

The effect of post-Covid-19 sport sponsorship on brand awareness of Premier League fans.

Victor Peenz



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Tish Taylor

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I hereby declare that the Research Report submitted for the BCOM (Hons) strategic brand management degree to The Independent Institute of Education is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for degree purposes.

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Title

The effect of post-Covid-19 sport sponsorship on brand awareness of Premier League fans.

Introduction

The Premier League is the most followed football league in the world, with people watching from 188 different countries and 1 billion different households (Premier League, 2021). The league consists of 20 teams that play a combined total of 380 matches during the season (Premier League, 2021). The Premier League generated 2.844 billion British Pounds in the 2019/2020 season (SportsPro, 2021). Sponsorships account for a large part of the revenue generated in the Premier League, where the combined total of the kit sponsorship alone for the 2018/2019 season has an estimated worth of 349.1 million British Pounds (Lange, 2021).

Sponsorship deals are used by different companies as marketing campaigns and do not only include kit sponsors used by the participating teams but include all the of the sponsorship within the stadium (Matchett, 2013). These stadium sponsors are used for a variety of marketing purposes, but mainly to achieve brand awareness (Hopper, 2021). With live sporting events being cancelled or taking place behind closed doors, the absence of fans in stadiums presents brands with the challenge of connecting with fans without them being physically in the stadium (Nott, 2021; Parry, 2021). No live sport presents a unique challenge for sponsors based on the number of on-site activations they host across sports leagues (Nielsen, 2021). March 2020 saw a 40% year-on-year drop in the number of sport sponsorship deals, as brands weren't willing to commit (Nott, 2021).

In reviewing sport sponsorship literature, the main objectives of sponsorship are to increase brand awareness and ultimately increase sales though the continuous exposure to new possible consumers that witness the showcase of new products in an exciting and exhilarating environment (Florian, 2017; Fan, 2018; Moahmoudabadi, Keshtidar & Razavi, 2019; Coelho de Brito, 2019; Aissa & Matar, 2016).

According to Nielsen Sports (2021:2) “A disrupted world is changing the value of sponsorship.” Covid-19 and the uncertainty it brings has accelerated many shifts in the way rights holders sell sponsorship, brands make sponsorship investments and how commercial partnerships are activated (Nielsen Sports, 2021). Covid-19 had a massive impact on the world and quickly changed the norm of living for most (ILO, FAO, IFAD & WHO, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in the Premier League being suspended from 13 March 2020, commencing later in 2020 but without spectators (Hawkins, 2020). This meant that brands sponsoring the Premier League had no live spectators in stadiums to view their advertising or branding campaigns and experiences. Pre-Covid-19 literature provides data of the effectiveness of this marketing technique and offers models to explain, however, there is little post-Covid-19 academic research on the topic of sport sponsorship, specifically in terms of the Premier League. Based on the economic value of sponsorship of the Premier League, it is necessary to determine if post-covid sport sponsorship has an effect on brand awareness of Premier League fans. It is evident that research on the effect of Covid on sport sponsorship brand awareness of the Premier League is needed. The way fans work, travel, communicate and socialise are fuelled by advancing technology and connectivity, which inform and shape the sports sponsorship market in 2021 and beyond (Nielsen Sports, 2021). Brands are being forced to dictate a more profitable deal model stimulating a shift towards more pay-for-performance contracts and moving away from big up-front cheques (Globaldata, 2021). The key drivers impacting the value of sponsorship are new sponsorship entrants, new channels, and new fan necessities (Nielsen Sports, 2021). It is therefore necessary to understand if post-COVID-19 sport sponsorship has an effect on Premier League fans in light of the suspension of live sporting events. This research will present literature on sport sponsorship for brand awareness and review how sport sponsorship has changed as a result of COVID-19.

Rationale

There have been countless studies on the sponsorship of sports in a variety of different settings. Aaker's (1991) brand awareness pyramid serves as the theoretical framework for this research as it identifies the various levels of brand awareness, which is the aim of sport sponsorship. Simpson (2016) further defines the brand awareness through brand activation, which is a campaign, event, or any interaction through which the company drives customer actions and aims at generating brand awareness pre-COVID-19 sport sponsorship, specifically during live sporting events and within the stadium, aimed at achieving brand activation. However, without the presence of fans in stadiums, sport sponsors have had to adapt and innovate their brand activation strategies.

Jaravaza and Guveya (2013) conducted a study in Zimbabwe on football supporters and the sponsorship of Castle Lager beer influencing the awareness of the brand routed in the Aaker (1991) brand awareness theory. Grimaldi (2014) researched "the effect of sport sponsorship on brand awareness, corporate image and brand association." Mainly focusing on Heineken's sponsor during the UEFA Champions League with findings very similar to the study by Jaravaza and Guveya (2013) concluding that there is a positive relationship between these factors and that through their findings state that sport sponsorship is an effective manner of increasing brand awareness.

These studies were conducted before the commencement of the Covid-19 pandemic and although their research serves as a good basis the primary factor in these studies changed due to regulations regarding the Covid-19 pandemic that disallowed spectators to attend live matches.

Post-COVID-19 research by Ratten (2020), Horky (2020), Conolly (2020) and Hopper (2021) broadly explain the effects of COVID-19 on different aspects of sponsorship in the sport industry but, these articles are not substantiated by data. This presents a research opportunity to conduct a study in a quantitative manner assessing the effect of post-COVID-19 sport on brand awareness of Premier League fans.

Problem statement

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, sport sponsorship within stadiums during live sporting events had the power to capture audiences attending the game in stadiums used by the Premier League to better their brand awareness (Horky, 2020). The main factor accounted for was that these stadiums were going to attract large numbers of football fans from all over the world to attend these sporting events and witness the branding and advertising the sponsored companies have set up (Conolly, 2020). Venue-based channels of communication are vital to partnerships, which is why attendance is so important, not only for gate revenue, but for sponsorship revenue (Wakefield, 2020). Due to Covid-19 these live sporting events could not be attended in person (Horky, 2020). This created uncertainty as to the effect this absence of fans would have on brand awareness campaigns. As a result, brands and sponsors have shifted their focus to digital platforms without understanding if the suspension of live sporting events will affect brand awareness sponsorship.

Research goal

The aim of this research is to determine if there is an effect of post-COVID-19 sport sponsorship on the brand awareness of Premier League fans. The research is being conducted to reflect what the effect of COVID-19 has on brand awareness through sponsorship of sport specifically the Premier League fans. (Horky, 2020). This research will assist in understanding whether sport sponsorship in stadiums requires the attendance of fans to achieve brand awareness.

Research question

What is the effect of post COVID-19 sport sponsorship on the brand awareness of Premier League fans?

Objectives

1. To analyse sport sponsorship and brand awareness by means of a literature review.
2. To analyse the effect of audience attendance during live sporting events by analysing the relevant literature.
3. To determine the effect of post-COVID-19 sport sponsorship on brand awareness of Premier League fans by means of an empirical study.
4. To interpret results from empirical analyses and literature review in order to identify the strength and direction of the relationship between post-COVID-19 sport sponsorship and brand awareness of Premier League fans.

To draw conclusions and make recommendations regarding the effect of post-COVID-19 sport sponsorship and brand awareness of Premier League fans.

Hypothesis:

H_0 : Post-COVID-19 sport sponsorship has no effect on the brand awareness of Premier League fans.

H_a : Post-COVID-19 sport sponsorship has an effect on the brand awareness of Premier League fans.

Theoretical foundation

Aaker (1991: 188) describes brand awareness as “the ability of a potential buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category.” Aaker’s awareness pyramid will serve as the theoretical foundation of this study as it explains the various levels of achieving brand awareness. Brand is directly linked to Aaker’s brand equity model and the role of brand awareness in brand equity will depend on the context and level of awareness achieved (Aaker, 1991).

Brand awareness involves a continuum which ranges from an uncertain feeling that the brand is recognized, to a belief that the brand is the only one in the product class (Aaker, 1991). The continuum is represented by three different levels of brand

awareness as illustrated in the awareness pyramid. The lowest level, at the base of the awareness triangle, is when a respondent is unaware that a brand exists and is unaware of the brand, even when aided. The next level is brand recognition, which is based upon an aided recall test (Aaker, 1991). At this level, respondents are given a set of brand names from a specific product class and are asked which ones they have heard of before. This is the minimal level of brand awareness and the link between the brand and product class is not a strong link. The third level from the base is brand recall and is termed “unaided recall” (Aaker, 1991:77). At this level, respondents are asked to name a brand in the product class, without being aided. The ability to identify brands at this level is associated with a stronger brand position (Aaker, 1991). Respondents can recall more items on an aided recall basis than when unaided. The first brand name given by respondents in an unaided recall task has achieved top-of-mind awareness, which is the top level of the awareness pyramid (Aaker, 1991). This top-of-mind brand indicates that it is ahead of other brands in the respondent’s mind.

According to Aaker (1991) brand awareness can create value in four ways, namely, providing an anchor to which other associations can be attached, familiarity/liking, substance/commitment, and brands to consider. Brand associations are a set of remembered qualities that help communicate information to the customer (Smith, 2016). These qualities should provide positive attitudes and feelings and differentiate one brand from the competition, and therefore provide a reason to buy that brand over the other (Smith, 2016). Associations represent the basis for purchase decisions and brand loyalty as they are the underlying value of the brand name (Aaker, 1991). Associations cannot be created until brand recognition is achieved. Recognition provides a brand with a sense of familiarity and people like the familiar (Aaker, 1991). Brand name awareness signals commitment and substance and provides the consumer with a sense of security (Aaker, 1991).

Sports sponsorship differs from conventional advertising in that it can captivate the audience more effectively than traditional advertising (Gay, 2017). Brands have advertised in stadiums during live sporting events to create brand awareness as the audience experiences a positive sense of emotion and excitement around the sporting

event and are less likely to feel the intrusiveness of sponsor related messaging (Gay, 2017). Audiences attending live sporting events in stadiums provide a captive audience for brand advertisers and sponsors, and with the suspension of live sporting events, brand activation may not be achieved. It is therefore important to determine if Premier League fans can recognize and recall brands that sponsored Premier League sporting events since the start of COVID-19. This information will indicate if sport sponsorship for brand awareness has occurred during the suspension of live sporting events.

Literature review and conceptualization

The focus of this study is the Premier league football fans as they are the consumers of the brands that sponsor the live sporting events and advertise during tournaments. The population and sample of this research study is Premier League football fans.

The Premier League is the most popular and watched football league in the world (Lange, 2021). According to Lange (2021) there were 14.62 million attendees at the different live matches during the 2018/2019 season. This number was significantly lower in the 2019/2020 season when there were 92 matches played during the Covid-19 pandemic that were closed off to public and could only be viewed virtually which resulted in an attendance of only 11.33 million (Lange, 2021). What was the effect of this lack of attendance on brands using the matches as a marketing platform to enhance their brands awareness and through that enhancement activate their brands?

Sport Sponsorship

Sponsorship is defined as one of the most impactful marketing techniques (Horky, 2020). It involves two parties, the sponsor who provides the service and/or products and the sponsee who receives the service and/or products (Lange, 2021). This marketing technique offers both parties certain benefits, as is the case of football sponsorship, where the brand attempts to achieve brand awareness and the football club receives financial gains (Mahmoudabadi *et al.*, 2019). People who attend sponsored sporting events already have positive feelings about the activity taking place and these feelings are easily transferred to the brand providing sponsorship

(Grimaldi, 2014). The focus of sport sponsorship is not just exposure of the brand to create brand awareness, it is to create an association in the mind of the audience between the brand and the sporting event, football club and event organisers.

According to Cosmas Jaravaza and Guveya (2013) it is important to repetitively expose a consumer to a brand, if the brand wants to ensure that action will take place or that the consumers preference will be positively affected. By sponsoring a certain football club or sporting event the sponsor aims at enhancing their exposure to the consumer through stadium advertising to achieve brand awareness. By repetitively exposing the consumer to the brand and product using advertisements during live sporting events they are applying the exposure theory. According to the exposure theory when consumers are in a situation or event that they are extremely involved in, their central processing route is used to make decisions that involve actual considerations (Cosmas Jaravaza & Guveya, 2013). Through sponsorship, the exposure theory is applied, as the live audience are inherently in an environment of participation and involvement that allows the information displayed by brands and their products, to be processed by the central route, allowing spectators to not only become more aware of or loyal to the brand, but allowing the brand to possibly influence their perceptions and preferences (Cosmas *et al.*, 2013).

In a study by Mahmoudabadi *et al.*, (2019) it was found that sport sponsorship contributes to brand awareness and overall business performance, adding significant value for the industry. Sports sponsorship is considered as one of the marketing communications tools that can communicate effectively with target consumer through their passion and emotion towards sport (Mahmoudabadi *et al.*, 2019). Similarly, Guy's (2017) study on the impact of sport sponsorships on NASCAR fans and found that consumers recalled more brands after attending a live event than they did when viewing tv commercials for the same brand. Sport sponsorship receives double exposure through media coverage of televised or digitally produced events, aligning with the repeated exposure theory. Sport sponsorship is attractive due to the high media coverage of the events, the propensity to attract large audiences at each event and through the media, the provision of a simplistic measure of segmentation and the higher visibility opportunities (Grimaldi, 2014).

Studies have found that highly involved fans are more likely to attend multiple sporting events and show higher recognition rates of sponsors (Guy, 2017). Consequently, fan involvement is a crucial component to brand awareness since varying levels of consumer involvement with a team or event will affect their attentiveness to sponsor messages (Guy, 2017).

Brand awareness

Consumer brand awareness has been cited as the main objective of brands engaging in sport sponsorship agreements and as a measurement of sponsorship effectiveness (Gay, 2017). Brand awareness, according to Aaker (1991) is the ability of the consumer to recognize or recall the brand as a member of a certain product category. Brand awareness is intensified by the brand recognition and brand recall. Brand awareness is the first step in the decision-making process which influences if a consumer recognizes, considers, and purchases the sponsor's product or service (Gay, 2017). Through the use of sponsorship companies keep their brand relevant to their consumers and revolutionize the consumer perception of the brand (Latif, Islam & Mdnoor, 2014). This allows the brand to continually promote to their consumers, moving them along the brand awareness continuum by using this repetitive technique which engages the consumer. Florian (2017) found that sponsorship awareness is subdivided into the recalling stage and the recognizing stage, which is crucial to building brand awareness. Crompton (1996) proposed the production adoption process, where the first step, awareness, develops into interest for the product or service, desire, purchase action, then reinforcement or loyalty to the brand.

Brand awareness is therefore influenced by a consumers sponsorship awareness. When a consumer can recall/recognize a product and connect it to the brand, there should be a positive increase in future purchase intention and recommendation likeability (Coelho de Brito, 2019). According to Guy (2017), sponsors who had products/services available at the site of the sporting event, were recognized more frequently than those that did not.

Becker-Olsen, Cornwell, and Wakefield (2007) there are four key factors that influence sponsorship recall, namely, sponsor relatedness, sponsor prominence, exposure of the brand to individuals at events and individual exposure to sponsors due to individual

involvement or identification with the sport and team. The accuracy of sponsor identification increases when there is a strong association between the event and the sponsor (Becker-Olsen *et al.*, 2007; Rosic, Djuricic, Radonjic & Vukovic, 2019). Market prominence may bias sponsorship recall as individuals assume that brands prominent in the marketplace are more likely to be sponsors of sporting events (Becker-Olsen *et al.*, 2007). The simple element of exposure can influence consumer's ability to recall a brand and strengthen positive associations with the brand (Becker-Olsen *et al.*, 2007; Rogic *et al.*, 2019). Guy (2017) states that exposure below the conscious level has been shown to positively influence awareness and liking, specifically at sporting events where focused attention is given to the game. This highlights the importance of live sporting sponsorship as televised events do not allow for the same level of exposure. Finally individual exposure to sponsors is a function of the number of events individuals chose to attend or the level of with a given organisation, as attendance and individual involvement with a group increases the ability to accurately recall brands (Becker-Olsen *et al.*, 2007).

Brand activation

For sport sponsorship to be able to achieve the objective of brand awareness, the overall brand strategy needs brand activation to take place. Brand Activation helps the brand to connect with a consumer at a personal level, increasing brand engagement and awareness through brand experience (Neha, 2020). Chhabra (2020) explains brand activation as an active and emotive type of marketing that is carried out at an event to encourage interaction with an aim to induce customer action and build a bi-directional relationship between the brand and the customer (Chhabra, 2020). Using activation strategies, such as in person experience events, can lead to the consumer to believe in the brand and what it stands for, which is a closer step in the path to purchase (Broadbent, 2015). One significant advantage of sport sponsorship is that it can establish brand relationships with multiple target markets by engaging sport consumers on an emotional level (Bai, Yim, Breedlove & Zhang, 2021). The emotional attachment to sport can make consumers more susceptible to the marketing initiatives of the sponsoring brand (Bai *et al.*, 2021).

Brand activation is absolutely the most important element of marketing a product or service through sponsorships as this is where brands develop ways to engage

customers with what the brand is doing (Schneider, 2021). Brand activation is achieved through interaction, which generates brand awareness as the interaction allows for direct engagement between the audience, brand, and products (Simpson 2016). There are three methods according to Simpson (2016) to activate a brand, namely, experimental marketing, sampling campaigns and on-site brand activation. These three methods have one very key element in common and that is the fact that they are in-person experiences. For these methods to be successful they need people to experience the branding campaigns to trigger a response which makes the brand memorable (Simpson, 2016). Sport sponsors have achieved brand activation through the sponsoring of live sporting events, however due to the suspension of these live events, brand activation is no longer possible.

Companies that sponsor the Premier League have always used brand activation methods in and around stadiums during sponsored matches, by combining imagery, and enhancing consumer experiences through countless measures. These activation methods and campaigns rely on one key factor, the presence of live spectators. Without which, sponsors are instead achieving brand nonactivation, which is the promotion of the sponsor's association using passive communication whereby the consumer audience processes marketing messages through less obtrusive methods (Ballouli, 2018). As a result, sport sponsors are shifting their brand activation strategies to digital platforms. The previous research conducted on brand awareness through sponsorship of sport was conducted before Covid-19 and considered a variety of viewing methods including live viewing which is absent because of the world pandemic.

Covid-19 Pandemic

The literature review illustrates through theory that brand awareness can be achieved through sponsorship (Grimaldi, 2014), and by using the Aaker's (1991) model of brand awareness. Latif *et al.*, (2014) clearly links the different levels of brand awareness to illustrate how brand awareness can be achieved and perceived through sponsorship as a marketing technique. This theory clearly substantiates the data collected from Grimaldi (2014) and Cosmas *et al.*, (2013) whose conclusions draw from the research based on the same brand awareness model.

The research conducted by these authors clearly indicates that pre-Covid-19 sponsorship was a useful and successful technique used to create brand awareness. This links with Simpson's (2016) research, illustrating the concept of brand activation which requires consumers to be aware of the sport sponsorship and present at the stadium/sporting event to be able to interact with the brand.

It is further evident that due to Covid-19, the key element in the theory provided is that the consumer is not physically present at a sporting event and as a result the sponsorship industry has changed dramatically in an attempt to adapt (Connolly, 2020; Horky, 2020; Howarth, 2020 and Ratten, 2020). The lack of research on the effect of Covid-19 on sports sponsorship presents the relevance of this research study.

Paradigm

There are two research paradigms that could be used for this study, positivism and interpretivism with one key difference. Positivism is based on an objective point of view in consideration to the study approach and data collection, where interpretivism is based on a subjective viewpoint in terms of data collection and research approach (Khatri, 2020).

The study aims to collect data regarding the post-COVID-19 sport sponsorship to determine the effect on brand awareness of Premier League fans. Covid-19 is a very recent and ongoing pandemic and as a result there is very limited research on the topic post-Covid-19, reflecting the effects of this world pandemic. Aligned with the purpose of this research, as well as the research question, a positivist approach will be used. The hypothetico-deductive model of science is associated with positivism as it aims to validate priori hypotheses by statistically testing the variables under study (Park, Konge & Artino, 2020).

Positivist research focuses on identifying explanatory associations or relationships (Park *et al.*, 2020). In line with the epistemology of positivism, objective data will be collected, free of the values of the researcher and participants. Knowledge, developed in this way is truth, meaning that it is certain, accurate and consistent with reality (Park *et al.*, 2020). Following the positivist ontology, pre-Covid-19 literature will be reviewed

to replicate and synthesise scientific theories, following the belief that one tangible reality exists, can be understood, identified, and measured (Park *et al.*, 2020).

Design/conceptual approach

The most appropriate paradigm for the research being conducted is positivism as previously discussed, by conducting the research in this manner it allows the study to be conducted using a quantitative method, showcasing the results of the study effectively through descriptive and inferential statistics.

Following the positivist paradigm, a quantitative non-experimental survey approach will be used for this study. The study is therefore deductive as the closed-ended questions used in the survey were constructed using previous literature to test the awareness model. The study is cross-sectional as respondents will have one opportunity to complete the survey and the results are based on a specific point of time. The research is interdisciplinary as the focus is on branding and brand awareness.

This data being collected to test the hypothesis further allows for statistical analysis so that the different relationships between the variables can be tested (Grimaldi, 2014).

Population

Explorable (2009) defines a research population as the focus group of people or objects that is studied in a certain scientific or broad research project.

The population will consist of all members participating in various Premier League social media groups.

These members will be the participants as only the participating members of these groups would have access to the research questionnaire during the time period of data collection and thus would need to be active on these group during this time frame to partake in the research study.

This specific groups were chosen as the population because of the ease of access, and the freedom of geographical location as it can be accessed from anywhere internet and access to the various platforms are available. This also allowed the study to be conducted in a safe manner as the Covid-19 pandemic was a recurring concern.

These groups were chosen as the members of the group fulfil the only requirement needed to answer the questionnaire and that is that the members support the Premier League to the point where they would join a social media group and watch the matches in person or televised. This ensures that the participants of these groups have the knowledge and experience to partake in the research study by answering the research questionnaire.

Sampling

Bhandari (2020) defines a sample as a certain process that entails selecting a part of the population to acquire data from. This further becomes the source of unknown information that is quantified to explain the research problem (Grimaldi, 2014). Daniel (2012) explains that it is important to prepare for sampling choices as it is integral part of obtaining data.

This research study will make use of probability sampling using the convenience sampling method. Daniel (2012: 6) explains that convenience sampling “gives every element in the target population a known and nonzero chance of being selected.” Therefore, each participant of the population is being selected for the sample, making the sample selection objective in line with the chosen paradigm and research method (Grimaldi, 2014). This further stipulates that the sample will not be manipulated or effected by any means during the research process.

For the purposes of the research, the sample of the research will consist out of male and female participants from of different nationalities as the Premier league is broadcasted worldwide and there are no limitations to being a member of a Premier League social media group. All ages above 18 years will be considered for the study. Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp recommend users to join above the age of 13

years but participants partaking in the research that do not meet the minimum requirement of 18 years will not be considered.

By using the chosen social media networks to access specified Premiere League fan bases, it is guaranteed that the population has an interest in the Premier League and will thus have been exposed to the branding and sponsorships under question in the research study. This also ensures that the participants have the knowledge to answer the questionnaire, producing data that is relevant to the particular study.

As previously stated, the research paradigm follows the positivism approach based on objectivity, thus collecting data through social media networks provide relevant data that meet the parameters of the study and corresponds to the characteristics of the chosen paradigm (Khatri, 2020).

The unit of analysis of the research study is human participants that adhere to the specified criteria of being a Premier League supporter being exposed to the branding and sponsorship that exists in the league itself.

The specified sample size of the research study consists out of 30 human participants. This specified sample size allows the researcher to collect sufficient data to conduct the data analysis method and application thereof in line with the research paradigm, consistently ensuring objectivity the main objective of the paradigm the research study is based on.

Data collection method

The research is focused as previously mentioned on Premier League supporters' group. This provides more than 100000 possible participants that have knowledge of the events and concepts that will be included in the survey.

Surveys were used as the data collection method. The survey consisted of a variety of questions linked to sponsorship and branding within the Premier League, including a demographic section to describe the sample.

The survey was uploaded to various Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp social media groups and pages using of Google Forms to make it accessible to the various social media groups and protect the privacy of the participants as the Google form does not track any personal information and only reflects the data that is generated from the specific questions set up by the author in this case, the researcher.

By using an online survey, a variety of limitations are avoided as it is accessible from all over the world that has access to internet and the various social media platforms as the only resources needed to partake. The online survey allows a large demographic to partake in the study as it is not focused on a certain age group, nationality or through personal connection with the researcher that allows the research to be objectively conducted.

The survey made use of multiple-choice questions for the demographic section and a 5-point Likert scale for the post-COVID-19 behaviour section measuring levels of agreement with various sponsorship statements. McLeod (2019) describes the Likert scale as a scale existing of five to seven points that allow the participant to express to which extent they agree or disagree with the provided statement or question.

The Likert scale thus provides useful data in terms of the variables being examined in a quantitative manner so that the data can be accurately presented and analysed. Furthermore, all questions based on the Likert scale provides data to accept or reject the null hypothesis: Post Covid-19 sport sponsorship has no effect on brand awareness.

Saunders and Lewis (2012) explain that Pilot testing plays a crucial part in the validity of a questionnaire to assure that the participants of the study inherently understand the research questions being asked and comprehend how to answer, assuring the correct data is being collected.

In this research the questionnaire was given to a small population consisting of 5 participants with consistent demographic and character traits to these of the actual population to identify any misconceptions or problems. After no problems were identified study could be made available to population.

The researcher applied for ethical clearance from the IIE and the research supervisor ensuring the survey questions are not harmful in any way. The survey has been given ethical clearance and it was successfully pilot tested by a test group of participants.

Application of data collection

After the ethical clearance was received and the pilot test results were successful the data collection process started. On 15 July 2021 the researcher started contacting various Premier League Facebook groups as a starting point due to the ease of access to these private and public groups as most only required an approval from the groups' admin to gain entrance. Various group posts were constructed containing the link to the Google form and a brief explanation of the study explaining why the study is being conducted and what the data generated by the study would be used for. In total 10 Facebook groups approved the request to join, and the researcher submitted the post to these various groups.

From the 10 posts submitted all 10 were declined due to the group guidelines set up by the various group admin prohibiting posts containing any links as these links may contain sensitive information, unwarranted or unauthorized media and harmful content.

To overcome this burden the researcher contacted the various admin of these groups directly in an effort to have the form posted by the group admin itself through Facebook direct message and email primarily used by these groups for promotional activities. Two responses were received stating that for the content to be posted a promotional fee would apply as it is unrelated to the nature of the group. As the study is not endorsed the offers were declined.

On 3 August 2021 the researcher started contacting various Premier League Instagram pages as an alternative in an effort to collect the data that needed for the study. As the researcher did not have direct access to these pages to construct a post 13 Instagram pages were contacted directly via Instagram direct message. The messages sent included the link to the Google form and a brief explanation of the

study and why the study was being conducted. One reply was received from a UK based Premier League Instagram fan page stating that the post could be constructed and published but that a market related promotional fee would apply. The researcher declined this offer as the research study is not endorsed.

On 5 August 2021 the researcher contacted a South African Premier League fan Instagram page via Instagram direct message. A positive response was received stating that they would post the Google form link on their Instagram story for a period of 24 hours. During that 24-hour period 15 individuals responded to the Google form questionnaire.

On 7 August 2021 various individuals were contacted using WhatsApp, a digital communications social network, asking individuals who are active fan members of the Premier League to forward the Google form to Premier League WhatsApp groups maintaining the population of the study.

During the period of 7-17 August 2021 15 Google form responses was received. The desired sample size was reached, and the Google form questionnaire was closed as the data needed for the research study was collected and could be analysed by the researcher.

Data analysis method

This section of the research aims and to showcase the findings of the intended research study after the questionnaires have been released and population, sample and data have been processed and assessed.

As previously explained the research was conducted in a quantitative manner using descriptive statistics that allows the sample to be described by use of frequencies. Laerd statistics (2018) describes descriptive statistics as a useful tool in the description, visualisation and presentation of data that converts raw data into visuals. Descriptive statistics can further be defined by two types, measures of central tendency and measures of spread (Laerd Statistics, 2018). Measure of spread refer to how wide the array of data collected is and the measure of central tendency refers

to how centered data is by use of modus, mean and median (Laerd Statistics, 2018). Descriptive statistics provides frequencies, central tendency, and standard deviation to present a demographic profile of the research participants.

SPSS v.23 was used as software for the data analysis of this research in combination with Microsoft Excel.

The frequency distribution for all questions provides the details of the sample.

Validity, reliability, and trustworthiness

Middleton (2019) states that validity and reliability are two key concepts in the quality of research.

Middleton (2019) defines validity as “[t]o how accurately a method measures what it is intended to measure. If research has high validity, that means it produces results that correspond to real properties, characteristics, and variations in the physical or social world.”

Middleton (2019) defines reliability as “[t]o how consistently a method measure something. If the same result can be consistently achieved by using the same methods under the same circumstances, the measurement is considered reliable.”

In this research the Cronbach alpha coefficient will be used. Bruin (2011) explains that the main objective of the Cronbach alpha is to measure internal consistency, how close certain factors are related to a group. Bruin (2011) states that it can be used to measure reliability. The coefficient of reliability can be explained as a consideration of several items, using their inter-item covariance, and applying the variances in a formula that produces their internal consistency by showcasing a decimal with certain ranges of covariance for example the range between 0.6 and 0.7 indicates a suitable level of reliability (Bruin, 2011).

The Cronbach alpha was used to conduct the reliability of the data and assure that the research used the correct statistical methods to thereby produce data that projects the

findings accurately, keeping the variables constant throughout the research assuring consistency.

The Cronbach alpha coefficient and pilot test validated the reliability of the research assuring no inconsistencies or errors were made during the research process and that the data was measured and presented without fault.

Application of data analysis

A research questionnaire was developed containing various questions including a demographic section, brand awareness related topics and brand recollection sections focused and developed from the brand awareness theory by (Aaker, 1991). These questions were specifically developed from the (Aaker, 1991) brand awareness pyramid, the key theory the research study is based on, in connection with sponsorship and branding within the Premier League. After the questionnaire was constructed, it was reviewed by the research supervisor, adjusted, and approved by the IIE. The research questionnaire was pilot tested successfully ensuring the data collected was consistent, accurate and without error.

The population consisted of Premier League fan members participating in various social media Premier League fan groups as the Google form questionnaire was posted on these various social media groups ensuring the stipulated population was reached and that the research study participants had the required knowledge to partake in the study and produce the relevant data.

Question 1-5: Demographic and electronic consent

This section of questions consisted of an electronic consent question stating the privacy clause and required age of consent (18) needed to partake in the study. The section further consisted out of four demographic questions including age, nationality, gender, and employment status. These questions assisted in the demographic profiling of each research participant.

Questions 6 and 7: Teams and home grounds.

In these questions respondents were asked what Premier League club they support and what the home grounds of this club was to be linked to the branding and sponsorship data collected from the following questions.

Questions 8-11: Covid-19

In these questions respondents were asked a variety of questions linked to their Premier League viewing behaviour in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic. Question 8 consisted of statements respondents were asked if applicable to them, consisting of information about the quality of the football matches, viewing pleasure, viewing consistency due to live audiences being suspended and variation of the effectiveness of marketing and sponsorship. Question 9 asked respondents where they usually viewed Premier League matches prior to Covid-19. Question 10 asked respondents how many football matches they have viewed in person prior to Covid-19 and question 11 specifically focused on behavioural changes due to Covid-19 in terms of viewing.

Question 13: Branding recollection

In this question respondents were asked to recall various official sponsorships of the Premier League by providing a variety of brands related to the Premier League. These questions consisted out of the lead partner for the 2020-2021 season, the official ball, official bank, official beer, official soft-drink, official timekeeper, and official licensee sponsors of the 2020-2021 Premier league season.

Question 14: Clothing branding recollection

In this question respondents were asked to recall their teams kit, shirt, and sleeve sponsors to be linked with the data collected in question 6-7 regarding their team choice.

Question 15: Likert scale question regarding perceptions of sponsors.

In this question, respondents were given a Likert scale to express if their perceptions towards brands change because they sponsor the Premier League. The Likert scale consists out of options ranging from 1-5, 1 being strongly disagree, 3 being neutral and 5 being strongly agree.

Question 16: Top of mind recollection

In this question respondents were asked to recall the first brand that would come to mind in the following industries: sporting apparel, bank, airline, beer, and car.

Questions 17 and 18: Brand awareness and recollection.

In question 17 respondents were asked what brands they were aware of selecting all that applied from a list and question 18 asked to recall any brands associated with the Premier League that were not named in the previous question.

As stipulated the respondents were anonymous as the questionnaire contained no personal identifying information. From the data received, 30 responses could be used for the non-probability and convenience sampling.

After the successful data collection period the data could be analysed. The different sections were analysed separately as a variety of statistical correlations and tests were used based on the data collected. A factor and demographic analysis were constructed from the first section to find and calculate the relationships between these variables.

The Cronbach alpha coefficient was calculated ensuring the consistency and reliability of each of the factors contained in the data and reflected a factor of higher than 0.7 deeming the data to be acceptable for the research study.

The descriptive statistics focused on the demographic profile of the Premier League supporters, a factor analysis produced four factors, Spearman's rank order correlations, ANOVAs and t-tests were applied to compare factors and demographics.

The descriptive statistics was accompanied by inferential statistics by using the Spearman correlation coefficient. Correlation measures the association or dependence between two variables, with Spearman rank analyses being used for ordinal variables. The unit of measurement for a correlation is a coefficient, which ranges from +1 to -1, with 0 indicating that no correlation between variables exists. In addition to determining whether the two variables are related, the coefficient also indicates the direction of the association. The closer the coefficient is to +1, the stronger and more positive the relationship. A perfectly positive relationship (+1) indicates that the two variables increase in value concurrently and a perfect negative relationship (-1) suggests that as one of the variables increases in value the other decreases at the same rate (Sage, 2015)

Spearman rank assisted in determining if the observed correlation coefficient is large enough to declare a zero-correlation unlikely, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The null hypothesis will be rejected when the associated significance, or p-value, is equal to or less than 0.05.

Presentation of data

Introduction

The research study was conducted on Premier League Football fans to understand the effect of Covid-19 on the brand awareness of the brands that advertise in the Premier League. A sample size of 30 participants were used for the study, and were asked a series of questions including demographic, brand awareness and general branding questions based on Aaker's (1991) brand awareness theory, specifically the brand awareness pyramid.

Demographics

A profile of the sample participants demographic profile is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Demographic profile of sample participants

Gender	Percentage
Male	100%
Female	0%
Age	Percentage
18-28	100%
29-38	0%
39-48	0%
48-58	0%
58 and above	0%
Country of origin	Percentage
South Africa	97%
Italy	3%
Employment status	Percentage
Student	60%
Employed	37%
Unemployed	0%
Other	3.3%
Team support	Percentage
Manchester United	26.7%
Manchester City	10%
Chelsea	16.7%
Arsenal	10%
Liverpool	33.3%
Tottenham Hotspur	3.3%

The sample consisted of 30 participants of which 100% were males, aged between 18-28 (100%), were South African (97%), and were students (60%). The participants were asked which Premier League Football Team they support resulting in,

Manchester United (27%), Manchester City (10%), Chelsea (17%), Arsenal (10%), Liverpool (33%) and Tottenham Hotspur (3 %).

Factor analysis

A Factor analysis was conducted to reduce the number of variables of a multi-variable data set into simpler factors, called principal components, for further data analyses.

A principal components analysis (PCA) was run on an 18-question questionnaire that measured brand awareness of 30 candidates. Inspection of the correlation matrix showed that all variables had at least one correlation coefficient greater than 0.3. The overall Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was 0.714 with individual KMO measures all greater than 0.7, classifications of 'middling' to 'meritorious' according to Kaiser (1974). Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant ($p < .0005$), indicating that the data was likely factorizable.

PCA revealed two components that had eigenvalues greater than one and which explained 55.39% of the total variance (Figure 1 below). Visual inspection of the scree plot, Figure 2 below, indicated that two components should be retained (Cattell, 1966). This was further supported by the results of a Parallel Analysis, which showed only two components with eigenvalues exceeding the corresponding criterion for a randomly generated data matrix of the same size values in addition, a two solution met the interpretability criterion. As such, two components were retained.

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.946	38.048	38.048	4.946	38.048	38.048
2	2.255	17.343	55.391	2.255	17.343	55.391
3	1.366	10.505	65.896			
4	1.179	9.067	74.964			
5	0.935	7.190	82.154			
6	0.720	5.536	87.690			
7	0.536	4.124	91.814			
8	0.294	2.261	94.076			
9	0.252	1.938	96.013			
10	0.215	1.650	97.664			
11	0.149	1.147	98.811			
12	0.089	0.688	99.498			
13	0.065	0.502	100.000			

Figure 1: Total variance explained by two component PCA

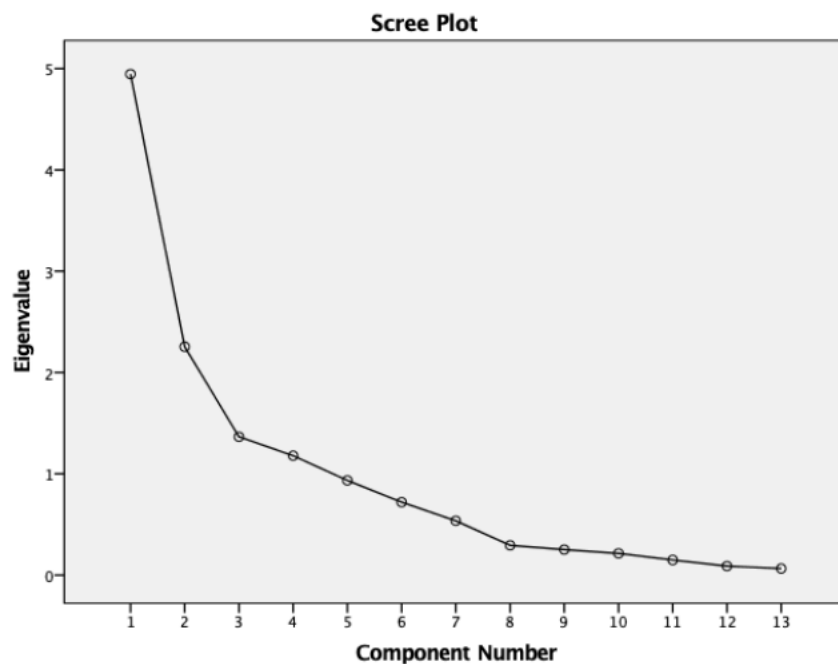


Figure 2: Scree Plot of Principal Component Analysis (PCA)

An Oblimin rotation was employed to aid interpretability. Component 1 was labelled 'lower intensity PL support' while Component 2 was labelled 'higher intensity PL support' Table 1 below provides scale items loaded under each of the Components.

Table 1: Pattern Matrix

Pattern Matrix ^a		
	Component	
	'Lower Intensity'	'Higher intensity'
v15 I am interested in watching specific big games	0,848	
v16 I am interested in watching all big games	0,835	
v20 I plan to attend a live Premier League Football match when stadiums reopen	0,683	

v22 I prefer to purchase products from brands that sponsor the Premier League	0,675
V21 I enjoy following coverage on Premier League Football	0,672
v12 I am more aware of brands that sponsor the Premier League	0,656
V13 I am only interested in watching Premier League Football if my team is playing	0,534
v11 I have been watching more Premier League football	0,436
v18 Premier League Football is important to me	0,804
v17 I am interested in watching games that are neither big nor have my team playing	0,701
v14 I am interested in watching some big games (Reverse coded)	0,624
v19 I am a strong supporter of Premier League Football	0,597
v23 I perceive brands that sponsor the Premier League more positively/likeable due to their sponsorship of the Premier League	0,553

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.^a

a. Rotation converged in 15 iterations.

The interpretation of the data was consistent with the questionnaire that was designed to measure the brand awareness of sample participants.

Cronbach alpha coefficient

Bruin (2011) explains that the main objective of the Cronbach alpha is to measure internal consistency, how close certain factors are related to a group. Bruin (2011) states that it can be used to measure reliability. The coefficient of reliability can be explained as a consideration of several items, using their inter-item covariance, and applying the variances in a formula that produces their internal consistency by showcasing a decimal with certain ranges of covariance for example the range between 0.6 and 0.7 indicates a suitable level of reliability (Bruin, 2011).

The internal consistency of the overall scale for this research study yielded a Cronbach alpha of 0.823 which is 'good.' Cronbach alpha for 'lower intensity' was 0.844 ('good') and for 'higher intensity' was 0.695 ('acceptable').

Spearman correlation

The Spearman's rank-order correlation measures the strength or direction between two continuous or ordinal variables (ρ or r_s). In this research study the two factors identified during the factor analysis were used to conduct the Spearman's rank-order correlation and the statistically significant results were between the following variables based on the branding elements within the Premier League including the official sponsors. These correlations were all statistically significant as $\rho < 0.05$ and are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Spearman Correlations

Correlations

	v8BecameMoreAwareOfMarketing	v9WhereNormallyWatched	v27Employment	v28Support	Factor 1	Factor 2	v31Lead	v32Bank	v33Beer	v34Drink	v35Ball	v36Timekeeper	v37Useless	v39GSponsor	v39ShirtSponsor	v40SneakersSponsor	v41BrandsMoreLikable
v8BecameMoreAwareOfMarketing	Correlation Coefficient																
	Sig. (2-tailed)																
	N	12	12	12	12	12	11	12	11	11	11	10	11	12	12	10	12
v9WhereNormallyWatched	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.103	-0.002	-0.098	-.390	0.042	0.143	0.000	-0.059	-0.059	-0.251	0.038	0.134	0.390	0.253	0.222
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.588	0.991	0.720	0.025	0.829	0.452	1.000	0.761	0.763	0.197	0.848	0.481	0.058	0.194	0.238
	N	12	30	30	30	30	29	30	29	29	29	28	29	30	30	28	30
v27Employment	Correlation Coefficient	0.103	1.000	-.499	-0.311	-0.054	0.193	0.189	0.183	-0.102	0.094	-0.014	-0.071	-0.070	-0.210	0.283	-0.046
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.588	0.000	0.094	0.776	0.316	0.318	0.342	0.598	0.628	0.943	0.714	0.713	0.288	0.145	0.811
	N	12	30	30	30	30	29	30	29	29	29	28	29	30	30	28	30
v28Support	Correlation Coefficient	-0.002	.499	1.000	0.273	0.037	0.140	.390	0.110	0.138	0.012	0.243	0.034	0.321	0.029	0.067	0.027
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.991	0.000	0.144	0.848	0.489	0.000	0.572	0.477	0.952	0.213	0.881	0.083	0.879	0.734	0.889
	N	12	30	30	30	30	29	30	29	29	29	28	29	30	30	28	30
Factor 1	Correlation Coefficient	-0.098	-0.311	0.273	1.000	0.218	-0.244	-0.004	0.188	0.318	-0.022	0.151	-0.043	0.183	-0.040	-0.228	-0.188
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.720	0.094	0.144	0.247	0.203	0.985	0.330	0.095	0.908	0.443	0.824	0.332	0.244	0.244	0.320
	N	12	30	30	30	30	29	30	29	29	29	28	29	30	30	28	30
Factor 2	Correlation Coefficient	-.390	-0.054	0.037	0.218	1.000	0.147	-0.027	0.310	.402	0.219	.477	-0.025	0.076	-0.200	-0.219	0.130
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.035	0.776	0.848	0.247	0.447	0.889	0.102	0.031	0.255	0.010	0.897	0.689	0.288	0.263	0.483
	N	12	30	30	30	30	29	30	29	29	29	28	29	30	30	28	30
v31Lead	Correlation Coefficient	0.042	0.103	0.140	-0.244	0.147	1.000	0.285	0.224	0.077	.377	0.005	.451	-.385	0.113	0.109	0.138
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.829	0.316	0.489	0.203	0.447	0.134	0.253	0.690	0.044	0.629	0.016	0.039	0.580	0.582	0.477
	N	11	29	29	29	29	29	29	28	29	28	28	28	28	29	28	29
v32Bank	Correlation Coefficient	0.143	0.189	.390	-0.004	-0.027	0.285	1.000	0.000	0.029	0.163	0.094	0.110	0.185	0.107	.426	-0.094
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.452	0.318	0.030	0.985	0.889	0.134	1.000	0.882	0.399	0.633	0.570	0.327	0.574	0.024	0.659
	N	12	30	30	30	30	29	30	29	29	29	28	29	30	30	28	30
v33Beer	Correlation Coefficient	0.000	0.183	0.110	0.188	0.310	0.224	0.000	1.000	-.445	0.283	0.138	0.000	0.271	0.000	-0.112	-0.288
	Sig. (2-tailed)		1.000	0.342	0.572	0.330	0.102	0.253	1.000	0.018	0.144	0.484	1.000	0.155	1.000	0.989	0.130
	N	11	29	29	29	29	29	29	29	28	28	28	28	29	29	28	29
v34Drink	Correlation Coefficient	-0.059	-0.102	0.138	0.316	.402	0.077	0.029	.445	1.000	-0.045	0.284	0.205	.495	0.282	-0.123	-0.141
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.761	0.598	0.477	0.095	0.031	0.690	0.882	0.018	0.817	0.129	0.295	0.011	0.139	0.532	0.486
	N	11	29	29	29	29	29	29	28	29	28	28	28	28	29	28	29
v35Ball	Correlation Coefficient	-0.059	0.094	0.012	-0.022	0.219	.377	0.163	0.283	-0.045	1.000	0.168	0.054	-0.123	-0.145	0.160	0.096
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.763	0.628	0.952	0.908	0.255	0.044	0.399	0.144	0.817	0.392	0.787	0.525	0.454	0.417	0.773
	N	11	29	29	29	29	29	29	28	29	28	28	28	28	29	28	29
v36Timekeeper	Correlation Coefficient	-0.251	-0.014	0.243	0.151	.477	0.095	0.094	0.138	0.294	0.168	1.000	0.136	-0.071	-0.170	0.270	0.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.197	0.943	0.213	0.443	0.010	0.629	0.633	0.484	0.129	0.392	0.489	0.720	0.388	0.165	0.999
	N	10	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28
v37Useless	Correlation Coefficient	0.038	-0.071	0.034	-0.043	-0.025	.451	0.110	0.000	0.205	0.054	0.136	1.000	0.208	0.126	0.299	0.095
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.846	0.714	0.881	0.624	0.897	0.016	0.570	1.000	0.295	0.787	0.489	0.283	0.514	0.123	0.738
	N	11	29	29	29	29	29	28	29	28	28	28	28	29	29	28	29
v39GSponsor	Correlation Coefficient	0.134	-0.070	0.321	0.183	0.076	.395	0.185	0.271	.485	-0.123	-0.071	0.206	1.000	.595	-0.152	-0.017
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.481	0.713	0.083	0.332	0.089	0.327	0.155	0.011	0.525	0.601	0.283	0.001	0.440	0.930	0.930
	N	12	30	30	30	30	29	30	29	29	29	28	29	30	30	28	30
v39ShirtSponsor	Correlation Coefficient	0.390	-0.210	0.029	-0.040	-0.200	0.113	0.107	0.000	0.282	-0.145	-0.170	0.126	.595	1.000	0.014	0.029
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.058	0.288	0.879	0.834	0.288	0.574	1.000	0.139	0.454	0.388	0.514	0.001	0.001	0.942	0.879
	N	12	30	30	30	30	29	30	29	29	29	28	29	30	30	28	30
v40SneakersSponsor	Correlation Coefficient	0.253	0.283	0.067	-0.228	-0.219	0.109	.426	-0.112	-0.123	0.160	0.270	0.299	-0.152	0.014	1.000	0.209
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.194	0.145	0.734	0.244	0.263	0.582	0.024	0.589	0.532	0.417	0.165	0.123	0.440	0.942	0.288
	N	10	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28
v41BrandsMoreLikable	Correlation Coefficient	0.222	-0.046	0.027	-0.188	0.130	0.138	-0.094	-0.288	-0.141	0.096	0.000	0.085	-0.017	0.029	0.209	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.238	0.811	0.889	0.320	0.483	0.477	0.659	0.130	0.498	0.773	0.999	0.738	0.930	0.879	0.288
	N	12	30	30	30	30	29	30	29	29	29	28	29	30	30	28	30

There was a moderate positive relationship between team supported and employment status $r = .468$ $p < 0.05$.

There was a weak negative relationship between 'higher intensity supporters' (Factor 2) and the location where games are usually watched $r = -.386$ $p < 0.05$.

There was a weak positive relationship between team supported by the sample and the official bank sponsor of The Premier league $r = .396$ $p < 0.05$.

There was a moderate positive relationship between the official drink sponsor and the higher intensity supporting fans $r = .402$ $p < 0.05$.

There was a weak positive relationship between the official ball sponsor and the lead sponsor of the Premier league $r = .377$ $p < 0.05$.

There was a moderate positive relationship between the official timekeeper and the 'higher intensity supporters' $r = .477$ $p < 0.05$.

There was a moderate positive relationship between the official licensee and the lead sponsor of the Premier league $r = .451$ $p < 0.05$.

There was a weak positive relationship between the various kit sponsors and the lead sponsor of the Premier league $r = .385$ $p < 0.05$.

There was a moderate positive relationship between the sleeve sponsor and the official bank of the Premier league $r = .426$ $p < 0.05$.

There was a moderate positive relationship between the official beer and official drink sponsor of the Premier league $r = .445$ $p < 0.05$.

There was a moderate positive relationship between the various kit sponsors and the official drink sponsor of the Premier league $r = .468$ $p < 0.05$.

There was a moderate positive relationship between the kit sponsor and shirt sponsor of the various Premier league teams $r = .595$ $p < 0.05$.

All these correlations are within the demographic parameters of ages between 18-28 years, and all are male participants as these demographics showcase 100% of the sample of 30 participants.

Kruskal-Wallis H test

The Kruskal-Wallis H test is a rank-based nonparametric test that is used to determine if there are statistically significant differences between a set of variables (Laerd Statistics, 2015).

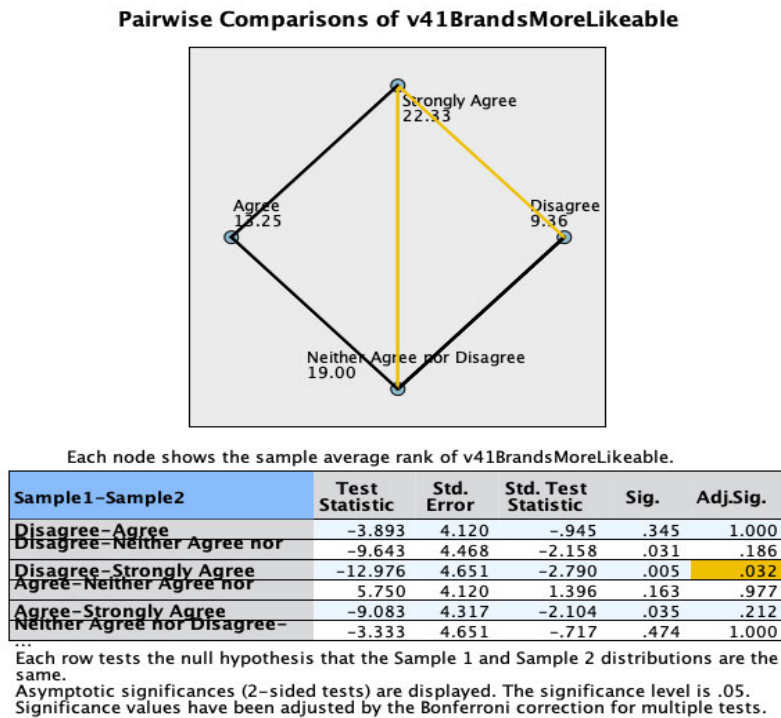


Figure 3: Pairwise comparisons of I perceive brands that sponsor the Premier League more positively/likeable due to their sponsorship of the Premier League and 'Higher intensity'

A Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to determine if there were differences in "Higher intensity supporters' scores between groups that differed in their perception of brands that sponsor the Premier League. Distributions of Higher intensity supporters scores were not similar for all groups, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. 'Higher intensity supporters' scores were statistically significantly different between the participants perceptions of brands that sponsor the Premier League, $\chi^2(2) = -12.976$, $p = .021$. Subsequently, pairwise comparisons were performed using Dunn's (1964) procedure with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. This post hoc analysis revealed statistically significant differences in 'Higher intensity

supporters' scores between the participants that disagreed that brands that sponsor the Premier League are more likeable (mean rank = 9.36) and participants that strongly agreed that brands that sponsored the Premier league were more likeable (mean rank = 22.33) ($p = .032$), groups, but not between any other group combination.

Interpretation of data

The data presents various correlations between the 18-part questionnaire based on Aaker's (1991) brand awareness pyramid, for sample respondents. The literature review explained that previous studies found a strong relationship between sponsorship and brand awareness and thus the null and alternative hypothesis was formed.

The demographics of the research study concluded that the data gathered is skewed towards South African males between the ages of 18-28 that are mostly students and currently employed.

The Cronbach alpha correlation validates the internal consistency of the research study and thus opens the data for interpretation. Various statistical tests were conducted analysing the different relationships between the variables of the study of which the following were statistically significant and in line with the focus of the study.

Variables were constructed for the questionnaire in line with the effect of Covid-19 and the Aaker's brand awareness pyramid focused on how the sponsored brands were perceived with the effect of Covid-19. Crosstabulations were constructed analysing the relationship between the variables and the factors identified during the factor analysis.

Brands more likeable due to sponsorship of the Premier League

The data reflects that 43.3% of the sample agree and 20% strongly agrees that brands are more likeable because of their sponsorship in the Premier League, but when these participants were asked to identify various branding elements regarding the premier league the data showed a negative correlation with the brand awareness

of these sponsors meaning that although the research participants were personally convinced that their opinions were influenced positively by the sponsorship they do not even have actual knowledge of who these brands sponsoring the Premier League are. The crosstabulations indicate that the participants who strongly agree that brands are more likeable cannot identify the lead sponsor of the Premier League and that 44.4% the participants that agreed to this statement incorrectly stated the lead sponsor, once again showcasing that the fans have a preconceived idea of how the sponsorship influences their brand awareness but in reality, the brands failed in creating brand awareness. This is significant as recognition is the second level in the brand awareness pyramid and these participants cannot name the lead sponsor to the Premier League (Aaker, 1991).

When the same sample was asked to identify their various team's, kit sponsor the data showcased that 60% of the (agree) participants answered incorrectly and 33.3% of the (strongly agree) participants answered incorrectly. Kit sponsor brands are showcased during the entire match, and they are brands that are perceived to be seen the most but cannot be recalled by the participants that support them. These statistics show that although the participants of the study believe they are familiar with the branding aspects of the Premier League, the brands have not successfully left their impression on majority of the sample.

The Spearman correlation has shown that there has been success in relation to inter-brand associations and that there is a part of the sample that could identify certain official sponsors. The relationships are mostly weak, but the covariance suggests that the participants that could recognize and recall brands could do so across most of the sponsorships. This indicates that there is a possible sub-sample within the analysed sample that were reached by the brands. This could be explained through the split of occupation and possibly the age range.

More aware of brands since Covid-19.

The data reflects that 30% of the sample participants agree and 16.6% strongly agree that they have become more aware of brands since the start of Covid-19. When these participants were compared to the groups resulting from the factor analysis 30% on average of both the higher and lower intensity supporters (factor 1

and factor 2) indicated that they have become more aware of the brands sponsoring the Premier League since the start of Covid-19. The crosstabulation between the factor analysis and the increased viewing variable also indicated that 46.7% of the lower intensity supporters (factor 1) increased their match viewing since the start of Covid-19, increasing their branding exposure.

These results correlate with the weak positive relationships between the official sponsors as showed by the Spearman correlation. Crosstabulations show that the sample who indicated that they have become more brand aware also correctly recalled the majority of the official sponsors correlating that a sub-sample within the sample were successfully reached. The sub-sample consists out of participants supporting one of four teams, Manchester United, Liverpool, Chelsea and Manchester city indicating that the branding of the sponsorships during these team matches were statistically more significant in terms of creating brand awareness in comparison to the other teams with Manchester United and Liverpool teams responsible for the majority share of 33.3% each.

Brand recognition

The questionnaire was constructed to not just test if participants can recall brands but if the brands sponsoring the Premier League achieved brand recognition. Participants were asked to choose brands they recognize from a list of logos associated with the Premier League. The results were moderately positive as on average 42.9% of the participants who disagreed with the statement of brands becoming more likeable due to sponsorship recognized five out of the nine possible brands without the names being stated and keeping in mind that these are not the most recognizable official brands. This shows statistical significance as similar results were displayed by the data gathered across the rest of the variable set explaining that a large part of the sample recognizes at least 50% of the brands provided concluding that these brands reached the second level of the brand awareness pyramid (Aaker, 1991).

Research problem, question, hypothesis.

The research problem stated that from existing theory brands could use sponsorship of sport as a means of increasing their brand awareness (Horky, 2020). This was further explained during the literature review, that previous studies found a positive relationship between these concepts pre Covid-19, but that there were little to no research regarding the subject since the commencement of Covid-19 and the effect it has on brand awareness.

The research objectives were thus formed to gather data on this matter by placing emphasis on the effects specifically on the brand awareness of the brands sponsoring the Premier League post commencement of Covid-19. The null and alternative hypothesis were formed in line with the research objectives and problem statement.

H_0 : Post-COVID-19 sport sponsorship has no effect on the brand awareness of Premier League fans.

H_a : Post-COVID-19 sport sponsorship has an effect on the brand awareness of Premier League fans.

The data findings have been presented and after careful interpretation the null hypothesis was rejected as a result of the Kruskal-Wallis H test, on both factors proved significant. These results indicate that the alternative hypothesis should be accepted as a clear effect was statistically evident from the data gathered during the data analysis.

The data presented indicated that Premier League fans have adjusted their supporting behaviour to some extent since the commencement of Covid-19 and although these behavioural changes could be assigned to smaller sub-samples of the sample group, they proved statistically significant in terms of changes in brand awareness. The data shows that there was an increase in interaction with the Premier League, especially from less intense supporting fans (factor 1) and that across the entire sample a small percentage fans perceived that they have become more aware of the branding of sponsors in the Premier League.

It is evident from the data that the participating fans are not as aware of the brands sponsoring the Premier League and that very little brands reached the top of mind and recall level of the Aaker's brand awareness pyramid including avid supporters of the league (factor 2). Brand recognition proved to be at a moderate level but considering the exposure to these brands the recognition level could be classified as relatively low especially from the higher intensity supporting fans (factor 2). Correlations are evident between brands that could be recalled and achieved recognition providing evidence that there were participants who were reached by multiple brands and that this brand awareness delivered significant results.

Conclusion

The research questions have been answered and the problem statement addressed. The alternative hypothesis needs to be accepted as it is statistically significant, and it is evident that post Covid-19 sponsorship had an effect on brand awareness, the data showcases that this effect was positive in terms of the limited sample and demographics, the study was based on. The data reflected that the average Premier League football fan has very little knowledge of the branding in the league but that the participants perceive that it increased during Covid-19, fans that are less intense supporters became more interested and with that a rise in the participants knowledge.

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Annexure 1:
Research questionnaire

I am an Honours student at IIE Vega currently doing my research study needed to complete my degree.

The purpose of this research project is to determine the effect of post-covid sport sponsorship on the Premier League. This project is being conducted by Victor Peenz at [VEGA] in fulfilment of the [QUALIFICATION]. You are invited to participate in this research because you are.....

Your participation in this research is voluntary and you may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time. There is no penalty for non-participation in this research.

The procedure involves completing an online survey that will take approximately 15 minutes. Your responses will be confidential and no identifying information will be collected. The survey questions are about **sport sponsorship**.

The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only. If you have any questions about the research study please contact [REDACTED]

The research has been reviewed according to [IIE] ethical procedures for research involving human participants.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below.

Clicking on the "agree" button below indicates that

- you have read the above information
- you voluntarily agree to participate
- you are over the age of 18 years

If you do not wish to participate in this research, please decline participation by clicking the "disagree" button.

- ☐ Agree
☐ Disagree

1. Please state your gender

- ☐ Female
☐ Male
☐ Prefer not to say

2. What is your age?

- ☐ 18-28
☐ 29-38
☐ 39-48
☐ 49-58
☐ 59 and above

3. Which country are you from?

4. What is your employment status?

- ☐ Student
- ☐ Employed
- ☐ Unemployed
- ☐ Other

5. Which English Premier League club do you support?

- ☐ Arsenal
- ☐ Aston Villa
- ☐ Brighton & Hove Albion
- ☐ Burnley
- ☐ Chelsea
- ☐ Crystal Palace
- ☐ Everton
- ☐ Fulham
- ☐ Leeds United
- ☐ Leicester City
- ☐ Liverpool
- ☐ Manchester City
- ☐ Manchester United
- ☐ Newcastle United
- ☐ Sheffield United
- ☐ Southampton
- ☐ Tottenham Hotspur
- ☐ West Bromwich Albion
- ☐ West Ham United
- ☐ Wolverhampton Wanderers

6. Please provide the name of your team's home grounds.

Section B: Change in behaviour since COVID-19

7. Since the start of COVID-19, sporting events have suspended audience attendance. Which of the following statements are appropriate to you? *Select all that apply.*

Without a live audience, football matches are less exciting

I watch fewer football matches than before

I watch more football matches than before

I prefer to watch football matches on the television

Live audience participation makes my team play better

Live audience participation influences game officials' rulings

The quality of football matches has decreased since the suspension of live matches

I have become more aware of marketing and advertising during Premier League Football matches

8. Prior to COVID-19, where did you normally watch Premier League events?

- ☐ Home
- ☐ Restaurants/Pubs
- ☐ Stadium
- ☐ Other

9. Prior to COVID-19, how many times had you attended a live Premier League Football match?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ 1-3 times
- ☐ 4-7 times
- ☐ 8-11 times
- ☐ 12 or more times

10. The statements listed below relate to your changes in behaviour regarding the Premier League since the start of COVID-19. Please rate your level of agreement with each statement.

Since the start of COVID-19	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
10.1 I have been watching more Premier League football	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.2 I spend more time reading about Premier League Football	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.3 I am more aware of brands that sponsor the Premier League	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.4 I am only interested in watching Premier League Football if my team is playing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.5 I am interested in watching some big games	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.6 I am interested in watching specific big games	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.7 I am interested in watching all big games	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.8 I am interested in watching games that are neither big nor have my team playing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.9 Premier League Football is important to me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.10 I am a strong supporter of Premier League Football	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.11 I plan to attend a live Premier League Football match when stadiums reopen	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.12 I enjoy following coverage on Premier League Football	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.13 I prefer to purchase products from brands that sponsor the Premier League	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

11. Based on the following categories, please name the company that you remember sponsored the 2020/2021 Premier League. If you don't remember, then please state "none."

- Lead Partner
- Official Bank
- Official Beer
- Official Soft Drink
- Official Ball
- Official Timekeeper
- Official Licensee

12. Based on the following categories, please name the company that you remember sponsored your 2020/2021 Premier League team. If you don't remember, then please state "none."

Kit Sponsor
Shirt Sponsor
Sleeve Sponsor

13. Do you perceive brands that sponsor the Premier League more positively /likeable due to their sponsorship of the Premier League?

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Neither disagree nor agree
☐ Agree
☐ Strongly Agree

Section C: Brand Awareness

14. When thinking of the following products/services, identify the first name that comes to mind.

Sporting apparel

Airline

Beer

Bank

Car

Gambling Company

15. Identify which of the following Premier League sponsors you are aware of? *Select all that apply.*

☐☐☐

CAZOO

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

16. Can you identify other brands (not previously mentioned) that have sponsored the Premier League since the start of COVID-19? *List all brands.*

Thank you!

Thank you for partaking in our questionnaire. Your response is important!

Annexure 2:
Ethical clearance



Date 15 July 2021

Student name: Francois Victor Peenz Student number: [REDACTED]
Campus: Vega Bordeaux

Re: Approval of RESE8419 Proposal and Ethics Clearance
HONOURS ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

Your research proposal and the ethical implications of your proposed research topic were reviewed by your supervisor and the campus research panel, a subcommittee of The Independent Institute of Education's Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee.

Your research proposal posed no significant ethical concerns, and your supporting documents and instruments are in order to proceed. We hereby provide you with permission to proceed with your research.

In the event of you deciding to change your research methodology in any way, kindly consult your supervisor to ensure all ethical considerations are adhered to and pose no risk to any participant or party involved. A revised ethical clearance letter will be issued.

We wish you all the best with your research!

GENERAL CONDITIONS TO BE FULFILLED IN RELATION TO RESEARCH

Permission is granted to proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met and may be withdrawn should any of these conditions be flouted.

Please note: The panel has not considered the merits, accuracy or ethical soundness of the research. The only merits examined are the use of The IIE as a sample.

Permission is granted subject to the following conditions:

1. The researcher(s) will need to obtain informed consent in writing from all of the participants in his/ her sample if the study is not anonymous.
2. The researcher(s) may only use the data collected for research purposes and in no other way.
3. Photographs of human subjects may only be taken if relevant to the research, informed consent was obtained, and even with informed consent, the photographs may not be published on any online platforms.
4. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes, and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.

5. No names or identifying information of participants may be used within the research and the research must be voluntary.
6. Please make it clear that the information will not be used punitively in any way and participants may in no way be counselled/advised based on this.

Supervisor name: Dr Tish Taylor

Signature: Campus Postgraduate Coordinator (CPC) name: Dr Tish Tay

Research Purpose/ Objective	Primary Research Question	Research Rationale	Seminal Authors/ Sources	Literature Review – Conceptual Framework	Paradigm	Approach	Data Collection Method(s)	Ethics	Key Findings	Recommendations
The main research objective was to analyse the possible effect of Covid-19 on the Brand awareness of the Premier League football fans.	What is the effect of post COVID-19 sport sponsorship on the brand awareness of Premier League fans?	There is very little to no research on the specific effects of Covid-19 on brand awareness especially with the changes in advertisements due to the Covid-19 restrictions.	Aaker's 1991 brand awareness model. Thomas Horky's article on sponsorship in sport from 2020.	Theme 1: Sport Sponsorship Theme 2: Brand awareness Theme 3: Brand activation Theme 4: Covid-19 Pandemic Theme 5: Theme 6: Theme 7:	Paradigm Positivism	Quantitative Population Population existed out of Premier League fans active on various social media groups on the specific platforms WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook. Sampling Probability sampling Convenience sampling method. Sample size of 30 participants	Collection method was done through a questionnaire. Data Analysis Method(s) Following the positivism paradigm and quantitative manner of the study the data analysis method was descriptive statistics through use of frequencies and the unit of analysis was Premier League football fans and thus people.	A variety of ethical issues were anticipated and worked around, the most difficult thereof was collecting data that would truly reflect objectivity and not alter the reliability of the study as collecting data proved to be a significant challenge. Limitations The two most evident limitations were the fact that the study was not endorsed and thus gathering data proves difficult especially with an international sample and second was the time frame for data collection proving to be significantly small.	The key finding of the data collected showcased that Premier League fans have very little branding knowledge of the sponsors and even the official sponsors of the League, not even considering growth or changes in brand awareness. Key Contribution The study produced relevant data post-Covid-19 on the topic and showcased very interesting and unexpected data that could be used by brand specifically advertising in Premier League football.	Recommendations for further studies would look at the model in which advertising opportunity is measured and the paid media involved in the Premier League and how to better branding awareness of the sponsors because the current techniques are showing very little success for a large amount of capital expenditure.
Research Problem	Secondary Questions/ Hypotheses/ Objectives	Key Concepts	Key Theories							
Due to Covid-19 venue-based advertising came to a stop and brands changed their advertising and means of reaching fans completely in an attempt to create brand awareness, there have been countless sponsorship studies done in relation to brand activation and brand awareness pre-Covid-19 but none after and thus the effect of the pandemic is unclear.	H_0 : Post-COVID-19 sport sponsorship has no effect on the brand awareness of Premier League fans. H_a : Post-COVID-19 sport sponsorship has an effect on the brand awareness of Premier League fans.	Covid-19 Sport sponsorship Brand awareness Brand activation Premier League football fans	Aaker's 1991 Brand awareness model, Aaker's 1991 Brand Equity model.							