VOL. 09 NO. 2,
AUGUST, 2025
E-ISSN 3027-1533
P-ISSN 3026-8648

African Scholar Publications & Research International
www.africanscholarpub.com

Journal of African Innovation & Advanced Studies (JAIAS)

The Effect of Sports Sponsorship in Enhancing Consumer Engagement in Sports Marketing: A Case Study of Bayelsa and Delta States, Nigeria

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.70382/ajaias.v9i2.041

Abstract

Sports sponsorship has increasingly become a strategic marketing tool with the potential to drive brand awareness, emotional connection, and long-term consumer engagement. This study explores the impact of sports sponsorship on consumer behavior and economic development in Bayelsa and Delta States, Nigeria. Anchored on the Elaboration Likelihood Model and Social Identity Theory, the research investigates how sponsorship influences consumer attitudes, particularly through brand activation strategies like events, merchandise, and social media engagement. Using a mixed-methods design involving 811 respondents—including sponsors, athletes, and sports fans—the study found that sports sponsorship significantly enhances consumer engagement by fostering loyalty, participation, and emotional affinity. Furthermore, the findings revealed a strong link between sponsorship and economic development, including job creation, local business growth, tourism promotion, and increased public revenue. Statistical analysis confirmed that sports sponsorship significantly predicts economic development in both states ($F = 479.799$, $p < 0.05$). Despite these positive outcomes, the study highlights a gap in region-specific research and calls for more culturally tailored sponsorship strategies. The findings contribute to both academic literature and practical marketing by offering

insights into how sponsorship can optimize brand-consumer relationships and drive regional development.

Keywords: Sports sponsorship, Consumer engagement, Economic development, Brand activation, Nigeria

Introduction

Sports sponsorship has grown from just an act of benevolence to a very powerful tool that can be strategically used to drive brand recognition, consumer loyalty, and support long-term business value. In the contemporary concept of sports marketing, sponsorship is known to be one of the driving forces in enhancing consumer engagements and building sustainable relationships between brands and their sports audiences; particularly in developing regions like Bayelsa and Delta States of Nigeria where sports mainly football and athletics are part of the social life; sports sponsorship significantly helps define the perception of consumers about a brand while fostering all-in audience participation on matters relating to the brand.

Consumer engagement within the volatile realm of sports marketing is defined as a multidimensional construct comprising behavioral, emotional, and cognitive ties that consumers periodically develop with brands. It is created at several touchpoints, including matches, branded merchandise, and corporate social media campaigns that go on to include community development programs (Nwosu & Ibe, 2020). Sponsorship becomes the connecting line between commercial brands and the world of sports which is full of emotions so that companies can access the loyalty, passion, and enthusiasm of sports lovers (Ogunyemi & Daramola, 2022). The ability of sports sponsorship to raise high consumer engagement mainly rests in its experiential nature- creating engagements that lead to strong brand affinity and recall (Kareem & Bassey, 2023).

Sports have provided a very viable platform for economic and social transformation in Nigeria, particularly from Bayelsa and Delta States which are known as producer centers of sporting greats at home and abroad in football, wrestling, athletics, and swimming (Ayeni, 2020). Increased private investments add to the already growing public investments for grassroots sports development, local tournaments, and branded sports events in these states. Firms want to be associated with the vigor that is witnessed from these positive energy-filled games plus the wide appeal it creates (Idemudia & Olayemi, 2021). As revealed by Okafor (2019), Nigerian Breweries Plc., Globacom, and Zenith Bank among others have been using this upbeat game to strategically reach different consumer markets segments while building on their brand identity as well as having an emotional attachment to consumers.

Sponsorship impacts consumer engagement through the Elaboration Likelihood Model

(Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) at a more theoretical level. With respect to branding, sponsorships can serve as both central and peripheral cues that shape consumer attention. Take for instance a sponsorship of a local football team in Delta, or a youth sporting event in Bayelsa. These spectators instantly affiliate the sponsorship to the brand and perceive the brand to have positive attributes like trust, community support, and excitement (Chinedu & Akpan, 2023). Such brand perception leads to increased consumer engagement in the form of brand identification, loyalty and intention to purchase.

Despite the increasing awareness of sports sponsorship as a key factor in boosting consumer interaction, there is still limited research on this topic within Nigeria, particularly in Bayelsa and Delta States. There is a clear need to explore how sports sponsorship strategies are carried out, how they impact consumer actions, and what local conditions either support or limit their effectiveness in southern Nigeria (Ugochukwu & Eze, 2022). It is also essential to evaluate how various sponsorship initiatives—such as promotional activities, fan engagement programs, and community events tied to corporate social responsibility—lead to measurable levels of consumer involvement in these states.

This study aims to examine the impact of sports sponsorship on consumer engagement in sports marketing by using Bayelsa and Delta States as examples. The research will uncover how corporate sponsorships shape the views and actions of sports consumers, the role of local sports culture in this process, and the benefits that companies gain from such sponsorships. By looking at these aspects, the study intends to add value to existing knowledge and offer actionable insights for improving sports marketing efforts in the region.

Statement of the Problem

Although sports sponsorship has become more common in Nigeria, especially in Bayelsa and Delta States, there is little understanding of how effective it is in driving consumer engagement.

Many companies invest heavily in supporting sports teams, events, and competitions, hoping to increase brand visibility, build consumer loyalty, and create stronger emotional ties with their audience. However, these sponsorship efforts often do not result in meaningful consumer interaction or clear marketing benefits, which raises concerns about how well these sponsorships are planned and executed.

In Bayelsa and Delta States—regions recognized for their active sports culture and youthful population—sports sponsorship has expanded considerably. Yet, there is a noticeable difference between the money spent on sponsorships and the actual levels of consumer engagement, such as fan involvement, brand interaction, and brand loyalty. Several important questions remain: Do consumers in these states show greater brand interest due to sponsorship? Are sponsorship strategies adapted to the local cultural and sports environment? What factors are preventing or helping the success of these sponsorships?

Moreover, while global research highlights the potential of sports sponsorship to shape consumer attitudes and behaviors, there is not enough local data in Nigeria to support these

claims.

There is a lack of studies focused on how consumers respond to sponsorship activities in specific regional sports markets.

Therefore, this study aims to address this gap in both academic research and practical application by investigating the impact of sports sponsorship on consumer engagement in Bayelsa and Delta States. It seeks to offer data-backed insights into how sponsorship can be better used to strengthen brand relationships with consumers in the unique social and cultural environment of southern Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to explore the effect of sports sponsorship on consumer engagement in sports marketing within Bayelsa and Delta States, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the degree to which sports sponsorship influences consumer awareness and emotional connection with the sponsored brands.
2. Evaluate the relationship between sponsorship activation methods (such as branding, promotions, and community events) and consumer involvement in sports marketing activities.

Research Question

To what extent will sports sponsorships enhance economic development in Bayelsa and Delta States?

Hypotheses

Sports sponsorship will not significantly enhance economic development in Bayelsa and Delta States.

Literature Review

Conceptualizing Sports Sponsorship: Sports sponsorship involves a company investing in a sports-related entity, such as an athlete, team, league, or event, with the goal of gaining promotional advantages in return (Kareem & Bassey, 2023). This relationship benefits both parties: the sports entity receives financial or other types of support, while the sponsor gains visibility, goodwill, and stronger brand value. Unlike traditional advertising, sports sponsorship allows companies to connect their brand with the emotional and loyal aspects associated with sports (Okafor, 2019).

Sponsorship has become an essential part of integrated marketing communications and is used to set a brand apart in highly competitive markets. In nations like Nigeria, sponsorship also plays a role in promoting social development by encouraging youth involvement and improving sporting infrastructure (Idemudia & Olayemi, 2021). Consumer Engagement in Sports Marketing: Consumer engagement refers to the level of mental, emotional, and

behavioral commitment a consumer has toward a brand or experience (Brodie et al., 2019). In sports marketing, consumer engagement is influenced by how much fans align with their favorite team, their level of participation in sports-related activities, and their perception of the brand's sincerity in supporting sports (Nwosu & Ibe, 2020).

Brands that use sports sponsorship effectively can build strong levels of consumer engagement, as fans often transfer their loyalty to the team to the brand that sponsors them. This transfer can boost brand recognition, trust, and loyalty (Chinedu & Akpan, 2023). Research also shows that consumer engagement is higher when sponsorship campaigns include elements like contests, social media activities, or corporate social responsibility initiatives (Ogunyemi & Daramola, 2022).

Theoretical Perspectives on Sponsorship and Engagement: Various theories explain the relationship between sponsorship and consumer engagement:

Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986): This model suggests that consumer's process information through either a central route (when they are highly involved) or a peripheral route (when they are less involved). Sponsorship can influence both routes by delivering relevant messages and creating associations during sports events.

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979): This theory explains how individuals form part of their identity through the groups they belong to. Sports fans who strongly identify with their team are more likely to connect with sponsors of that team, seeing them as part of their in-group (Ugochukwu & Eze, 2022).

These frameworks suggest that sports sponsorship can create powerful emotional and psychological ties between brands and consumers, especially when the sponsorship is genuine, visible, and evokes strong emotional responses. Sponsorship Activation and Consumer Behavior: The effectiveness of a sponsorship largely depends on how it is activated. Sponsorship activation refers to promotional strategies that go beyond just having a brand name appear in an event, such as creating immersive experiences, digital engagement, giving away merchandise, and engaging in community initiatives (Eke & Adetunji, 2021). Good activation increases the connection between the consumer and the brand by making the sponsorship more tangible and memorable.

In Nigeria, companies like MTN and Nigerian Breweries have used sports sponsorships to drive activation through live viewing events, local competitions, and online contests (Okonkwo & Ajayi, 2019). These strategies not only increase brand visibility but also foster a sense of involvement and ownership among consumers.

Empirical Studies in the Nigerian Context: Although international research has extensively explored the relationship between sponsorship and engagement (Cornwell & Kwon, 2020), studies in Nigeria are still limited but growing. Ayeni (2020) examined grassroots sports programs in the Niger Delta and found that corporate sponsorship significantly improved youth participation and community branding. Similarly, Idemudia and Olayemi (2021) noted that sustained sponsorship efforts in Delta State led to increased fan loyalty and local economic growth. Kareem and Bassey (2023) conducted a study on experiential marketing and

discovered that interactive sponsorship campaigns strongly influenced consumer attachment to brands in Lagos. While these findings are encouraging, they highlight the need for more research in regions such as Bayelsa and Delta where sports culture and consumer behavior may differ.

Gaps in the Literature

Despite the increasing use of sports sponsorship in Nigeria, several gaps remain:
- Few studies have specifically measured consumer engagement as a result of sponsorship.
- There is limited research on sponsorship activation strategies in certain areas like Bayelsa and Delta States.
- The cultural and social factors affecting the success of sponsorship efforts are underexplored in Nigerian research.

This study aims to address these gaps by investigating how sports sponsorship influences consumer engagement, using insights from sports fans and marketers in selected states.

The reviewed literature supports the idea that sports sponsorship is a powerful tool for boosting consumer engagement, particularly when activation strategies are well-planned.

Theoretical models such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model and Social Identity Theory offer a solid basis for understanding the psychological connections involved. However, studies focused on specific regions in Nigeria, particularly at the state level, are still limited. This study contributes to existing knowledge by providing local evidence on how sports sponsorship affects consumer engagement in sports marketing.

Methodology

The study uses a descriptive survey approach combined with qualitative interviews to gain a thorough understanding of how sports sponsorship affects consumer engagement. The study focuses on Bayelsa and Delta States, two areas in southern Nigeria known for strong sports culture, frequent regional sports events, and active corporate sponsorship by both public and private entities.

The population includes: sports administrators, corporate sponsors, coaches, and athletes in Bayelsa and Delta States of Nigeria. A purposive sampling method was used to select participants who are: active participants or followers of sports events in these areas, and representatives of companies that are well-known for their sponsorship investments. The sample size is 811 respondents. A structured questionnaire was used, which contains closed-ended Likert-scale items measuring: awareness and perception of sponsors, participation in sponsorship-related activities, and emotional and behavioral engagement.

The instruments were validated by experts in sports marketing and educational research. A pilot study was conducted with 20 participants. Cronbach's Alpha was calculated to ensure reliability, resulting in a value of 0. 85, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Data collection was done through self-administered questionnaires. Descriptive statistics, including percentages and means, were employed to examine overall trends. Inferential statistical

methods were applied, with the Chi-square test used to assess the relationship between sponsorship and engagement. Linear regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the impact of activation strategies on consumer behavior. Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic content analysis to uncover common themes and key insights from the interviews.

Result Presentations

Research Question: To what extent will sports sponsorships enhance economic development in Bayelsa and Delta States?

Table 1: Mean $\bar{X}$ and Standard deviation (SD) of the extent sports sponsorships enhance economic development in Bayelsa and Delta States

S/N	Items	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
1.	Sports sponsorships create employment opportunities in Bayelsa and Delta States.	3.45	.722	Accepted
2.	Sports sponsorships contribute to the growth of local businesses (e.g., vendors, hospitality) during sponsored sporting events.	3.10	.953	Accepted
3.	Sports sponsorships will provide economic benefits to communities in Bayelsa and Delta States.	3.31	.713	Accepted
4.	Sports sponsorships contribute tourism development in Bayelsa and Delta States.	3.05	.918	Accepted
5.	Sports sponsorships contribute to increased revenue generation for local governments and sports organizations.	3.09	.931	Accepted

Table 1 shows Mean $\bar{X}$ and Standard deviation (SD) of the extent sports sponsorships enhance economic development in Bayelsa and Delta States. It shows that all items were accepted because their mean values were above 2.5 as the benchmark. This means that sports sponsorships create employment opportunities in Bayelsa and Delta States, sports sponsorships contribute to the growth of local businesses (e.g., vendors, hospitality) during sponsored sporting events, sports sponsorships provide economic benefits to communities in Bayelsa and Delta States, sports sponsorships contribute tourism development in Bayelsa and Delta States and sports sponsorships contribute to increased revenue generation for local governments and sports organizations.

Hypothesis

Sports sponsorship will not significantly enhance economic development in Bayelsa and Delta States.

Table 2: Linear regression of sports sponsorship and economic development in Bayelsa and Delta States.

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
1	Regression	34514.682	1	34514.682	479.799	.000	Rejected
	Residual	58195.956	809	71.936			
	Total	92710.639	810				

α = 0.05; R = .610; R square = .372

a. Dependent Variable: Sport Sponsorship

b. Predictors: (Constant), Economic Development

Table 2 showed an F value of 479.799 and a p-value of .000. Testing at an alpha level of .05 the p-value is less than the alpha level. Hence, the null hypothesis which states that sports sponsorship will not significantly enhance economic development in Bayelsa and Delta States is rejected. This means that sports sponsorship will significantly enhance economic development in Bayelsa and Delta States.

The extent sports sponsorships enhance economic development in Bayelsa and Delta States

The results of the findings in research question three and hypothesis three on the extent sports sponsorships enhance economic development in Bayelsa and Delta States revealed that sports sponsorships create employment opportunities in Bayelsa and Delta States, sports sponsorships contribute to the growth of local businesses (e.g., vendors, hospitality) during sponsored sporting events, sports sponsorships provide economic benefits to communities in Bayelsa and Delta States, sports sponsorships contribute tourism development in Bayelsa and Delta States and sports sponsorships contribute to increased revenue generation for local governments and sports organizations. Hypothesis three tested revealed that sports sponsorship will significantly enhance economic development in Bayelsa and Delta States. This explains that sports sponsorships enhance economic development in Bayelsa and Delta States. This is related to a study carried out by Kelly and Morgan (2022) who revealed that major sponsorships in indigenous tournaments contribute to tourism growth and community engagement. This economic stimulus helps sustain indigenous sports and related cultural activities. They further highlight that indigenous athletes supported by sponsorship programmes serve as role models, inspiring younger generations to participate in sports. Furthermore, indigenous sports sponsorship helps preserve traditional practises and promotes cultural pride (Dubnewick et al. (2018)). Brands engaging in indigenous sports sponsorship can enhance their corporate social responsibility (CSR) profiles. Anderson and Patel (2019)

argue that companies supporting indigenous sports benefit from improved brand loyalty, particularly among socially conscious consumers. Positive brand associations with indigenous causes can also lead to increased consumer engagement and market expansion.

Conclusion

This study has examined the effect of sports sponsorship on consumer engagement and economic development in Bayelsa and Delta States of Nigeria. The findings reveal that sports sponsorship is a powerful marketing tool that enhances brand awareness, emotional connection, and consumer loyalty, particularly when sponsorship activation strategies are well-designed and contextually relevant. Furthermore, sports sponsorship contributes significantly to economic development through employment generation, tourism promotion, local business support, and revenue growth for both private and public stakeholders. Theoretical frameworks such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model and Social Identity Theory provided strong explanations for the psychological mechanisms behind consumer engagement in sports. Despite the increasing adoption of sponsorship in Nigerian sports, there remains a need for strategic alignment between sponsorship initiatives and the socio-cultural dynamics of the target audience. Overall, the study affirms that sports sponsorship, when effectively implemented, not only strengthens brand-consumer relationships but also fosters sustainable economic transformation at the regional level.

Recommendations

1. Companies should design sponsorship initiatives that align with local sports culture, community values, and consumer preferences in Bayelsa and Delta States to ensure authenticity and maximize engagement.
2. Brands should go beyond logo placements by investing in experiential marketing such as fan zones, social media contests, merchandise, and community sports programs to deepen consumer involvement.
3. Sponsors and stakeholders should implement robust systems to measure the impact of their sponsorship activities on consumer engagement and economic indicators, using both quantitative and qualitative metrics.
4. Government agencies should collaborate with private sponsors to co-develop sports infrastructure and talent development programs, ensuring long-term benefits for youth empowerment and regional development.
5. Training and workshops should be organized for sports administrators and marketing professionals in the regions to improve their ability to attract, manage, and evaluate sponsorships effectively.

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