

Sports Sponsorship and its Influence on First Bank's Image in Kwara State, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

Sports Sponsorship has become a major promotional tool for business organisations across the world. It is a powerful and impactful marketing advertising technique used to generate brand awareness and customer loyalty. The study investigated the impact of Sports programme sponsorship on brand awareness, brand association and on the corporate image of First Bank Limited in Kwara State, Nigeria. A descriptive research design of survey method was used. The population for this study was comprised of 336 staff members of the bank in all the 15 branches located across Kwara State. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 4 branches located in Ilorin, the capital of the state. A sample of 100 respondents was randomly selected for the study. The research instrument was a structured questionnaire. Person Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the hypotheses for the study. The findings revealed that; there is significant relationship between sports sponsorship and Brand Awareness (calculated r-value of 0.67 and the p-value of 0.00); Brand Association (calculated r-value of 0.40 and the p-value of 0.00) and Corporate Image (calculated r-value of 0.33 and the p-value of .001) of First Bank Limited, Kwara State, Nigeria at 0.05 alpha level. Based on the findings, it was recommended that private Organizations should be involved in sponsoring sporting events in order to improve brand awareness, enhance positive association with customers to fast track sales and increase brand reputation and image.

KEYWORDS: Sport Marketing, Sport Sponsorship, Brand Awareness, Brand Association, Corporate Image

INTRODUCTION

Corporate image has become a critical intangible asset that significantly influences consumer perception, trust, and loyalty. Within this evolving environment, sports sponsorship has emerged as a strategic marketing and public relations tool through which corporations seek to enhance visibility, foster emotional connections, and strengthen brand equity among diverse audiences (Tahir, Adnan and Saeed 2024). Sponsorship refers to a mutually beneficial business arrangement in which a company or individual provides financial or other forms of support to an event, organization, individual, or project in exchange for promotional benefits. It is a symbiotic and strategic partnership where the sponsor provides resources, such as funds, products, or services, to the sponsored entity or activities. Cornwell, T. B. (2019). In return, the sponsor receives various forms of exposure, advertising, branding, or other marketing opportunities associated with the sponsored entity (George, & Wakefield, 2018). It allows sponsors to enhance their brand visibility, reach their target audience, demonstrate corporate social responsibility, and establish positive associations with the sponsored entity. Sponsorship is a common practice in various fields, including sports, entertainment, arts, culture, community events, and nonprofit organizations.

Sponsorship can take many forms. Financial Sponsorship involves providing monetary support to the sponsored entity or event, which may cover expenses, investments, or participation fees. In-Kind Sponsorship offers products, services, or resources that is relevant to the sponsored entity or event instead of providing financial support. In Media Sponsorship, sponsors may offer media-related benefits such as advertising space, airtime, and others to promote their brand or products. Naming Rights Sponsorship occur when a sponsor's name is incorporated into the

name of an event, venue, team, or project. For example, a sport facility may be named after a sponsoring company (SponsorUnited, 2024). While in Endorsement Sponsorship, a company or individual may be associated with a particular athlete, celebrity, or public figure, leveraging their popularity or influence for promotional purpose (Hollebeek, Srivastava, & Chen, 2019).

Sports sponsorship as one of the sponsorship avenues plays a crucial role in increasing brand awareness for companies. When a company sponsors a sports team, event, or athlete, it gains exposure to a wide audience of fans and spectators who are engaged with the sport. Sports sponsorship provides a platform for brands to connect with a passionate and engaged audience, create positive associations, and increase brand awareness through extensive reach, emotional connections, media exposure, and word-of-mouth marketing (Nwabiwe, Akarah and Nabofa, 2025).

A brand is a combination of tangible and intangible elements that represent a product, service, organisations, or individual. It encompasses the overall perception, reputation and recognition of an entity in the minds of its target audience. Some of the key components of a brand are identity, values and personality, perception and reputation, differentiation, emotional connection, consistency and perceived value (Almutairi, 2025). Effective value of brand management involves strategic planning, communication, and consistent execution to shape and reinforce the desired brand image in the minds of consumers. Brand can have significant impact on consumer behaviour, purchase decisions and long-term loyalty (Simon, 2013).

Sports branding refers to the process of creating and managing the brand identity and image of a sports team, athlete or sporting event. It involves developing a unique and recognizable brand that reverberates with fans, sponsors and general public. Sports branding encompasses various elements such as logos, team colours, merchandise, marketing campaigns and overall brand strategies (Simon, 2013) Sports sponsorship plays a significant role in establishing brand

associations for companies. The relationship between sports sponsorship and brand association can be better achieved through positive image building, emotional connections, credibility, shared values, differentiation, target audience engagement, and leveraging the influence of sports entities. These associations can contribute to brand loyalty, preference, and long-term success in the market (Asada, Yan, Ko, & Lee, 2023)

Sports sponsorship also plays a substantial role in shaping the corporate image of an organization by increasing brand visibility, aligning with values, creating emotional connections, engaging with communities, differentiating from competitors, generating media coverage, and fostering employee pride. These factors collectively contribute to a positive perception of the organization and can enhance its overall corporate image (Simmons, Naraine, & Greenwell, 2023)

First Bank Nigeria Limited, a public finance institution was founded in 1894 as Bank of British West Africa. It converted to a public company in 1970 and was listed on the Nigerian Stock Exchange (NSE) in 1971. It was renamed First Bank of Nigeria in 1979 with the Headquarters located at 35 Marina, Lagos, Nigeria. The customers of the First Bank Group are serviced from a network of over 700 business locations across Africa. First Bank has an extensive Agent Banking network, with over 200,000 locations across Nigeria. The Nigerian banking business operates nationally, with an active customer base of over 10 million. (Wikipedia, 2023). First Bank Nigeria Limited had been supporting events, teams, and athletes across different sports in Nigeria over a long period of time. First Bank's sports sponsorship activities encompassed both grassroots and professional sports. They have been known to sponsor major tournaments in sports like football, basketball, athletics, golf, and tennis. They partner with Sport Organizations, Federations, and Associations to promote and develop sports in the country. (ThisDay, 2021).

Kwara State provides a relevant context for examining these dynamics due to its growing youth population, increasing digital connectivity, and active participation in sports-related activities at educational and community levels. Despite the strategic importance of sports sponsorship in Nigeria's banking industry, empirical studies that examine its image-related outcomes within specific local and digital contexts remain limited. This gap accentuates the need for systematic research into how sports sponsorship initiatives, when reconciled through digital platforms, influence public perception of First Bank Nigeria in Kwara State.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- i. Examine the effect of brand awareness on First Bank Image
- ii. Assess the influence of brand association on First Bank Image
- iii. Determine the impact of corporate image on First Bank Image

Research Hypothesis

The following hypotheses were postulated based on the research question above:

Ho1: Sponsorship of sport programmes will not have significant impact on the brand awareness of first bank Nigeria Limited.

Ho2: Sponsorship of sport programmes will not have significant impact on brand association of First Bank Nigeria Limited.

Ho3: Sponsoring of sport programme will not have significant impact on the corporate image of first bank Nigeria Limited.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive research design of survey method was used. The population for this study was comprised of 336 staff members of the bank in all the 15 branches located across Kwara State. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 4 branches located on Unity Road, Saw-Mill, Surulere and Ajase-Ipo Road all in Ilorin. Random sampling technique was used to select

100 respondents for the study. The research instrument was a self-designed structured questionnaire. Person Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the null hypotheses for the study

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between sport sponsorship programmes and brand awareness on the corporate image of First Bank Limited, Kwara State, Nigeria

Table 1: PPMC showing Impact of sports programmes sponsorship on brand awareness of First Bank.

Variable	No	X	σ	<i>df</i>	<i>r-value</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Decision</i>
Brand Awareness	100	1.41	0.49	98	0.67	.000	H0
Sport Sponsorship							Rejected
Programmes	100	1.24	0.43				

$P \leq 0.05$

Table one revealed the calculated r-value of 0.67 and the p-value of 0.00 with 98 degree of freedom at 0.05 alpha level. Since the p-value of 0.00 is less than 0.05, therefore the null hypothesis one is rejected which implies that there is significant relationship between brand awareness and Sport sponsorship programmes on the corporate image of First Bank Limited, Kwara State, Nigeria

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between sport sponsorship programmes and brand association on the corporate image of First Bank Limited, Kwara State, Nigeria

Table 2: PPMC showing Impact of sports programmes sponsorship on brand association of First Bank.

Variable	No	X	σ	<i>df</i>	<i>r-value</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Decision</i>
Brand Association	100	1.40	0.49				H0
				98	0.40	.000	Rejected
Sport Sponsorship Programmes	100	1.24	0.43				

$P \leq 0.05$

Table three revealed the calculated r-value of 0.40 and the p-value of 0.00 with 98 degree of freedom at 0.05 alpha level. Since the p-value of 0.00 is less than 0.05, therefore the null hypothesis two is rejected which implies that there is significant relationship between sports sponsorship programmes and brand association of First Bank.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between sport sponsorship programmes and Corporate Image of First Bank Limited, Kwara State, Nigeria

Table 3: PPMC showing Impact of sports programmes sponsorship on corporate image of First Bank.

Variable	No	X	σ	<i>df</i>	<i>r-value</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Decision</i>
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Corporate Image	100	1.46	0.50				H0
				98	0.33	.001	Rejected
Sport Sponsorship Programmes	100	1.24	0.43				

$P \leq 0.05$

Table four revealed the calculated r-value of 0.33 and the p-value of .001 with 98 degree of freedom at 0.05 alpha level. Since the p-value of .001 is less than 0.05, therefore the null hypothesis three is rejected which implies that there is significant relationship between sports sponsorship programmes and corporate image of First Bank.

Discussion of Findings

Sports sponsorship is the company's use of its resources as marketing and promotional tools in the field of sports in order to achieve certain objectives. The study investigated the impact of Sports programme sponsorship on brand awareness, brand association and on the corporate image of First Bank Limited in Kwara State, Nigeria. The study found that there is significant relationship between brand awareness and Sport sponsorship programmes on the corporate image of First Bank Nigeria Limited. This was buttressed in the report of Yin, (2025), who described brand awareness as a technique in which businesses utilize the images or portraits of well-known sport personalities or sport team as a marketing strategy to enhance the sale of their products or services. He buttressed that branding as an act of giving a particular name and image to goods, events and services so that people will be attracted to patronize them. Marketers use branding as a strategy to advertise and make favorable impact to

sell their products or services to the targeted customers. Simon, (2013) stated that effective value of brand management involves strategic planning, communication, and consistent execution to shape and reinforce the desired brand image in the minds of consumers. Brand can have significant impact on consumer behaviour, purchase decisions and long-term loyalty. This may account for why First Bank Nigeria Limited has been able to sustain their large number of customers for a long time.

The study further revealed that there is significant relationship between sports sponsorship programmes and brand association of First Bank. Sponsorship allows companies to meet with prospective customers, vendors and others in unique situations. Catane, Lambas, Laquinon, Labo, Mirinda, Orbita, Sayman, Tacio and Aquino, (2025) stated that the objectives of sponsorship are to create promotional opportunities, improving community relations, fostering favorable brand and company associations, creating entertainment opportunities and gaining publicity. This might be responsible for First Bank customers spread all over the nation as reported by Olatunji (2022) that First Bank has an extensive Agent Banking network, with over 200,000 locations across Nigeria and with an active customer base of over 10 million. People who attend sponsored activities or special events already have favorable feelings about the activity taking place. These positive attitudes are easily transferred to a company that has provided funding. Furthermore, the main focus of sponsorship is not just exposure of the brand to a target audience, it is image transfer: the sponsor ties itself to the event, organization or team so that it becomes associated with its image in people's minds (Sapong and Zungu, 2025).

The findings from the study also revealed that there is significant relationship between sports sponsorship programmes and corporate image of first bank. SportBusiness Group (2025) reported that Sports sponsorship continues to dominate present-day sponsorship activities, accounting for the largest share of sponsored sectors worldwide. Industry analyses indicate that sports attract a significantly higher proportion of sponsorship investment compared to other areas

such as arts and culture, media, franchises, and various other sectors, highlighting sport as the leading platform for sponsorship engagement. This might be connected with the fact that sport embraces a rich range of values and symbols that can be expressed in image. The image of sport has the potential to influence the behavior of all those involved with a sports organization, including its members, spectators and sponsors toward their products. According to Simmons, Naraine, & Greenwell, (2023) Sports sponsorship plays a substantial role in shaping the corporate image of an organization by increasing brand visibility, aligning with values, creating emotional connections, engaging with communities, differentiating from competitors, generating media coverage, and fostering employee pride. These factors collectively contribute to a positive perception of the organization and can enhance its overall corporate image. First Bank Nigeria Limited's involvement in the sponsorship of different sporting events must have enhanced her brand image, coming from the angle of public perception, reputation, customer satisfaction, brand recognition and financial performance. No wonder her profit before tax rose by 12.4 percent to ₦147 Billion as of the end of 2022 from ₦130.9 in the previous year. This was a statement credited to Dr. Adesola Adeduntan, the Chief Executive Officer of FirstBank (Commercial Banking Group). Adeduntan (2022)

Conclusion

Based on the results of the findings, the following conclusions were drawn, That:

1. sport sponsorship programmes have significant positive effect on brand awareness of first Bank Nigeria Limited,
2. sport sponsorship programmes have significant relationship with brand association of first Bank Limited,
3. the corporate image of first Bank Nigeria Limited is positively influenced by her involvement in sport sponsorship programmes

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were drawn:

1. Private Organizations should sponsor different types of sporting event in order to improve brand awareness.
2. Corporate organizations should associate their brand with target consumers in order to enhance brand loyalty and to fast track productivity or sales by getting involved in sponsorship of sport programmes
3. Private organization should get involved in sponsoring sporting activities in order to increase their brand reputation and image

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