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Live Spectators View on Sponsorship in Sporting Events

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how live spectators view sponsorship and sponsors' marketing initiatives appearing in sporting events. Through constructing a relationship model central to sporting events, three relationships are demonstrated linking teams, sponsors and live spectators. This model is supported by previous literature on sporting events, marketing through sports, sponsorship, hedonic consumption and brand community. Eight individual interviews were conducted with the phenomenological approach exploring live spectators' personal emotions and opinions narrating their unique sporting event experience. The findings imply that live spectators hold positive attitudes towards sponsorship but also require sponsors' brands to fit with the team image. Live spectators show preference for sponsors' brands when making purchasing decisions in daily life, but still expect that sponsors put effort into building active and friendly relationships with consumers and not only with teams.

Keywords: *Sporting events; Sports; Live Spectators; Marketing through Sports; Sponsorship; Marketing Initiatives of Sponsors; Identity; Hedonic Consumption; Brand Community.*

INTRODUCTION

Sponsorship has evolved from simple philanthropic activities into a long term business partnership (Fahy et al., 2004) to achieve potential marketing goals and enhance brand image (Fyrberg and Söderman, 2009) through investing financial support in events (Thwaites and Meng-Lewis, 2013). Sponsorship is considered as the most fast developing marketing strategy nowadays (Meenaghan, 2001; Polonsky and Speed, 2001; Poon and Prendergast, 2007), which has been widely used by companies as an efficient communication platform (Grey and Skildum-Reid, 2003), especially in the sports industry (Belzer, 2013). A report from PricewaterhouseCoopers (2011) predicted that global revenue from sports sponsorship would increase from US\$35 billion in 2010 to US\$45.3 billion in 2015, including North America with 6.1% growth, Europe with 5.3% and Asia Pacific with 4.4%.

When event organizations, sports teams and sponsors enjoy benefits from money flowing into the sports industry, there have been constant debates questioning ethics of sponsors from the spectators' views. For instance, Members of Parliament in the UK and fans have requested to keep personal loan company Wonga's logo off of replica soccer shirts for children as the negative influence of targeting young people as customers (Craven, 2014), as well as gambling companies (Crompton, 2014). Companies who produce consumables with high quantities of fat, salt, sugar (Crompton, 2014) and alcohol are also criticised for being sponsors in major sporting events by spectators and the public due to the potential long-term health damage and social risk (Richards, 2015) caused from over consumption. In addition, distinct from

other parts of the world, the big four sports in North America have no sponsors' logos printed on team jerseys. Recently, according to Tierney (2014), the possibility of jersey sponsorship in the coming season brought strong resistance. Fans held concerns about over-commercialization (Crompton, 2014) would kill the beauty of original jersey designs and even destroy the true spirit of the sport.

Sponsors seem to be facing a growing challenge of damaging their reputation and preference from spectators who are their most important potential consumers (Thwaites and Meng-Lewis, 2013), especially live spectators since they provide immediate feedback to sponsors' marketing initiatives during sporting events (Fullerton, 2010). This therefore requires a research to investigate the actual attitude of live spectators towards sponsorship and the practical influence they gain from sponsor's marketing initiatives. In order to help sponsors establish effective promotional plans in sporting events accordingly, the research question for this study is:

How do live spectators perceive sponsorship and marketing initiatives of sponsors in sporting events?

Taking a look at previous studies, most of them explore certain topics from either the view of sponsorees (sport teams, and event organizers) or sponsors. Renard and Sitz (2011) created a brand model as the key success factor for sponsorees to build valuable partnership with sponsors by conducting a case study. Walraven et al. (2014) spent four years (2005-2009) collecting data to examine changes in sponsorship awareness associated with UEFA (Union of European Football Associations) Champions League and the results suggest the importance of building

strong long-term relationships between sponsors and sponorees to achieve high level of awareness from consumers. Critically, Crompton (2014) explored the operational and reputational negative outcomes for sponorees from sponsorship, which warns sponorees the risk of choosing wrong sponsors. Unlike the above research, this study is standing in the live spectators' shoes to analyze their perspective towards sponsorship and sponsors' marketing initiatives by using the relationships among teams, sponsors and live spectators as a framework basis.

Furthermore, there are several studies exploring the importance of the spectators' point of view on sponsors by applying the quantitative method. For example, Bal et al. (2009) investigated the effects of emotional factors and levels on sport sponsorship from spectators by taking two different examples from Australia and France. They realized that the more positive emotions spectator have, the more influence they intend to get from sponsorship. Ferrier et al. (2013) examined how consumers view sponsorship from a financial company in sporting events, and the findings implied that the brand image and event image should fit well first, as well as the necessity for financial firms to build strong relationships with consumers to achieve trust. However, the quantitative method is rather limited compared to the qualitative method in gathering in-depth results of spectator insight (Ferrier et al, 2013).

The purpose of this thesis is to deepen the understanding of live spectators' subjective emotions and opinions towards sponsorship in sporting events. By using a phenomenological approach the thesis contributes to former research on spectators view of sponsorship. The thesis also aims to provide new insights for companies who are

or will be sponsors in future sporting events to cater to live spectators' expectations and formulate effective marketing initiatives.

The following sections of this paper are structured accordingly: Section two is based on the research question, relevant literature, theories and previous studies are also discussed; in section three, the method for this research is explained; section four describes the interviews' results and analysis; in the following section five, the findings of this research are presented referring to theoretical framework, and the managerial marketing suggestions for companies are indicated. The limitations for this paper and future possible research are discussed in the sixth section. The conclusion and summary of this study are demonstrated in the final section.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Since the main context for this study is sporting events, it is necessary to explain the definitions and characters of sporting events and sports in the first place. In order to investigate how live spectators perceive sponsorship, a diagram of the relationships among teams, spectators and sponsors based on sporting events is formulated to discuss the findings after data analysis from the interviews with live spectators. The demonstration of this model is based on different concepts, theories, and previous research respectively.

Sporting Events and Sports

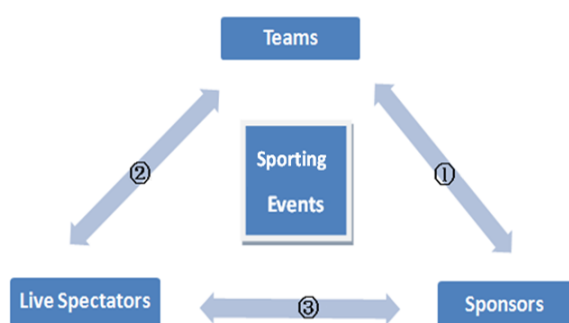
To begin with, the concept of 'sporting events' needs to be understood. Sporting events are events that contain one or more types of sporting competition (Getz, 2005) at a given place and time (Watt, 1998; Getz, 2005), and it attracts people to participate

because of sports' spirit, excitement, and unique mixture of setting, management, and people (Getz, 2005). For this research, sporting events are viewed as a platform for primarily providing sports as a cultural product (Crawford, 2004; Hesmondhalgh, 2013) for spectators who enjoy the balance of competition, teams, players and atmosphere. Sports therefore as a cultural product at the core of sporting events, are producing social meaning and creating texts to communicate with audiences (Longhurst, 1995; Fillis, 2010) as a key purpose, rather than a traditional, tangible product with market value for satisfying certain needs (Kotler and Levy, 1969).

Relationship Model among Teams, Sponsors and Live Spectators

Diagram 1 is used as the main theoretical framework in this study. Relationships ① and ② can be demonstrated based on existing concepts, theories and previous studies, which will contribute to explain and clarify the relationship ③.

Diagram 1: Relationship Model among Teams, Sponsors and Live Spectators



Relationship ①

--- Teams and Sponsors

On the basis of the purpose of this study, concepts and theories used to illustrate the relationship between teams and sponsors are

generally seen as the fundamental rationales for further investigation.

Sports as cultural product have high cost in organisation (Hesmondhalgh, 2013) for which teams are responsible. According to Beech and Chadwick (2013), sports have evolved dramatically to the extent where they have developed into 'big business'. On one hand, the cost of forming a successful football or basketball club is similar to running a healthy business, which requires investment in stadia, wages, production of merchandise, other operational costs and more. Teams aspire to build up successful business relationship with other companies to achieve financial support. On the other hand, sports bring huge financial and reputational benefits from sponsorship, advertising, broadcasting, sales of merchandise and positive image as demonstrated by Barker (2013), which is mainly what sponsors are expecting in return from teams. From a sponsor's perspective, sports teams are a special experience for sporting consumers that contain a series of marketing opportunities to reach a significant level of financial benefit and brand exposure.

Marketing through Sports

There are large numbers of studies suggesting the definition of sports marketing. Historically two dimensions of sports marketing need to be considered: marketing within sports and marketing through sport (Fullerton, 2010; O'Reilly et al., 2013). The former stands on the perspective of sports teams applying marketing principles, processes and practices to attract and manage spectators, sell sport-related products to satisfy spectators' needs and achieve the company goals (Pitts and Stotlar, 1996; Gray and McEvoy, 2005; Mullin et al., 2003;

Fullerton, 2010); the latter dimension has the view that team business partners, such as sponsors, also implement marketing initiatives to influence potential customers' preference (Fullerton, 2010) on both sport and non-sport-related products and services (Fullerton, 2010; O'Reilly et al., 2013).

Hence, considering the subject of this study, 'marketing through sports' is selected firstly as the fundamental rationale, which leads the other core concept – sponsorship.

Sponsorship

As stated by Fullerton (2010), marketing through sports has been a considerably important concept through the evolution of the sports industry, and a number of companies have been using sporting events as a promotional vehicle and sponsorship platform. According to previous research, the general idea is sponsorship represents business activities rather than supporting without any return benefits (Fullerton, 2010). Meenghan (1991b) gave the definition of sponsorship as financial investment in an activity, and in order to have access to potential commercial opportunities associated with the activity. That is similar to many of the definitions that cover the commercial dimension of sponsorship (Fullerton, 2010). This study refers to Thwaites and Meng-Lewis' (2013) demonstration of sponsorship which is an exchange between the activity receiving financial support (or other benefits), and sponsors obtaining the priority of association with the event to achieve a series of promotional goals (Barker, 2013). This determines that sponsorship is rather a business relationship than corporate philanthropy.

Sponsorship VS Advertising

A cohesive marketing plan, integrated

sponsorship with traditional marketing mixes, has been used for organizations to convert live spectators into potential consumers (O'Reilly et al., 2013). There are significant differences between advertisement and sponsorship although sometimes sponsorship is expressed as another form of advertising (O'Reilly et al., 2008; Thwaites and Meng-Lewis, 2013). Apart from the similarity in commercial dimensions with advertising, sponsorship has its own advantages (Fullerton, 2010; Thwaites and Meng-Lewis, 2013). For instance the credibility that provides validity of products and service claims for consumers; matching the image of an event and the image of sponsors positively; the prestige (of the relationship) indicates that correspondence between reputation is very important; of course, sales opportunities from selling products to consumers; as well as accessing to live spectators to receive their immediate feedback, as the greatest advantage, cannot be implemented by traditional advertising (Fullerton, 2010).

Relationship ②

--- Live Spectators and Teams

The relationship between teams and spectators is critical to achieve the goal of this study in discovering spectators' perspectives towards sponsorship. The reason being spectators are identified as consumers (Crawford, 2004) who absorb the whole event as an unforgettable (Getz, 2005) and unique experience (Thompson et al., 1989; 1997). This includes event tickets, sport (and non-sport) related products and services, and as sponsors' potential buyers (Fullerton, 2010). On one side, from a live spectators' view, according to Crawford (2004), they are involved in the production of sports as a cultural product and constituting text such as creating the

atmosphere in stadiums that is viewed and consumed by other live spectators. As a result, live spectators are hedonic consumers who contribute to sporting event meanings and the social importance (Crawford, 2004) through their conversations, consumption behaviors (Holt, 1995) and interactions. On the other side, teams respect live spectators because of their support, as well as apply marketing practices and principles to attract more live spectators to attend events through buying tickets and consuming products and services.

Hedonic Consumption

Previous studies suggest that the consuming experience involves the combination of consumers' utilitarian and hedonic consumption value (Babin et al., 1994; Babin and Darden, 1995). Utilitarian value is function-oriented (Voss et al., 2003), while hedonic value expresses emotion and feelings of the shopping experience (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Babin et al., 1994). Hedonic consumers therefore are viewed as the opposite of traditional consumers, because they are seeking multisensory satisfaction, pursuing fantasies and particular experiences associated with emotions from purchasing (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Liao et al., 2009). This suggests that emotional satisfaction leads consumers to make purchasing decisions spontaneously on hedonic products rather than rationally on utilitarian ones (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2002). For example sports consumers have different levels of emotional influence with regard to different categories of products (O'Reilly et al., 2013). Furthermore, Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) have mentioned in their research on hedonic consumption, that the same products lead consumers to various emotions and fantasies depending on

different ethnic or cultural backgrounds. This explains why products are seen as subjective symbols instead of objective entities (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982), which suggests meanings for individuals should be explained specifically depending on consumers' respective situations.

Because of sports belonging to cultural products, that are able to affect people's knowledge, understanding, opinions and experience about their society, as well as speak directly to consumers' emotions (Hesmondhalgh, 2013). Live spectators are able to enjoy the excitement of competitions, create text through their own interpretations, and share the emotions and influence other live spectators (Crawford, 2004).

Relationship ③

--- Live Spectators and Sponsors

As discussed above, sponsors' view is spectators are potential buyers of products or services (Fullerton, 2010) especially live spectators because sponsors can reach them directly during events and receive fast and efficient feedback. Companies therefore have developed sponsorship as a key marketing platform to widen customer bases through implementing marketing initiatives, such as advertising on tickets, comprehensively in sports venues on display screens, audience participation games during intermissions, distributing free samples etc (Skinner and Rukavina, 2003; Fullerton, 2010).

However, promoting through sporting events is also risky because companies' various marketing opportunities often depend on one single attribute of sport, which determines the outcome of marketing plans is uncertain and unplanned (O'Reilly et al., 2013). For example, huge investment in promotion of an instance where the team loses would be considered a huge failure.

Presumably, this emphasizes the importance of emotional influence from sport consumers to the products and services, as well as with different categories of products associated with different levels of fans (O'Reilly et al., 2013). As a result, it is necessary to understand the perspective of live spectators towards sponsorship and sponsors' marketing initiatives to explore insights for companies creating effective marketing plans, which is the aim of this study.

Brand Community (from Relationship ② and ③)

Brand community connects each party in relationship ② and ③. Lury (1996:1) explains consumer culture as a material culture which can be defined as a 'person-thing' relationship (Crawford, 2004). Arnould and Thompson (2005) explain consumer culture as a more intertwined and dynamic relationship between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings, rather than only material things. Consumption emerges from socio-cultural practices, cultural meanings, socio-historic influences and consequently social dynamics influence the consumer's identity and experiences (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Therefore consumers become 'new consumers' (Cova and Cova, 2012) who use marketer-generated material such as advertisements, branding or material goods to construct a sense of self, manifesting personal and social circumstance, as well as lifestyle. Meanwhile, consumers are able to construct brand community with or without geographical boundaries (Muniz Jr and O'Guinn, 2001) based on socio-historic patterns of consumption which consist of social characteristics, which all influence consumption of certain brands (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Furthermore, Crawford

(2004) agrees 'person-person' relationships in consumer culture, where people observe and get influenced by others' behaviours and shared stories (Muniz Jr and O'Guinn, 2001) about consumption, i.e. watching live sporting events. Hence sports' live spectators establish their 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983) focused on certain teams through shared sense of identity, belonging and memories, with social interaction as well as comparable patterns of exclusion (Crawford, 2004). Additionally sharing is vital in creating and maintaining a brand community (Muniz Jr. and O'Guinn, 2001) that strengthens the emotional bond between community and consumers, as well as among consumer themselves because the importance of supporting each other and being part of the community is greater than the individual itself (McAlexander et al., 2002). Similarly, brand communities can also be established between live spectators and sponsors because of the existence of goodwill in sponsorship which is believed in and appreciated by live spectators who recognize that the team they support gains benefit from sponsors (Meenaghan, 1991). This suggests that goodwill adds advantage for sponsors' brands when live spectators are making purchasing decisions in their daily life. In return, live spectators also can formulate brand communities around certain products or services for sponsors (Cova and Cova, 2012) to benefit customer relationship based on live spectators' connection with particular sports 'imagined communities'.

To summarize, placing sporting events at the core of the relationship model defines the framework and clarifies the necessity to investigate the relationship between live spectators and sponsors, especially from the live spectators' perspective. These

relationships are explained based on important literature, concepts and existing studies, which provide the suitable theories for academic foundation and for further analysis after data collection. Hence, it is vital for this research to have such a theoretical framework that combines logic and rationale for further investigation.

METHODOLOGY

As discussed above, rather than quantitative methods with statistical analysis, the qualitative phenomenological method is more appropriate. This is because the goal of this study is exploring a 'lived experience' from the live spectators' perspective on sponsorship and marketing initiatives in sporting events, as well as their views on sponsors' brands in daily life as a phenomenon. The result can be yielded from the live spectators' narrated data for understanding this phenomenon (Thompson et al., 1997) instead of other research methods.

Phenomenological Approach

Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) have influenced subsequent studies from a phenomenological perspective, with their well-known research that defines consuming practice experiential, with hedonic dimensions, resulting in the view of consumption as a psychological phenomenon. That has brought the emphasis on the emotional perspective during consumption into a great new level (Holt, 1995). Bernet et al (1989) also argued that Husserl had developed the philosophy of phenomenology as one of most important influences for qualitative research in understanding people's experience of phenomena. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) emphasized this approach and focused on

personal views and shared meanings for certain phenomena to reveal how people understand social phenomena from their own perspective. Therefore, the phenomenological approach is viewed as the right and efficient method to examine consumers' subjective opinions and emotional reaction, since consuming is experience, and therefore requires the phenomenological description of how consumers feel about their experiences (Holt, 1995) to investigate consumption practices. The aim of this research is to understand a 'lived experience' of how live spectators view sponsorship and marketing initiatives in sporting events, and also how they view sponsors' brands in daily life as a phenomenon through their own narration (Thompson et al., 1997). The phenomenological approach is selected as the key method for this research including interviews and collection of empirical data, for instance, how live spectators perceive sponsorship through dynamic displays or static advertisements, and interactive activities whilst experiencing (or consuming) sporting events, as well as the diverse influence that live spectators obtain from those surrounding commercials.

Phenomenological Interview

In order to understand an individual's emotions and views of the 'lived experience' as a certain phenomenon, phenomenological interview techniques have been chosen to collect valid data from narrations in unique individual experiences. Since the topic is related to personal experience at certain moments in life, an individual interview is able to offer flexible time, privacy and space for recalling memories without interruption. It also contributes in obtaining valid data and avoiding the risk of interviewees changing their opinions because of

influence from others. Therefore, it is the most suitable approach for extracting meaning from people's experience (Thompson et al., 1989; 1997).

With regard to this study, interviewees' answers will have obvious differences related to distinctive individual experiences as well as similarities in their emotions, habits etc, thus the answers should be gathered and sorted into major themes and then analyzed. However according to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008), exceptional answers also require analysis, and therefore cannot be ignored as this may lead to new themes. The collected data from conversational interviews including formal questions and circular (nonlinear) dialogues (Thompson et al., 1989; Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008), is to be analyzed and categorized into themes which all relate back to the research question. Based on those themes, the analysis can be explained by the interviewees' perspectives on sponsorship in sporting events and the influence from it. Besides that, it relevantly refers to theories and previous research findings. By integrating differences and similarities, illustrating and exploring the findings, eventually the aim of solving research question can be achieved. Suggestions can be discussed concerning respective stakeholders including the spectators (consumers), teams, sponsors and wider society. Certainly, the limitations of this research can be discussed for potential research projects in the future.

Phenomenological Interview Design

Generally, a proper and comprehensive construction of an interview is essential for further research, not only for keeping the direction towards solving the research question, but also for efficiency and detail in data. In particular, samples should be

chosen objectively and with consideration since any one singular experience is based on multiple objects surrounding the subject and their background including culture, religion etc. This will determine the different views, values and perspectives extracted from the interview questions (Thompson et. al, 1997). For this research, there are some criteria for selecting samples in order to collect as much comprehensive material as possible. Firstly subjects have all previously attended major sporting events, such as soccer, basketball, hockey and cricket because the higher frequency of events (compared with the Olympic Games for example, every four years), regional influence (majority of live spectators are local) and public participation drives (e.g. extra-curricular classes for students). This is essential to the validity of all interviews. Secondly multiple genders were chosen since the percentage of female spectators has been increased dramatically, (over 45% in National Football League, and 31.8% in National Basketball Association) (Farrell et al., 2011). Thirdly, ages 25 to 34 were chosen, to ensure effective participation in the questions, and their ability to share inspiration and influence of live sporting events (eventIMPACTS, 2011). Finally, a diverse selection from different cultural backgrounds (Thompson et al., 1997) with different levels of interest involvement was considered in order to collect unique experiences and opinions around this topic.

Eventually, eight people with different profiles were selected from researcher's immediate social circle, providing the advantage of prior knowledge of their habits related to live sporting events. Depending on the information of interviewees (*see Table 1*), interviewees are named with sports, involvement and gender representation in the data analysis section:

BasketballSupporter (F), Basketball-Enthusiast (F), HockeyOnlooker (F), SoccerOnlooker (F), BasketballEnthusiast (M), SoccerEnthusiast (M), CricketSupporter (M) and Basketball-Supporter (M).

questions. After this open question, further questions such as ‘outside of work hours, what do you usually do during your leisure time? Do you have any hobbies?’ can be added to further lead the conversation towards to the topic of sporting events as-

Table 1: Information of Interviewees

Sport	Involvement	Gender	Age	Occupation	Country (Living in)
Basketball	Enthusiast	F	28	Accountant	USA
		M	34	Employee in Airline Business	China
	Supporter	F	27	Master Student	Australia
		M	27	Invest Banking Manager	China
Cricket	Supporter	M	33	Self-employed in Music Industry	UK
Hockey	Onlooker	F	25	Graphic Designer	Sweden
Soccer	Enthusiast	M	34	Art Director	Sweden
	Onlooker	F	27	Human Resource Officer	China

A unique aspect of the phenomenological interview is to proceed without an interview guide, keeping the interviews entirely conversational (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008; Thompson et. al, 1997, Thompson et. al, 1989). A fixed guideline or question form is unnecessary, determining that it is vital for open questions to orientate the whole dialogue towards the right course; and for following questions to be specific according to each dialogue. This hands the initiative to interviewees’ to share their experiences which relates back to the purpose of the investigation and the research question. The opening questions, (that follow interviewees’ occupations and introductions), can follow along the line of ‘how do you describe the balance of your work and life?’ which initiates conversation related to daily life without the pressure of answering formal

well as allowing the interviewees to engage with the core subjects, ensuring the interview is rich in information yet informal. The interviewer should provide further neutral questioning whilst avoiding ‘why’ questions to allow interviewees to recall their own experience in detail, with thoughts, feelings, images, sensations and memories, rather than diversion (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008; Thompson et. al, 1997, Thompson et. al, 1989). Questions for clarification without suggestion or the interviewer’s opinions were carefully avoided. Within the interview three photos were shown to interviewees to extract their comments (*see appendix*): *Picture 1*: a soccer jersey (with betting company’s sponsorship); *Picture 2*: half of Swedish hockey team jersey and other half of American hockey jersey; *Picture 3*: the interior of a basketball gymnasium with

various sponsorship logos.

Practical Process

Eight individual interviews were carried out, each with audio recording. After completing each interview, the recording was listened to and transcribed carefully in order to reduce data and extract the relevant information that is compared with the theoretical framework. It also involved reflexive analysis (Finlay, 2005) with ongoing conversations between acknowledging self-awareness (Hertz, 1997) and others' experience and experiencing simultaneously (Finlay, 2008). Through this method, results were categorized into three main themes which in turn are individually supported by two sub-themes. The findings were analyzed from interviewees' understanding of the phenomenon reflecting on the theoretical framework. In the process of discussion, theoretical implications and managerial implications were presented according to the summarised discussion from interviews and practical suggestions.

For the limitations of the process, the eight interviews were conducted during interviewees' spare time. Those located in Sweden were interviewed in local cafés and those in America, Australia, China and UK through a Skype meeting. A large percentage of interviewees are employed and work to a tight schedule, finding suitable time is very important for them to feel relaxed and discuss away from work pressure to motivate their involvement, which also contributed more interesting information and solid data collection. Yet there were also some difficulties needing to be mentioned. For instance Internet connection stability issues with Skype meetings that also influenced continuity during the interviews. Since some questions were related to detailed memories of

interviewees' previous experience, there were vague answers for data analysis since, as mentioned Thompson et al. (1989), experience is difficult to capture precisely because of its personal nature and additionally it connects too many different threads of thought. During the interviews, some 'onlookers' were not as detailed as 'enthusiasts' when describing their experience. Additional questions regarding to how they interact with other personal in attendance, other spectators members behaviors, and their other most clear memories (outside of the actual sporting event) were necessary to ask to maintain the conversations. In contrast 'enthusiasts' were often very expressive in answering the questions because of their engagement with the sport, and there was even requirement to maintain the conversation direction towards the research question but without imposing researcher's ideas to interviewees (Thompson et al., 1989). Examples of these following questions can be found in the appendix.

Quality of Research

Richardson (2000) suggests it is vital that choosing compatible evaluation criteria depending on the research question and the aims of the study. The key aim of phenomenological study is uncovering the 'truth' of people's understanding from their passive attitude without moral judgment from the researcher (Finlay, 2014), as a result, the evaluation criteria should be focused on whether general readers could understand of the world view in a new and deep way (Finlay, 2008) through seeing the arguments and explanation described by researchers, as well as whether readers recognize the phenomenon from their own experience (Thompson et al., 1997). This thesis uses the 4R's defined by Finlay and

Evans (2009) to evaluate trustworthiness of the phenomenological approach: **rigour**, **relevance**, **resonance** and the extent that **reflexivity** is demonstrated.

Rigour examines the whole process of the research. This study rigorously follows the procedure of qualitative research with systematical sections to ensure the integrity. The phenomenon is defined as how live spectators view sponsorship and marketing initiatives in sporting events. Aside from this, all the findings were analysed based on the theoretical framework with trustable theories, which were validated by the supervisor.

Relevance focuses on the applicability and contribution value of the research. This research has filled the gap in a theoretical understanding of live spectators' perspectives towards sponsorship, which helps enrich sponsors' knowledge about their potential customer needs and improve the effectiveness of marketing initiatives.

Resonance taps into emotional and spiritual dimensions which can be felt the same by the reader (of this study). Eight interviews were conducted to describe interviewees' real experiences of being live spectators in sporting events, which involved vivid emotions and subjective opinions. Moreover, interviewees were selected with different levels of interests and cultural background for data diversity. The true feelings expressed from interviewees would achieve resonance with other live spectators or spectators from all over the world.

Reflexivity refers to the research's self-awareness and openness in its process. Interviewees were not imposed upon or lead with ideas, only guided in the direction of the research subject during the interview process. The researcher has taken their subjectivity into interpretation and

discussion to explore the findings based on the theoretical framework and realities in the discussion section. Additionally the researcher's humility will be displayed in the limitations section with objective acknowledgement of the restrictions in this research.

Consequently, this research meets the evaluation criteria and therefore achieves the validity and trustfulness required.

DATA ANALYSIS

The main themes appearing in the interviews are 'gathering because of sports', 'perspectives on sponsorship' and 'requirements for sponsors'. Each theme is supported by two additional sub-themes.

Gathering Because of Sports

Sport is described by Hesmondhalgh (2013) as an influential socio-cultural product belonging to peripheral cultural industries. It creates social meaning and text to communicate with spectators who are viewed primarily as consumers (Kotler & Levy, 1969) as well as influencing their knowledge and understanding. Through mutual interactions between sport and spectators, such as the spirit of sport interpreted by spectators and online world-wide discussions among spectators related to sports (Crawford, 2004), certain non-geographically bound (Muniz Jr. and O'Guinn, 2001) 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983) are built up spontaneously by live spectators who support the same team, share the same spirit or admire the same players. Therefore, sports consumption brings together various consumers with different life experience, cultural background and social status.

a) Live Sporting Events Influence Daily Life

Consumers are trying to construct a sense of themselves (Cova and Cova, 2012) and demonstrate their identities and lifestyle (Arnould & Thompson, 2005), spectators encouraged by the desire of presenting who-they-are through sports consumption, for instance, purchasing sports events tickets and merchandise. Particularly, Basketball-Enthusiast (F) described her abundant experience of watching live NBA games with certain sense of pride and motivation within her own life:

'I think I am a super fan of NBA rather than any other girls in my social circles. I have started to follow NBA news since I was 12. I have really strong feeling of being proud of following my team because they win champions, they are friendly to fans and they never given up when they have hard time. This power of believing in the team has been encouraging me for my own live experience. When I was doing my master programme in America, I usually travelled to see games when I had school holidays. Although now work time more than before, I still watch live games three times on months. Sometimes I even think it is the faith of my team spirit leading to where I am and who I am now. I feel very grateful and proud to be one of their fans.'

Equally, BasketballEnthusiast (M) interpreted his passion in supporting the team as regional pride:

'I am originally from Beijing and I love this place even it has its own problems. I am quite passionate fan for my city team, because they not only represent this city but also they play great basketball and have strong sense of teamwork. I and my wife go to see

almost every live game of my team in Beijing.' We order their limited edition jerseys and hats every time they win the champion. Also, I think it is important to support them in gymnasium because we can truly feel that we are one of them, and we represent this city as they do.'

Similarly, BasketballSupporter (F), Cricket-Supporter (M) and BasketballSupporter (M) all expressed their feelings of regional support when they experience the sporting events:

'I am from Beijing, and of course I support our team. Although I don't have enough time to follow their news, I watched several games in gymnasium which were really exciting. I feel it is my honour to support them'

said by BasketballSupporter (M); CricketSupporter (M) also mentioned:

'Although cricket is not as popular as other sports like football or basketball, it gathers quite a lot fans and audience in the area where I live, which is like a local event that local people need to go.'

BasketballSupporter (F) pointed out:

'Since 2013 I moved to Melbourne, I and my boyfriend started to watch Melbourne Tiger and we often see their games in gymnasium. When cheering up the team there, I really feel like I am a "Melbournner".'

In a word, sporting events play a vital role in spectators' daily life, especially those live spectators who can be close to the team spirit and players, showing their admiration and support that contributes to their life goals. They also express a geographical connection with a certain place (Crawford, 2004) as a strong sense of self-identity to not only feel distinct, but also proud.

b) Value Sharing

Apart from self-identity, live spectators also create a great sense of belonging of value sharing in all 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983) related to different teams or clubs. It can be categorised into two aspects.

b.1) Socializing among Live Spectators

Firstly, among communities of spectators, sharing stories, experience (Muniz Jr and O'Guinn, 2001), and a sense of belonging (Crawford, 2004) it is critical to create and keep the sports communities alive since similar subjective values and emotions are able to be understood, agreed, shared and diffused. For example, SoccerEnthusiast (M) associates his obsession of the team with nostalgia of childhood and emotional bond with his father:

'I am not from where my team is but my dad usually took me to see their games when I was small. He is a big fan of this team, and I became another big fan mainly because of him since then. Soccer has been one of our main topics all the time. Even now I can't go back often to watch their games, I still hope one day I can watch it again with my dad, which it is very important to me that we share the same memories and feelings';

BasketballEnthusiast (M) thought that it was essential for him and his wife to have same interests:

'I went to gymnasium with my wife who is also a basketball fan as well. I think this is a good way to share our same feelings in one thing, which enhances our relationship by spending our leisure time together to make our life more interesting';

BasketballSupporter (F) shared the same feeling with BasketballEnthusiast (M) that

basketball became a firm bond in the relationship and added spice in their life:

'I watch basketball because my boyfriend who is a big fan. I would say that he influences me a lot on this because I was not really into sports before. He always explains the rules to me and what is happening, which makes me understand the game quickly. Now we will go to gymnasium to watch games as long as we have time'; furthermore, friendship and social circle trigger value sharing among spectators as well.

Specifically, BasketballEnthusiast (F) described the importance of watching games with her friends:

'I rarely watch games by myself because it is boring. The most important thing is going with some of my friends who support the same team as I do. We cheer our players on when they win, we support them when they lose and we joke funny things happened during the games. I think those are very important moments for us being friends';

BasketballSupporter (M) also said friends were essential for him to enjoy the games:

'It is about we all share the same feelings and emotions, which make us feel closer';

CricketSupporter always enjoyed the feeling of watching games with his friends:

'I am the kind of fan that having fun, singing, laughing and joking. I am just singing the songs along with what the crowd sing to support and just enjoy the atmosphere. And also having a drink with friends and just having a good time is very important for me to see cricket games';

SoccerOnlooker (F) watched the first game in stadium because of friends:

'I am not a fan of soccer. The first time I was in stadium because my friend took me there with tickets as gift. My friend explained to me about the rules to let me understand better';

HockeyOnlooker (F) went to gymnasium to watch the first hockey game because of her colleagues:

'Actually I got the tickets from my colleagues as a Christmas gift after one month I joined the company, and we all went to see the game together. It is my first experience of hockey and it is very interesting. I also feel very welcomed from my colleagues, and feel suddenly close to them from watching the game together.'

In addition, sharing values with unfamiliar spectators during the games is very common. During basketball games, Enthusiast (F), Enthusiast (M), Supporter (F) and Supporter (M) all remember that they have interacted with unfamiliar spectators who support the same teams as they do, such as cheering together, joking about the other team, and playing interactive games during intervals.

Therefore, socialising based on share values is the essential bond to tight live spectators together.

b.2) Belief in Sponsors Shared Values with Teams

Secondly, sponsorship is viewed in general as a business relationship with sporting events (Thwaites and Meng-Lewis, 2013) and has become an innovative promotion vehicle for companies (Fullerton, 2010) to implement marketing initiatives through sporting event. Therefore, from the interviews, live spectators of every level of involvement, speak similarly about the significance of accordance between brand image of sponsors and team spirit as a result of believing sponsors' goodwill and shared

values. In particular, Basketball- Enthusiasts (F) said the historical background of sponsors is required to match with teams':

'I think it is important to have brand images matching between sponsors and teams. For example, the team I support has really long history; I would feel strange if they are sponsored by some companies who got successful very quickly or from nowhere. I think it would more or less affects my team image and fans would not feel comfortable because we would think the company doesn't share the same spirits with us, who are just investing money on the team, and get benefits from us';

BasketballEnthusiasts (M) explained that companies who provide sport products or services are more suitable to be sponsors for sports games:

'I work in a transportation company and I don't see the possibility of my company sponsoring any games in the future. To be honest, companies' logos I have seen in gymnasium are mainly sports brands, and I think they are more relevant to sponsor the teams';

Another central opinion regarding to this theme is sponsorship ethics. For example *Picture 1* was showed to every interviewee drew a generally negative response:

'I don't think the gambling company is suitable for sponsoring these kind big sporting events. There must be some bad influence for kids who watching the games.' said SoccerOnlooker (F);

Meanwhile, CricketSupporter (M) believes that the gambling industry is not appropriate to promote through large sporting events which have widespread effects on youngsters:

'I have seen teenagers wearing this T-shirts when I was in the stadium, and

I don't think it is quite right to have their logo on since the message could be wrongly interpreted such as gambling when your team plays to show support.'

Although SoccerEnthusiast (M) cares more about the game and team's performance, he agreed teams should have ethical consideration when choosing sponsors:

'I feel that sponsors are also part of the team same as fans. When teams play well, the business relationship could bring benefits to both teams and sponsors; but when sponsors do not deliver positive messages to society, it would also influence the team image even it plays very well.'

Consequently, sponsors are expected (by spectators) to have matching brand images and values with the teams they support since they believe sponsors are a part of their 'imagined communities', sharing the same values and spirit, which also refers to the finding of Ferrier et al. (2013) that the importance of matching between brand and event image.

Perspectives towards Sponsorship

Through interviewees answering questions and commenting on pictures, live spectators' attitudes towards sponsorship and sponsors' marketing initiatives are explored below.

a) Positive Attitudes on Sponsorship

Interviewees have high awareness of sponsorship being one of the most important marketing strategies for companies to promote themselves (Fullerton, 2010). All interviewees have shown positive attitudes towards sponsorship and sponsors' promotional initiatives experienced during events. The interviewees were asked to comment on *Picture 2* and *3*. Engaged spectators tend to focus on games and

players, which means they do not become affected by promotional initiatives from sponsors. Basketball-Enthusiast (F) mentioned that:

'There are a lot of sponsors' logos I remember around the gymnasium as well as the on the TV screen. I don't feel distracted by them because I think I enjoy the game mostly.'

BasketballEnthusiast (M) pointed out:

'I think sponsorship is necessary for sport industry now, so I don't have any negative idea about them. More sponsors we have, strong financial support we will have, then we could buy more great players. For me, the team is the most important.'

SoccerEnthusiast (M) also thought more objectively:

'Sometimes my vision got distracted by commercials, which is when advertising boards are changing and players are moving at the same time, but sponsorship is an inevitable strategy for soccer as far as I know. If business makes my team stronger and better, then why not?'

Compared with Enthusiasts, Supporters and Onlookers demonstrated their positive attitude related to the atmosphere, surrounding spectators, and interactive activities provided by sponsors. Basketball-Supporter (M) expresses gratefully:

'I don't think the logos or advertisements are annoying, on the opposite, I think they help the game more interesting during the breaks, such as interactive games, grabbing gifts and so on.'

In addition, HockeyOnlooker (F) remembered:

'There are some interesting activities sponsored by local companies such as a nice performance with fireworks

before the game started and a kiss cam during breaks. I think sponsors do a good job get spectators involved more into the live atmosphere and games.'

SoccerOnlooker (F) recalled:

'I am just normal audience of soccer, so I don't really think negatively about anything. I think those companies must be quite successful to be able to support teams.'

Over all, live spectators hold positive attitudes towards to sponsorship and sponsor promotional initiatives in the events due to live spectators' complete immersion in watching the game, and absorbing the surroundings including the dynamic atmosphere. That is to say, spectators are hedonic consumers as (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982) explained that they are eagerly seeking emotional satisfaction through live sports games. And also, sponsors receive live spectators' positive response and appreciation of support for their team and general goodwill (Meenaghan, 2001).

b) Limited Persuasion in Daily Life Consumption

In spite of positive attitude towards sponsors and their promotions, live spectators prefer to make consumption decisions according to their own life experience rather than being convinced through sporting event advertisements. This infers that spectators emotional satisfaction leads them to make decisions spontaneously about purchasing sport-related products or services, but rationally on utilitarian (non-sport-related) ones (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2002), such as insurance and cars provided from sponsors, which proves one of the findings from O'Reilly et al.'s study (2013) that live spectators have different emotional involvement according to different kinds of

products. For example, BasketballEnthusiast (F) admitted:

'Normally I buy things depending what I usually like or recommendation from friends and I don't buy things only because the advertisements.'

Moreover, HockeyOnlooker (F) mentioned same as SoccerOnlooker (F) that:

'I don't consume based on what advertisements tell me because it is hard to know if it is true. I rather collect some reviews from others.'

Furthermore, BasketballSupporter (M) emphasised:

'Too many advertisements on TV and hard to believe them and I rely on more friends or families to make decision.'

However, sponsors' brand preference has definitely risen thanks to spectators' belief and appreciation in sponsors' goodwill (Meenaghan, 2001) and viewed as potential consumers by sponsors (Fullerton, 2010). BasketballEnthusiast (M) said:

'I definitely add preference for those sponsors who support my team because we are all in the same team and share good and bad.'

BasketballSupporter (M) and CricketSupporter (M) commented similarly:

'If I know some company supports my team that also provides things I need to buy recently, I would consider checking their products out first.'

BasketballSupporter (F) also said that:

'I would love to have a look sponsors' websites if they are in those industries I am interested in such as fashion or beauty.'

This suggests that because of the connection with sports 'imagined communities', live spectators show brand preference on sponsors' brands when making purchase decisions in daily life. That brings an essential advantage for sponsors to build

relation with their potential customers.

Interestingly, from these answers, it is apparent that Supporters and Onlookers remember sponsors' names or marketing initiatives easier than Enthusiasts during live games. Enthusiasts mainly remembered a few sponsors on jerseys and sports products brands, while Supporters and Onlookers listed many companies names not only related to sports industry but also non-sport ones, such as financial firms, restaurants, telecom, and cars. Despite all live spectators are hedonic consumers, those with low involvement have stronger impressions of sponsors, compared to spectators with high involvement. One key reason can be the concentration of spectators with low involvement is distributed through different surroundings whilst seeking various pleasures besides the competitive game. In contrast, live spectators who are really engaged in sports, enjoy games intently.

Requirements for Sponsors

During interviews, different sponsors defined here as 'international companies' and 'local companies' have been mentioned. What they perceive and require from a sponsor depends on the type and size of the company.

a) Multinational Companies

Multinational companies generally have enormous financial strength to support teams, yet it is hard to engage spectators' attention because of the existing reputation and sense of distance. According to CricketSupporter (M)'s view was:

'When you see the multinational businesses advertisements, it is hard to believe that if they really need to do this because they are already quite successful.'

BasketballSupporter (F)'s opinion was:

'I don't see the relevance between me and international insurance firm, and I am not sure that they would get business from spectators. They probably just invest a lot of money and care about the benefits, not sure they really care what's going on in our team.'

Nevertheless live spectators believe that there are certain ways of helping multinational companies to communicate effectively such as interactive activities and free products samples. In particular, in terms of basketball, Enthusiast (F) and Enthusiast (M) emphasised the joy being involved in interactive activities:

'There are many interesting interactive games during breaks to motivate audience to participate with free products provided by sponsors. I think it is very effective to let audience to understand those international companies not only just putting their logos everywhere in the gymnasium but also putting efforts and ideas to share the joy with audience. Free samples.'

Besides, Supporter (M) also admitted that:

'It is always good to have something for free. When I am lucky to have some free gifts during the games, I keep them as souvenirs.'

Live spectators' preference for interactive activities and free gifts from multinational companies indicates that it is critical for multinational companies (as sponsors) to implement these strategies in order to build close connection with live spectators by understanding products with free samples and understand values from enjoying the games together.

b) Local Companies

Evidently regarding local companies, live

spectators accept that their financial strength and reputation are not as powerful as multinationals, but they still give tolerance and trust. Moreover, live spectators affirm the feeling of being part of the team community is greater than individual itself (McAlexander et al., 2002); hence, the feeling can be extended regionally to local companies who offer sponsorship. As such, BasketballSupporter (F) remembered that:

'I think local companies sponsoring sporting events are more effective because their products and services are more close to daily needs, especially for local people. I called once to rent a car from the flyer I got from a basketball game. I actually had a nice conversation with to one of them during breaks, and he seemed a really nice guy so I also got his name card. I think the trust between us is built very quickly through topics about basketball. I think I will definitely choose him in the future when I need this service.'

Furthermore, CricketSupporter (M) demonstrated that:

'When I used to play in my local cricket team in school, we did have local business to support us and we thought they were like part of our team. They were all from my local area, and we felt like we already known them from what they are doing in my daily life, I had a strong sense of trust for them. Especially, sometimes, during the games or after the games, those business people also joined us of drinks and dinners, which made the atmosphere very friendly, it felt like we were big family together and we were helping each other. For example, if I need a roof, I probably would go to them first. If they support the same team as I do, I probably would have

more trust on them from emotional side before I start to know whether their business is successful or not. There is a kind of feeling related to good memory. Since I have my own business now, if in the future, I have the chance to sponsor my team, I would definitely to do that to show my support.'

This suggests that live spectators are naturally belonging to certain 'imagined communities'. Sponsors are appreciated by live spectators because of their goodwill and support for teams (Meenaghan, 1991; 2001). By creating an emotional bond between spectators and local sponsors, and building trust face-to-face via sporting events as a communicational bridge, live spectators are likely to be sponsors' customers in daily life, even creating brand communities around sponsors' brands. In return, sports team communities therefore benefit from the establishment of sponsors' brand communities as the most important ingredient.

To conclude, sporting events bring great pleasure and influence to live spectators' everyday life. Those spectators as sports consumers not only seek the affirmation of self-identity, but also the geographical identity of where they currently are, or come from. Furthermore, value sharing exists among live spectators and also sponsors. Live spectators share their emotions, stories, passions and strong sense of belonging in the 'imagined communities' while they also believe sponsors are part of them. Sponsors therefore are required to have matching brand image and ethics with the teams. Over all, live spectators hold positive attitudes and brand preference on sponsorship and sponsor since they provide goodwill and support for teams. Sponsors' marketing initiatives during events bring

persuasion in their daily life consumption (although limited) to live spectators, especially those who have low involvement. Live spectators also require differently in terms of particular marketing initiatives (depending on company organisational size) to communicate with them, which contributes to suggestions for companies who are or will be sponsors to establish effective marketing initiatives in the future.

DISCUSSION

Depending on interviewees' different narration of experience, three findings regarding live spectators' perspectives towards sponsorship are concluded accordingly. The findings refer to theories as well as previous research presented within the relationship model in theoretical framework.

First of all, the analyzed data indicates that live spectators have brand preference on sponsors' brands that are connected to the same teams as themselves, and the positive attitudes influences their purchasing decisions in daily life. Taking a look back on the theoretical framework, sport itself evolves into an indispensable mediator between sponsors and live spectators (Fullerton, 2010) since companies have utilized sporting events as a promotional vehicle, including not only free media exposure but also increasing sales since 1983 (Skinner and Rukavina, 2003). Spectators have become potential customers for sponsors from that moment. According to interviewees, live spectators assume sponsors also belong to the team 'imagined communities' that is composed of live spectators who share the same sense of identity, belonging (Crawford, 2004) and values (McAlexander et al., 2002). This confirms Meenaghan's (1991; 2001) view

of live spectators' appreciation of sponsors' goodwill and support for teams and events. Live spectators therefore show preference to sponsors' brands because of their belief in sponsors' goodwill at the first point of a purchase decision making process, which is of great advantage to companies in reaching a wider range of spectators (potential customers).

Furthermore, live spectators also expect and require sponsors to share the same values and spirit that reflects from sponsors' brand images without damaging team images because the root of spectators' preference is their belief in a particular team. Consequently, spectators cannot accept any negative influence brought to their teams from sponsors' behaviour, damaging belief and pride. One managerial implication considered by this study is that companies should pay attention to constructing a positive brand image while sponsoring sports teams in order to approach the same healthy public image as the team to achieve the preference and support from spectators. Meanwhile, teams should also think wisely when choosing sponsors.

Second, live spectators who have a different level of involvement react differently concerning sponsors' marketing initiatives during sporting events, which is to say that spectators who have low involvement bear deeper impression of sponsors' marketing initiatives than spectators who have high involvement. Watching sport is a hedonic consumption behaviour for all kinds of spectators in the stadium to express emotional feeling, satisfaction enjoyment and fantasy (Babin et al., 1994; Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). In spite of this fact, spectators who have high involvement, care about how players perform and game results as their central satisfaction. In contrast, spectators who

have low involvement expect multi-satisfaction (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982) such as social interaction with friends, family, strangers and additionally dynamic atmosphere and participation in interactive games during intervals. Sponsors who utilize this distinctive opportunity, (for example compared with media advertising), interact directly with spectators during sporting events, and attract more attention from normal spectators than engaged ones.

This can be one of the key findings of this research. Spectators with lower involvement enjoy sporting events from diverse aspects, which implies that live spectators with less involvement of sports might be a more interesting target group for sponsors to set up marketing initiatives accordingly, compared to those highly involved ones. This will bring diffused influence into their daily life consumption to achieve promotional goals.

Thirdly, because of live spectators brand preference for sponsors brings the great advantage in daily purchasing. Those potential customers could also build up brand communities around sponsors to enhance their customer relationships (Muniz Jr and O'Guinn, 2001), which is beneficial from live spectators' strong existing 'imagined communities' around teams. This suggests that teams 'imagined communities' is the most important component of sponsors' brand communities. As a result, it is very important for sponsors to create effective communicational initiatives with live spectators.

Those spectators show different expectations according to the organisational size of sponsors. Even though spectators spontaneously carry preference because of sponsors' goodwill and support for teams, they find it hard to have a tight connection with multinational sponsors. This is because

companies treat the business relationship (with sports teams) as potential for profitability, but neglect to openly communicate the presence of shared values with live spectators. This refers to the research conducted by Weber Shandwick (2012) which points out how hard it is for large international companies to get respect and trust from consumers. To highlight that change they claim international companies have increased 23% respect while local companies increased 55% (2011-2012). The main reason for this difference is consumers offer more trust to companies who are relevant in a local context, such as producing, employing, and investing locally and also engaging in local societal issues (Nielsen, 2013). Consumers therefore have a strong desire to shop locally from small business rather than from multinational companies who appear faceless and often lack direct communication (Burson-Marsteller, 2011). As consumers, live spectators embrace direct marketing or communication initiatives from multinational sponsors including interactive activities and free samples or coupons. For example by offering interactive activities, (such as competitions related to team history), they engage a wide range of live spectators to participate and pass on the message from sponsors who care about team and players the same as those spectators do.

In contrast, it is easier for spectators to have trust in local companies. One reason is that sports teams, spectators and local companies are bound together emotionally in sharing the same geographical identity. Another reason is local companies are involved in live spectators' daily life through their products, services, personal contacts and local activities (Nielsen, 2013). Sponsoring sporting events is therefore believed by spectators to be a wide platform

for local businesses to extend their customer base. As live spectators have a strong sense of belonging to the locality (Crawford, 2004), local companies (as sponsors) should emphasise the emotional bond with spectators in marketing initiatives during sporting events to convey the message of friendship or being an extended family. Then with the local area build the foundation of a relationship with spectators (as potential customers). Meanwhile, local businesses should also take advantage of supplying good quality products and services to live spectators' daily life to enhance customer trust.

LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This thesis has investigated the views of live spectators in sporting events, on sponsorship and sponsors' marketing initiatives with phenomenological interviews. Even though the phenomenological approach is appropriate when exploring how individuals understand a phenomenon and provide rich data personal experiences and emotions (Thompson et al., 1989), the sample size is limited. In this case eight spectators participated in the study. The concern in regard to sample size is the difficulty in yielding a generalised result for an accurate population (Wilcke, 2002). The samples were all young adults from the middle class, rather than juveniles, middle aged, or seniors from other social classes, which can be seen as a distinct limitation. Hence, one suggestion for further research would be interviewing with extended sample ranges by taking into consideration different ages and social statuses to gain more comprehensive results.

In addition, more varied cultural origins or literacy levels also would have

considerable influence on how people perceive particular phenomena in regard to hedonic consumption as Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) claimed. However, the major discussion is focused on their current cultural status (where they exist at the moment of interview) in this research. Another exploration for future studies, as a result, could cover this limitation by investigating live spectators from diverse cultural origins, which would contribute to a broader understanding of how hedonic sports live spectators view sponsorship. Finally, to conduct an in-depth study and exploration of brand community in sports is highly recommended. Through this angle, a comprehensive and thorough understanding on how sport teams, sponsors and live spectators interact could be generated and efficient communication strategies could be implemented among the three parties.

CONCLUSION

This study addresses the research gap of how live spectators perceive sponsorship and marketing initiatives of sponsors in sporting events using a phenomenological approach. It discovers the results from in-depth analysis based on a model constructed by interlaced relationships among sporting events, teams, sponsors and live spectators. The findings show that enjoying sporting events bring active social influence in live spectators' daily life within and outside their social circles. As an important part of sporting events, sponsorship generally wins the positive attitudes from live spectators, and also sponsors obtain brand preference and limited persuasion for live spectators on their marketing initiative. Brand communities around sponsors' brands could be established by live spectators (as

customers) in daily life because of the tight connection in team 'imagined communities' extending from sporting events. Therefore, it is vital for companies to create effective marketing initiatives in sporting events to communicate with live spectators (as potential customers).

Rather surprisingly, live spectators with low involvement are more interesting target group for sponsors' promotional plans during sporting events. The author argues that this owes to live spectators (with low involvement) enjoying the whole environment and atmosphere of the event such as decoration, activities and socialising rather than the game itself. Due to live spectators' different requirements towards different sizes of sponsors, the managerial implications of this study are that multinational companies (as sponsors) should apply interactive activities to communicate more effectively with live spectators, and offer free samples for experiencing their products. Local companies (as sponsors) enhance their emotional bond with geographic similarities in the promotional message they send to live spectators through marketing initiatives.

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APPENDIX

Examples of Following Questions in the Interviews:

When did you watch the latest game in stadium?

For student: 'would you consider working for those companies that you have seen their advertisements in the stadiums in the future?

Could you describe that experience?

For self-employed: 'have you considered or would you consider sponsoring any sport events in your living area?

What do you feel about yourself being in the live game?

What type of audience are you? for example, passionate or just normal audience?

For employees: are there any companies you have worked or been working for supporting sport events? If yes, how do you think about it? What influence is brought to the company or team or you? If not, would you like your employer to do that?'

What do you usually do during breaks?

How do you feel about seeing those advertisements when you watch games?

What advertisements or companies' logos have you seen in the games?

Is there any moment that you got annoyed with advertisements during watching live games?

Would you give me an example that you think the image of the club and ads not matching when you are watching a game?

If there is any brand you really don't like and you avoid buying products or service from?

Have you ever bought any merchandise of the sports teams you support?

What companies do you think are good for sports to have sponsorship with?

How do you think about advertisements when watching sport games on TV and in stadium or pitch?

Pictures Shown to Interviewees in the Interviews:

Picture 1: Jersey of Stock City Soccer Team from Premier League



Picture 2: Comparison Hockey Jersey between Sweden and USA



Picture 3: A Basketball Gymnasium in NBA

