be expanded on and applied to several key topics in the future.

Furthermore, as we conducted an online survey, it is important to mention that the ecological validity decreased. We could not control the participant throughout the survey, which may have caused the respondents not to respond correctly. Additionally, the data we obtained from the survey was based on the respondents' self-statements regarding their attitudes towards Coca-Cola. Our collected survey data is only as accurate as the responses received. Inaccurate answers are often given consciously and subconsciously without any awareness that the information provided is incorrect. Therefore, we must consider biases and inaccuracies in the data. A social desirability bias may have occurred if respondents felt compelled to seem different from who they are regarding social responsibility, such as wanting to maintain a certain level of credibility (Brace, 2018, p. 195-198). Finally, even though the participants state their attitudes in the survey, the question remains whether they will pursue these attitudes in real life. Our data collection was conducted before the event, so we can only predict consumer attitudes in advance. It could be of interest to research the effects of other similar events, in addition to exploring attitudes after the FIFA World Cup in Qatar. Such explorations could be

more representative as respondents might be more familiar with the event and the circumstances in hindsight.

In addition, we conducted our survey during a time when the sportswashed event had extensive media coverage. This may have influenced the results. Hence, there is a possibility that some of the answers stem from a general attitude towards the event that may affect consumers' attitude towards Coca-Cola's corporate image more strongly than usual. However, we aimed to reduce the effect of this limitation with a well-designed survey and questions. Additionally, it should be mentioned that the majority of our respondents claimed that the sponsorship is incongruent. However, this could potentially result from an uneven number of respondents in each articulation group due to data cleaning. Thus, studies without this limitation might broaden our study by providing a more even number of participants in each group and may explore more significant results.

A limitation of the survey was getting enough participants to represent the population as a whole. Because our study was conducted to better understand which factors are likely to reduce harm to Coca-Cola's corporate image as they sponsor a controversial sporting event, it was necessary to examine a representative sample of the Norwegian population to gain insight into their attitude towards Coca-Cola. Despite our results being useful, our inability to control the participants' answers is likely to encompass elements of selection bias. Moreover, even though we included a screening question, there is also a possibility that some respondents answered correctly by coincidence. This may have led to random errors by including respondents without a general knowledge of the sponsorship.

Furthermore, the majority of the respondents were considered to be football fans. This could potentially mean we encountered a particular bias favoring the World Cup. Most respondents made it clear that the World Cup has made them aware of the controversies happening in Qatar. All responses recorded were those with general knowledge of Coca-Cola's event sponsorship. It could still indicate that consumers are too familiar with and used to the traditions of football, and may thus be less willing to change their attitudes.

Finally, because the area of sportswashing is fairly new and little researched, we encountered some limitations. As our thesis relies on limited prior research studies, it was challenging to link our findings to established theories and proven relationships. Even though there is extensive research on the topic of controversial sponsorships, working with a sportswashed event that might also be defined as a controversial event has been challenging. This is because when a brand sponsors a controversial athlete, it has a direct link to the brand as they sponsor this specific person. However, for our study, Coca-Cola does not necessarily directly support sportswashing, but they sponsor the event which is held in a country that is accused for using sportswashing to clear their image. This limitation has made it challenging to find similar concepts to make comparisons with.

6.2 Future Research

Future studies may find it relevant to differentiate between genders and ages to determine potential differences in justifications and attitudes towards Coca-Cola's sponsorships. Consequently, researchers may discover interesting findings and get the opportunity to discuss differences. An important note is that the human rights violations described in our literature, including discrimination against women and homosexuals, may be considered assaults according to current Western standards. However, they are not necessarily considered abusive or controversial by large parts of the developing world. This could be one of the reasons why the sponsorships continue, as Coca-Cola sells lots of its products in the developing world. This could therefore be a topic for future research. Additionally, our study focused only on the Norwegian population, where future research could include comparisons with other European countries. Moreover, the representativeness of the sample is a common concern during most surveys. As our results are not generalizable to the entire Norwegian population, we suggest that future research contain a larger sample size and examine other methods to draw claims to produce several significant results.

In addition, future research could include a statement or a positively loaded advertisement with a well-known football player as an articulation element to examine if there is a difference in attitude. We would suggest this, given that advertisement research indicates that endorsers being perceived as positive role models can positively influence the perception of a product or brand with which they are paired (Stone & Jones, 2003). In addition, future research could examine

whether articulation also moderates the effects of brand involvement and football involvement. A suggestion for future research is also to conduct an experiment where consumers are provided with information about the FIFA World Cup and test if there is a change in attitude after the event. This will allow the respondents to know more about the event.

As the FIFA World Cup has not happened yet, the upcoming time may truly show whether there will be any significant change in customers' attitudes towards the sponsorship. Although there has already been media coverage of the human rights abuses in Qatar, many consumers still do not know of the situation in Qatar, and even fewer know Coca-Cola is a sponsor of the event. Therefore, a discussion could contain whether the results would be different after the event has been held. Additionally, the topic of sportswashing is under rapid growth and has only in recent times been acknowledged as an issue. Therefore, even though our results indicate that the World Cup is seen as an important global event, having more knowledge of sportswashing could potentially have led to different results. In addition, quantitative research has the limitation that respondents can feel they must answer consistently and politically correctly, rather than honestly. Thus, we recommend that future research conduct a qualitative study through in-depth interviews to obtain more personal results and to dig deeper into the topic.

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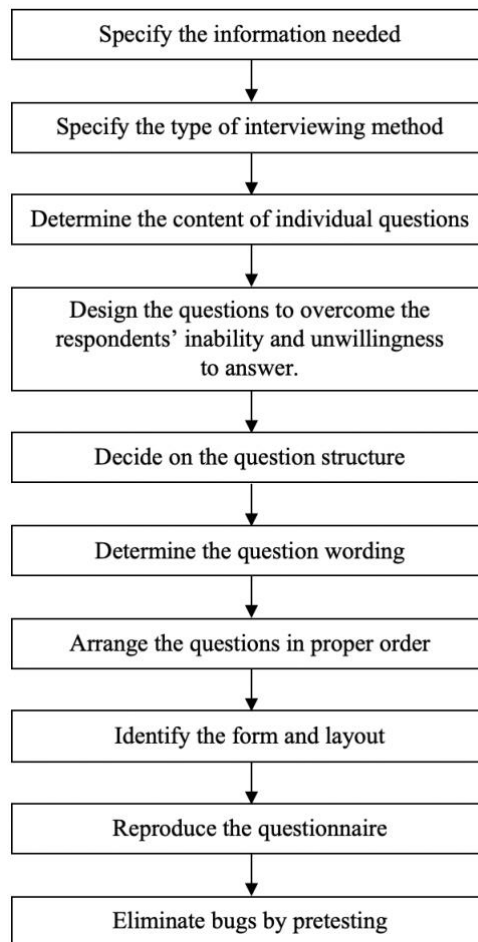
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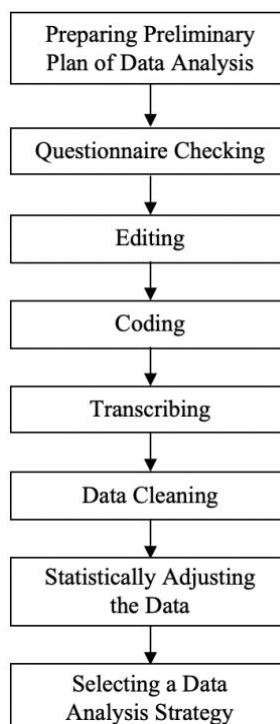
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Questionnaire Design Process



Appendix 2: Data-Preparation Process



Appendix 3: Survey (translated to English)

Start of Block: Block 1 Introduction

Hello!

This survey is conducted in connection with our final Master's Thesis in the MSc program Strategic Marketing Management at BI Norwegian Business School. The purpose is to identify the factors that can influence consumers' attitudes towards a brand.

Participation in the survey is anonymous and voluntary, and no personal data including e-mail address or IP address is collected. There are no right or wrong answers. Therefore, please answer the questions based on your own experiences and feelings.

Implementation takes approximately 4 minutes. We greatly appreciate you taking the time to respond to our survey, as it is of great importance for our master's thesis. Thank you!

For questions or inquiries, please send an e-mail to Hedda.M.Isaksen@student.bi.no or Sissel.M.Johansen@student.bi.no.

End of Block: Block 1 Introduction

Start of Block: Block 2

Q1 Which of the following events is Coke sponsoring in 2022?

- FIFA World Cup (1)
- Formula 1 (2)
- Tour de France (3)
- I don't know (4)

Skip To: End of Survey If Which of the following events is Coke sponsoring in 2022? != FIFA World Cup

End of Block: Block 2

Start of Block: Block 3

The following questions include references to Coca-Cola® company products, which includes a variety of products such as Coke Original, Coke Zero, Sprite, Fanta, BonAqua, etc., but this survey will hereafter refer to Coca-Cola company and its many drink brands as "Coke".

Q2 Brand involvement

How often do you drink Coke (Original, Zero, Zero Caffeine-free, Zero Lime, or Light)?

- Every day (1)
 - At least once a week (2)
 - At least once a month (3)
 - At least once every third month (4)
 - At least once every sixth month (5)
 - Less than once every sixth month (6)
-

Q3 Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements about the brand and products of Coke (Original, Zero, Zero Caffeine-free, Zero Lime, or Light).

	Completely disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Completely agree (5)
I am familiar with the Coca-Cola brands (Sprite, Fanta, BonAqua etc.) (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Coke is my preferred choice of soft drinks. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I choose Coke because it is what I usually choose. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe Coca-Cola is a responsible company. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I know that Coca-Cola is a sponsor of major sporting events. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Block 3

Start of Block: Block 4

Q4 Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements.

	Completely disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Completely agree (5)
I am interested in football. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will actively follow the FIFA World Cup. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am rooting for a specific team in the FIFA World Cup. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Block 4

Start of Block: Block 5a

Q5 Articulation *Coca-Cola recently sent out a press release regarding their participation in the FIFA World Cup 2022. Please read the following before continuing:*

"Coca-Cola is proud to be a sponsor of many sporting events around the world, and we have decided to continue our FIFA World Cup 2022 sponsorship because we feel it is important to support the athletes and staff who have trained hard to compete, but our sponsorship does not mean that we support any of the controversies regarding the FIFA Cup host."

End of Block: Block 5a

Start of Block: Block 5b

The following questions are about your attitudes toward Coca-Cola and their sponsorship of the 2022 FIFA World Cup. There are no right or wrong answers. Therefore, please answer the questions based on your own experiences and feelings.

End of Block: Block 5b

Start of Block: Block 6

Q6 Perceived fit

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

	Completely disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Completely agree (5)
Coke and FIFA World Cup stand for the same things (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It makes sense that Coca-Cola sponsors the 2022 FIFA World Cup (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Coca-Cola has the best interest of FIFA World Cup at heart (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The main reason why Coca-Cola is involved with FIFA World Cup is because they believe the sport and athletes deserves support (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q7 Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statement:

	Completely disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Completely agree (5)
I am aware of the controversies surrounding the 2022 FIFA World Cup. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q8 Please fill in the text box below the answer to the following statement:

I am under the impression that the controversies regarding the FIFA World Cup 2022 are about...

End of Block: Block 6

Start of Block: Block 7

Q9 Moral decoupling

Please read the following: In 2022, the FIFA World Cup in Qatar will be held. The choice of Qatar as the host nation has caused global controversy.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

	Completely disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Completely agree (5)
The FIFA World Cup has made me more aware of the challenges in the Qatar. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that the sponsors of the FIFA World Cup organizers are responsible for the implementation of the event. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I see the FIFA World Cup as an important global event. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q10 Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements regarding Coca-Cola's sponsorship of the FIFA World Cup in Qatar:

	Completely disagree (1)	Somewhat agree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Completely agree (5)
I get a better impression of Coca-Cola because they sponsor the FIFA World Cup. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe seeing the Coca-Cola logo at the stadium will make me want to buy Cola. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe it is positive that Coca-Cola is sponsoring the FIFA World Cup 2022. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Block 7

Start of Block: Block 8

Q11 Intent

Coca-Cola's sponsorship of the FIFA World Cup 2022 has ___ my intention to buy Coke.

- Reduced (1)
- Somewhat reduced (2)
- Not changed (3)
- Somewhat increased (4)
- Increased (5)

End of Block: Block 8

Start of Block: Block 9

Q12 Gender?

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

Q13 Age?

- 18-24 (1)
- 25-34 (2)
- 35-44 (3)
- 45-54 (4)
- 55-64 (5)
- 65-74 (6)
- 75-84 (7)
- 85-90 (8)

End of Block: Block 9

Thank you for taking the time to respond to the survey. Your answers are registered anonymously.

Appendix 4: Moderation Analysis

Moderation Analysis for PercFit

Model Summary

	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
	.2970	.0882	.5269	4.1288	3.0000	128.0000	.0078

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	2.1556	.3663	5.8853	.0000	1.4309	2.8804
PercFit	.1889	.1186	1.5927	.1137	-.0458	.4236
Articula	-.4586	.4813	-.9528	.3425	-1.4109	.4938
Int_1	.1319	.1592	.8284	.4090	-.1831	.4468

Product terms key:

Int_1: PercFit x Articula

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):

	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
X*W	.0049	.6863	1.0000	128.0000	.4090

Moderation Analysis for MorDeco

Model Summary

	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
	.4555	.2075	.4580	11.1687	3.0000	128.0000	.0000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	1.4718	.3851	3.8215	.0002	.7097	2.2338
MorDeco	.3952	.1186	3.3316	.0011	.1605	.6299
Articula	-.5997	.5420	-1.1066	.2706	-1.6721	.4726
Int_1	.1622	.1687	.9611	.3383	-.1717	.4960

a. Adjusted R-Squared = .2075

Product terms key:

Int_1: MorDeco x Articula

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):

	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
X*W	.0057	.9238	1.0000	128.0000	.3383