The Influence of Sponsorship on Purchase Intent: Oakley Brand Case Study

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Abstract. The income of the sponsorship activities is a theme that requires attentiveness at the time of their implementation. The effectiveness of sponsorship and the perceptible contribution to the organization are significant points to the sponsoring entity. It is expected that contribute to the success of its business performance and the proper fulfillment of its goals.

Oakley, a brand recognized for its optical products and services, uses sports sponsorship as its dominant marketing and communication tool. This work aims to understand the impact of Oakley sponsorship on the purchase intention of Portuguese consumers. Through a survey, it intends to study the brand recognition in sports events, as well as the consumer's attitude and engagement to the brand.

Keywords: Sponsorship · Buy intention · Oakley · Sporting events · Consumer engagement · Purchase intent

1 Introduction

Over time, companies have been discovering the benefits and potentials of sponsorship as a means of communication, using this marketing component as a support in the formulation of strategies and the measurement of communicational and organizational objectives. According to Pope [26], sponsorship can be defined as the provision of resources (e.g., money, people, equipment) by an organization (the sponsor) directly to an individual, authority or body (the sponsee).

Sponsorship can also be seen as a mix of advertising with its capacity for message control and public relations. Companies that want to sponsor have a wide variety of entities to choose from, according to the target or values that wish to transmit, such as charities, teams, tournaments, arts, and sports. According to

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Dolphin [5], the most popular is sports sponsorship, reaching 75% of all support giving.

Sports sponsorships have characteristics that differentiate them from other promotional strategies, having as added values the possibility of a relationship, the segmentation of the target audience, the sale of products or services, and the significant exposure in the media [11,15]. Sport is the leading type of sponsorship mainly for the propensity to attract large audiences not only at each event, but also through the media attached to these activities. Besides, it provides a simplistic measure of segmentation and higher visibility opportunities for the sponsor because of the duration of each event.

Meenaghan [17] argues that one of the advantages of sports sponsorship over other communication tools is interaction with the target audience, and positive feelings are triggered in consumers, which are later manifested by purchase behaviors. Sports sponsorship allows influencing consumers' attitudes, generating positive emotional connections with them. Sponsors drive consumers to engage with the product and gain business-friendly conduct [2,4,14].

Oakley, Inc. has long used athlete endorsements to authenticate its products and tell its brand story. It uses sponsorship and athlete endorsements to build relevancy, credibility, and authenticity through third-party validation. The company leverages ties to access content for its social media platforms and those of its retail partners.

The brand's recognition and engagement with the Portuguese market were never studied. Besides, the number of studies that connect brands and sports events in the country is still small. The main aim of this study is to understand the relationship of the Oakley brand with consumers. Analyzing the communication tool adopted, with dimensions as consumer engagement, consumer attitude, and purchase intention, the final intention is to give some guidelines to marketing managers when they consider using this communication technique.

The paper is composed of five sections. Section 2 describes concepts related to sponsorship, brand recognition, and purchase intention. It is also presented the companies focused on the study. Section 3 is regarding the methodology used for this work, such as the survey dimensions and the statistical tools involved. In Sect. 4, the results reached with the survey are analyzed. Finally, the main conclusions are carried out in Sect. 5, and some limitations and future work are pointed.

2 Theoretical Background

Sports marketing aims to increase public recognition, reinforce a corporate image, define the identification of market requirements, overcome competition actions, involve a company with a community and give credibility to products and services [10,11].

According to Cardia [3], sports marketing and sports sponsorship are two concepts that are interconnected and complement each other, being a resource that business entities associated with segmentation. The desired return from the

application of these two components comes from the increase in the brand image, the public's appreciation, the return at the institutional level, and the increase in sales.

2.1 Sponsorship

Meenaghan [16] characterizes sponsorship as an investment, which can be applied in cash or goods, in an activity, individual, cause, or event. The trade-off based on sponsorship activity is based on the sponsor's access to the exploitable commercial potential, associated with that activity, person, project, or event so that political, financial, or promotional returns are obtained.

Neto [22] argues that sponsorship derives from a promotional investment strategy, applied at sports, cultural or social levels. The sponsorship activity focuses on obtaining return and the occurrence of interaction and compliance contexts between the brand, the product, the sponsoring entity, and the consumer.

The sponsorship of sporting events has attracted the attention of marketing technicians, who seek to cover specific markets, looking for a profitable situation for attracting consumers [6,28]. Similar to sponsoring sports celebrities, sponsoring sports events indirectly influences the consumer, providing the association of the event's image with the sponsoring entity. Sponsorship relating to an event establishes a synergistic relationship between the sponsor and the sponsor. Event sponsorship is an effective way for companies to promote their brands and products [8,24]. These, within the scope of merchandising, may contain the logo of a company, to facilitate consumer retention and recognition [1,3].

2.2 Consumer Engagement and Purchase Intent

The engagement of the audience is crucial because the perceived associations with the sponsor became stronger. Several studies highlighting the importance of attitudes towards an unconditioned stimulus [29]: a positive attitude toward the event will be associated with a positive response towards the sponsor. Sponsorship can be used to modifying the brand perception, create a new relationship with potential clients, and enhance the organization's image.

Grohs *et al.* [7] states that companies employing sponsorship for the attainment of corporate communications goals tend to have a more positive public image than companies not involved in sponsorship. Therefore, it is fundamental to evaluate the image's transfer. Related to the previous one, building goodwill could be another benefit of sponsorship, by boosting brand image and positioning [18–21].

Finally, the essential purpose of sponsorship is sales increase. To accomplish this goal, companies evaluate their objectives and then decide what specific sponsorship would suitable. Pope and Voges [27] state that consumers who believe that a company's brand is involved in sponsorship tend to have a higher intention to purchase the company's product. Purchase intentions have often been accepted in the literature as a final measure of sponsorship effectiveness. The

purchase intent could be seen as the outcome for the sponsor, to have effective impact on consumers' behavior.

One of the brands that use Sponsorship as a part of brand communication is Oakley.

2.3 Oakley Company Charaterization

Oakley, Inc. is a subsidiary of the Italian business group Luxottica Group S.p.A and was founded in 1975 by Jim Jannard. Its founder started the business of the company over forty years ago, has reinvented the concept of solar optics, especially in sports. Oakley's current CEO is Colin Baden, headquartered at Foothill Ranch in the United States [23].

Oakley communicates with its audience in a variety of ways and means, adopting a global communication strategy that is tailored to the brand's reality. The brand establishes multi-channel communication, using forms of communication that encompass media such as sponsorship, patronage, and advertising, but also digital and interactive media such as e-commerce, social networking, and digital platforms.

Throughout its activity, the Oakley brand has used and continues to use sponsorship as one of its key communication components, linking its name to athletes and events. Many athletes have become icons and benchmarks, such as Bubba Watson, Greg Lemond, Lance Armstrong, Olympic athletes Shaun White and Lindsey Vonn, and NBA star Michael Jordan. Wishing to familiarize themselves with recognized athletes and promote the brand at international sporting events, the Oakley brand has taken the initiative to become the official sponsor and supplier of optical products for the US Olympic Committee and the US Team.

This investigation sought to verify the existence of a constant relationship between Oakley brand sponsorship actions and the consumer behavior, to prove a positive effect of these actions ond consumer's engagement and attitude towards them.

3 Methodology

This section presents an overview of the main steps adopted in this research to achieve the goal planned. The work was designed to assess the relationships between Oakley and consumer and was developed as follows:

- the research began with the analysis of the current literature about sports sponsorship;
- based on the literature review, a questionnaire was designed, taking into account scales related to the theme; this research was based on a case study, adopting a quantitative research methodology through a survey;
- questionnaire was applied: the sample consists of two hundred and fourteen inquiries;
- statistical analysis was developed resorting to IBM SPSS version 24, and the main results were drawn.

3.1 Research Design

The survey consisted of three parts; the first contains general questions about the characterization of the respondents, such as gender, age, employment situation, and educational qualifications. The second part is related to consumer behavior concerning optical products. The main idea was to know how often the consumers buy optical products if they recognize the brand Oakley and also if they associated this brand with specific sportsmen and sports. The last part refers to the sponsorship activity. The scales of Speed and Thompson [29] and Martensen *et al.* [13] served as a reference in the design of the survey. The questions were divided into five dimensions present the answer option based on the Likert scale, which ranges from 1 (Strongly Disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Neither Agree nor Disagree), 4 (Agree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The questions for each dimension are compiled in Table 1.

Speed and Thompson [29] model was a model developed to verify the effect of the consumer's attitude towards the sponsoring entity and the event, as well as the effect of the consumer's perception regarding the sponsoring entity's relationship with the sponsor. The aim was the orientation given to marketing managers, motivated by a consulting market that provides support to sponsoring entities during their sponsorship actions, promoting their effectiveness.

The theoretical model of Martinsen *et al.* [13] was a model developed to verify the effectiveness of sponsorship of a given event. This model analyzes the impact of the event sponsorship, and how it influences the level of purchase intention and the consumer perception of a brand. The authors analyzed a golf sporting event sponsored by the Danish brand Bang & Olufsen and the results confirmed that the event in the question had a positive effect on purchase and consumer perception of the sponsoring entity.

3.2 Data Collection

The questionnaire was developed in the Google Forms platform. It is an easy and intuitive question development system and has a simple and practical interface for the respondent. Another advantage is the fast collection of information and the absence of non-responses.

The survey was subject to a pre-test with a small sample, to assess the language used and the redundancy of the questions. Some minors corrections were implemented.

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Table 1. Dimensions used for the sponsorship activity and the brand Oakley

Dimension	Item	Description of the item	Reference
A - Actions of sponsorship	A1	Oakley's sponsorship actions add value to the brand	[29]
	A2	Oakley's sponsorship actions promote the memorization of the brand's name	
	A3	Oakley's sponsorship actions promote a favorable attitude towards the brand	
	A4	Oakley's sponsorship actions increase the likelihood of experimentation with Oakley products	
	A5	Consumer purchase intention regarding Oakley brand products/services	
S - Sponsorship in sport events	S6	There is a relationship of agreement between sporting events and Oakley sponsorship actions	[29]
	S7	The sporting events in which Oakley participates as a sponsor convey relevant information about the brand	
	S8	Attending the sporting events in which Oakley participates as a sponsor contributes to increase brand awareness	
	S9	Oakley's image conforms to sporting events in which Oakley participates as a sponsor	
CE - Consumer Engagement	E10	Oakley is an interesting brand	[13]
	E11	Oakley is a significant brand	
	E12	Oakley is an appealing brand	
	E13	Oakley is a fascinating brand	
	E14	Oakley is an essential brand	
CA - Consumer attitude	CA15	I consider Oakley a quality brand	[13]
	CA16	I have a positive attitude towards the Oakley brand	
	CA17	Oakley has benefits compared to brands in the same industry	
	CA18	Oakley has a higher level of quality compared to brands in the same industry	
CP - Consumer Purchase Intent	CP19	Oakley has added relevance to me	[13]
	CP20	Next time I need optics, I'll opt for the Oakley brand	
	CP21	I am willing to pay more for Oakley over other brands	
	CP22	I will recommend to others the Oakley brand	

could also bring some useful information for the brand and its relationship with some potential costumers as an exploratory approach.

3.3 Data Analysis

SPSS 24.0 was used for data analyses (IBM, Chicago). Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied. Descriptive statistics included frequency distributions (range, mean, standard deviations, and percentage).

The scales' reliability was calculated with Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha is a statistical tool that quantifies the internal reliability of a survey; it ranges from 0 to 1 and the minimum acceptable value is 0.7 [9].

After that, principal component analysis is carried out to show the most influencing determinants in the survey design. Finally, the Mann-Whitney test was performed to analyze if there is a difference of gender factor in the responses of the survey. The statistical significance was set at a p-value $<.05$.

4 Analysis of the Results

4.1 Sample Characterization

The respondents had a large spectrum of characteristics, as summarized in Table 2. The sample is mostly male (72%). The age group with the largest representativeness of the sample is between 24 to 34 years old (52.3%). Individuals aged 35 to 45 years represent 23.8% of the sample. Regarding the employment situation, the sample is largely composed of individuals who work for others (49.5%). However, 21.5% of the sample is represented by students and 19.6% by self-employed individuals. Most of the sample (44.4%) consisted of individuals with Secondary Education, 39.2% of individuals with a Bachelor degree and 6% of individuals with a Master's degree. Given the theme (sports), young men tend to be more inclined to participate in the research. Our resulting sample is not balanced, but it may well be representative of the distribution of gender groups of the consumers that Oakley could try to achieve.

4.2 Oakley and Its Relation with Consumers and Sports

This subsection is related to data analysis concerning the Oakley brand, regarding its relation to sports events and consumers. For the 22 questions, descriptive statistics and principal components analysis are presented (PCA) to give a panoramic view of the results. In Table 3, all items were answered using the totality of the scale (from 1 to 5). The average value of the answers was higher than three, meaning at least a neutral position to the statements provided.

Regarding the dimension related to actions of sponsorship (Dimension A), the sample also agreed that Oakley's sponsorship actions add value to its brand, promote the memorization of its name, promote a favorable attitude from individuals towards its brand, and increases the likelihood of trying its products/services. It should be noted that the authors Martinsen *et al.* [13], obtained similar results, showing an influence on the consumer's purchase intention, influenced by the characteristics and brand image, as well as its memorization.

Table 2. Sample characterization

Gender	%	Age	%
Male	72	13–23	17.8
Female	28	24–34	52.3
		35–45	23.8
		46–56	5.2
		57–67	0.9
Employment situation	%	Education qualifications	%
Unemployed	8.9	Basic education	2.3
Student	21.5	Secondary education	44.4
Retired	0.5	BSc	39.2
Employee	49.5	Master Degree	11.7
Self employed	19.6	PhD	2.3

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and Cronbach'alpha

Dim.	Item	Min	Max	Mean	St. Dev	Alpha
A	A1	1	5	3.82	0.954	0.921
	A2	1	5	3.93	0.942	
	A3	1	5	3.85	0.843	
	A4	1	5	3.87	0.898	
	A5	1	5	3.66	0.954	
S	S6	1	5	3.69	0.878	0.896
	S7	1	5	3.55	0.864	
	S8	1	5	3.89	0.918	
	S9	1	5	3.79	0.882	
CE	CE10	1	5	3.81	0.886	0.919
	CE11	1	5	3.72	0.891	
	CE12	1	5	3.71	0.946	
	CE13	1	5	3.40	0.962	
	CE14	1	5	3.20	0.998	
CA	CA15	1	5	3.83	0.868	0.935
	CA16	1	5	3.72	0.890	
	CA17	1	5	3.49	0.838	
	CA18	1	5	3.46	0.891	
CP	CP19	1	5	3.16	1.042	0.938
	CP20	1	5	3.26	1.047	
	CP21	1	5	3.19	1.106	
	CP22	1	5	3.34	0.998	

The results obtained from sponsorship in sports (Dimension S) showed that the relationship between the Oakley brand and the sporting events in which it is inserted as a sponsoring entity, is a fruitful relationship that benefits the brand at various levels. The results presented are consistent with the study by Speed and Thompson [29]. The authors have proven that sponsors and agents of sporting events can maximize the value of sponsorship by understanding the attitudes held by their audience.

Regarding the third dimension analyzed (Dimension CE), there is a positive level of engagement between the consumer and the Oakley brand, with the sample considering it an interesting, significant and appealing brand. Regarding adjectives that classify Oakley as a fascinating and essential brand, there was a considerable percentage of respondents who showed a certain indifference. These results are distinct from a study conducted on the essential features of the Oakley brand in 2005 [25]. Respondents, despite having a positive attitude towards the brand, also found that the brand was not fascinating or attractive to the majority of the female audience.

The consumer's attitude towards the Oakley brand (CA Dimension) is positive. Most respondents agreed that Oakley is a quality brand, expressing also a positive attitude towards it, thus meeting the study by Peters [25].

In terms of purchase intention (CP Dimension), it was possible to verify a considerable number of elements that showed a sense of indifference towards the purchase intention of the analyzed brand's products/services. Even so, the number of respondents who said they fully agree or agree with the relevance of the brand and are willing to pay more for it is higher than the discordant responses. Martinsen *et al.* [13], similarly to the sport of golf, demonstrated that the fact of proving a close relationship between the sporting event and the studied brand, produced a transfer of value for the brand in question, leading to a higher purchase intention relative to the sponsoring brand.

Making a general analysis of all items, the ones with higher means are A2 with the mean 3.93 and item S8 with the value 3.89. Both items are related to the memory of the brand in consumers and sports; the inquiries agree that sponsorship, especially in sport events, increase brand awareness. The lowest means, although in the positive spectrum, are related to the dimension "Consumer Purchase Intent", with the values 3.16 (item CP19) and 3.19 (item CP21). Although consumers believe in brand quality, they are not completely committed to pay more to acquire this product. The standard deviation does not present great discrepancies between items. attitude To evaluate the reliability of the scales, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated. In this survey, the minimum obtained was 0.896, which shows the reliable of the survey.

Principal Component Analysis is a factorial model in which factors are based on total variance. With this analysis it is necessary to evaluate the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sampling adequacy measure and the Bertlett sphericity test. Both indicate the adequacy of the data for the accomplishment of the factorial analysis [9]. For each dimension, one component was obtained. Through the results (Table 4) of the factorial weights we conclude that all the items present a positive

Table 4. Principal component analysis

Dimension	Item	Communalities	Factor loadings	KMO measure	Bartlett's test (sig)	Total variance (%)
A - Actions of sponsorship	A1	0.668	0.818	0.888	<0.001	76.4
	A2	0.831	0.912			
	A3	0.816	0.904			
	A4	0.793	0.891			
	A5	0.713	0.844			
S - Sponsorship in sport events	S6	0.803	0.896	0.829	<0.001	76.3
	S7	0.686	0.828			
	S8	0.763	0.873			
	S9	0.801	0.895			
CE - Consumer Engagement	CE10	0.799	0.894	0.826	<0.001	75.4
	CE11	0.790	0.889			
	CE12	0.847	0.920			
	CE13	0.775	0.881			
	CE14	0.557	0.746			
CA - Consumer Attitude	CA15	0.828	0.910	0.791	<0.001	83.9
	CA16	0.831	0.911			
	CA17	0.867	0.931			
	CA18	0.829	0.911			
CP - Consumer Purchase Intent	CP19	0.825	0.908	0.840	<0.001	78.3
	CP20	0.831	0.911			
	CP21	0.638	0.799			
	CP22	0.837	0.915			

correlation. Regarding the suitability measure of the KMO sample, the minimum result obtained of 0.791, which is close to 1, indicates the average degree of adequacy of the PCA. In this case, the calculated chi-squared statistic was significant at the level of <0.001, indicating the presence of correlation between the various items. Regarding the communalities (after extraction), it is possible

to see, that the lowest value is in dimensions "Consumer Engagement", which translate inn lower factor loading for the correspondent item in the component.

4.3 Influence of Sponsorship by Gender

A last analysis was done, regarding the different behavior between gender and consumption of optical products, for the dimensions related with sponsorship actions and consumer purchase intention.

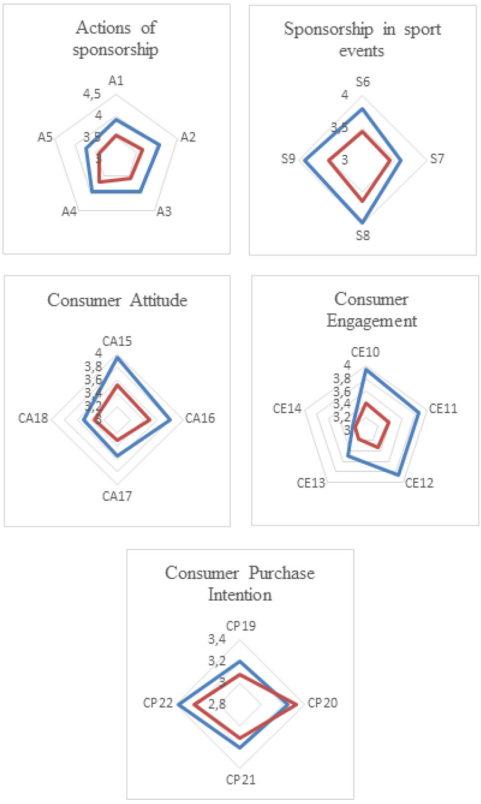


Fig. 1. Average level of agreement, by gender (blue - male; red - female) (Color figure online)

Figure 1 shows the average answers, by gender. It is notorious that the degree of agreement with the sentences of the survey is higher in the male gender. One exception in all surveys, which is related with item CP20, related with the buyer option of Oakley brand which is higher in women. The most visible differences in the answers are in the dimension "Consumer Engagement". These results, meet the study results of Peters [25], where the Oakley brand was considered less attractive to the female target.

In order to prove that these differences are statistically significant, a Mann-Whitney U test was done [12]. It compares the differences between two independent groups (in this case divided by gender), when the dependent variable is either ordinal or continuous, but not normally distributed. It is used to test the null hypothesis that two samples come from the same population, i.e., have the same median. The significance level used was 0.05. The results meet the graphical analysis done in Fig. 1. The answers given by male are statistically different than woman, regarding the importance of sponsorship for the Oakley brand recognition. Except the item CP20, the level of engagement with this brand is higher for men, when compared with women's answers. Curiously, the answers given related to the purchase intention are significantly similar for both genders.

Table 5. Mann-Whitney U test, using gender as grouping variable

Dimension	Item	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
A	A1	0.002	Reject
	A2	0.002	Reject
	A3	<0.001	Reject
	A4	0.011	Reject
	A5	0.007	Reject
S	S6	0.003	Reject
	S7	0.097	Retain
	S8	0.004	Reject
	S9	0.002	Reject
CE	CE10	<0.001	Reject
	CE11	<0.001	Reject
	CE12	<0.001	Reject
	CE13	0.019	Reject
	CE14	0.839	Retain
CA	CA15	<0.001	Reject
	CA16	0.004	Reject
	CA17	0.066	Retain
	CA18	0.231	Retain
CP	CP19	0.341	Retain
	CP20	0.593	Retain
	CP21	0.541	Retain
	CP22	0.140	Retain

5 Conclusions

As the main conclusion of this study, it was verified that Oakley brand sponsorship actions positively influenced the consumer's attitude towards the brand. In this sense, its target audience establishes a positive global assessment concerning the sponsorship activities.

Concerning sporting events in which the Oakley brand participates as a sponsoring entity, the results are in line with the literature review, which argues that the higher the level of association and identification between the sponsor and the sponsored event, the greater the involvement and the more profitable will be the attitude of individuals towards the event and the brand.

Despite the consumer purchase intention is the dimension where the survey values are smaller, the consumer recognizes the Oakley value and will recommend it to others.

As the main contributions of the investigation, it is considered that all the work carried out during this investigation presents a special contribution for the Luxottica group, more specifically for the Oakley brand, which based on this study, will be able to focus on relevant aspects focused on their brand, on its relationship with sponsorship activity and consumer response to this marketing tool.

The study's limitations are related to the fact that the sample was selected by convenience, which could lead to some bias of the sample. the use of a stratified sample in the next questionnaire application, could contribute to a more reliable conclusions.

As future investigations, this study can be applied in other contexts and realities based on interviews and focus groups that equally address the theme of sponsorship, and that analyze, in a more personal way, its influence on consumer behavior, another approach consists of analysis of the sponsorship effect, in a purely relational perspective, focused on the influence of the sponsorship on the relationship with the consumer, to the detriment of the purchase intention.

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