

Evaluating Sponsorship Chinese Brand Value in the Gangwon 2024 Winter Youth Olympics: A Consumer-Centric Perspective

Pu Liu ^{1, a}, Ai Yang ^{3, b}, Yue Wang ^{2, c}, Kun Liu ^{1, *}

¹ Hunan Institute of Traffic Engineering, Hengyang, Hunan, 421219, China

² Moscow State University, 119991, Russia

³ University of Macau, Macao, 999078, China

* Corresponding Author: Kun Liu (Email: liukun@hnjt.edu.cn), ^a 1401467930@qq.com,

^b aaiyang2002@gmail.com, ^c ameliew@126.com

Abstract. The Gangwon 2024 Winter Youth Olympics organized by the Olympic Games Organising Committee (OCOG) heavily relies on strong tier 1 sponsorship partnerships for its financial and operational success. This study focuses on the consumer perception of tier 1 sponsorships associated with mega-events by brand value association, it further seeks to fill a crucial gap in the understanding of how such partnerships resonate with audiences. The primary research objective is to identify the values, attributes and characteristics of a brand that are in line with consumer preference and expectations, yielding useful data that can assist in developing sponsorship strategies for OCOG. All of this is guided by a central question: What brand attributes drive consumer support for Olympic sponsors? This research employs a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both qualitative insights and analysis. Sub-questions probe into underlying aspects, like brand-consumer alignment, perceived authenticity, and engagement with values. These findings focus on providing actionable insights into improving sponsor selection, elevating audience engagement, and ultimately driving mutual value for both the OCOG and the associated partner brands. Understanding the memorable impact of sponsors at major events. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse around sponsorship effectiveness at mega-events, providing theoretical and practical implications for stakeholders involved in either sports marketing or event management.

Keywords: Sponsorship Brands; Winter Youth Olympics; Consumer Perception; Brand Equity; Strategic Partnerships.

1. Introduction

The Gangwon 2024 Winter Youth Olympics presents a chance for Korea to promote its winter sports and strengthen its global influence. Despite this strategic importance, local enterprises face struggles with brand marketing and communication strategies pertaining to ice and snow sports, hurting their sponsorship value. As the event's nine Tier 1 sponsors look to optimize their partnerships, understanding how consumers view brand value within a cultural marketing framework is of paramount importance. This study investigates the influence of culture and consumer attitudes on sponsorship engagement, offering useful, tangible insights for the Winter Youth Olympic Organising Committee to refine sponsor selection and make better long-term brand alignment choices. Drawing from Girginov and Parry's (2012) take on economic efficiency in mega-events, like the 1984 Los Angeles Games —this research evaluates sponsorship success through consumer support and cultural impact. The main question is: *Which brand traits draw consumer support and boost cultural value for the Organising Committee?* Related topics include the drivers of consumer preference, how well brand aligns with culture, brand authenticity, and perceived societal contributions.

This study takes a mixed-method approach (Zhao & Liu, 2016) that incorporates qualitative interviews along with quantitative surveys to explore multidimensional consumer engagement. The results seek to contribute to theory development in the field of cultural marketing and sponsorship strategy, and to deliver actionable recommendations for practitioners. This research not only aids the operational objectives of the Gangwon 2024 Winter Youth Olympics by mapping synergies between

brand value and cultural narratives but equally lays the foundations for future Olympic partnerships to create economic efficacy and global acknowledgement.

2. Literature Review

This brief literature review attempts to tackle three key issues. First, it adds to the literature by conceptualizing the construct of sponsor brand image, detailing its connection to brand equity, and suggesting its impact on sponsorship outcomes. Second, it deeply explores the consumer brand value paradigm particularly probing and comparing Keller's and Aaker's (1991; 1993) frameworks which provide rich and multidimensional paradigms of consumer brand value. Third, the review critically examines previous research on consumer branding and compares it with Keller and Aaker's frameworks to support the methodology of this study and justify its importance. Brand image is thus key not only for impact assessment of the overtly sponsored brand in question, but for the academic and practicing fields. The existing empirical literature demonstrates different ways of quantifying brand image and stresses the increasing need for this systematization (Plumeyer et al., 2019). For example, when creating a new brand, many companies focus on simply creating a brand image that quickly captures the attention of consumers (Rines, 2002). Several studies have proven that this direction is mistaken, as brand image is closely tied to corporate image and can heavily affect each other, which in turn would heavily affect consumer perception (Çifci and Koçak, 2012). Rines' analysis only covers creating initial attention to the brand, completely leaving out brand image maintenance in the long run and consumer consideration.

Brand image is also often a critical part of brand value. Simon (2004), with extensive research and analysis, argued that the process for creating brand image is closely connected to brand awareness, brand alignment and brand equity. Gordon & James, 2017 acknowledged the importance of brand image, noting that sports sponsorship can serve as an effective communication device in developing consumer-based brand equity. In this hyper-competitive marketplace, firms strive to mold favorable consumer-based brand equity, where brand image serves as a bridging connector between consumers and brand equity and shapes consumer's perception of brand equity (Ansary and Nik Hashim, 2018). Therefore, brand image plays a significant moderating role in brand value.

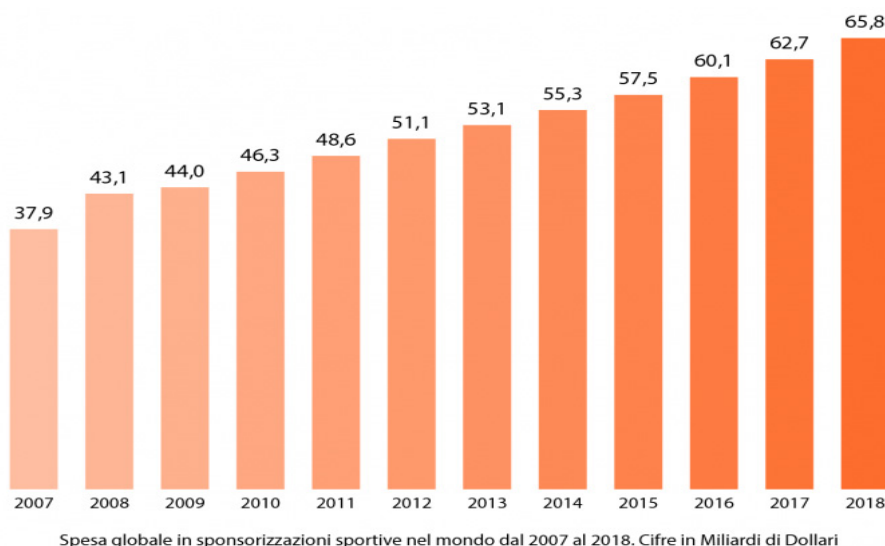


Figure 1. Global spending in sponsorship from 2007 to 2018. Figures in billions of dollars

Note The graph represents total global spending on mainly sports sponsorships in billions (USD) from 2007 to 2018. (<https://rtrsports.com/en/blog/growth-sponsorship-global-spending/>). From

“The growth of sponsorship: global spending, geography and future Annual spending in sponsorships”, by Emanuele Venturoli, 2019, (<https://rtrsports.com/en/blog/growth-sponsorship-global-spending/>)

In recent years, as shown in figure 1, many brands have participated in sponsorship activities, most notably sports sponsorships as referenced in the graph, it is worthy to mention that Gwinner and Eaton (1999) found that only a relatively small number of studies of sponsorship provided discussions that focused on brand image as a highly important issue, with most studies focusing more on strategies to gain widespread brand awareness. However, while sponsorship has been a statistically recognized method for the fastest growing promotional means (Rines, 2004), academic inquiry on brand image for sponsorship brands is not as extensive as sponsorship events, across all types, have proliferated. The majority of current research views sponsorship as a marketing activity, and minimal research has been done on positive brand image effects on the output of the sponsor (e.g., to the event organizer/organizing committee) (Woodall, 2007). As a result, the writer states that sponsorship of a positive brand image of the sponsoring brand will produce a good cultural output for the event organizers. Association with brand image, which is an embedded element of corporate image (Balmer, 2017), can be regarded as a cultural output for the local community (Devereux et al., 2020) and sponsorship as a marketing activity. Based on previous empirical research dealing with brand image and corporate image, the analysis presented in the following chapters of this study hope to prove that a positive image for the brand that is being sponsored can be translated into a positive cultural output (cultural marketing) for the host of the sponsored cultural event.

3. Theoretical Framework to Brand Value

3.1 Early Definitions of Consumer Brand Equity

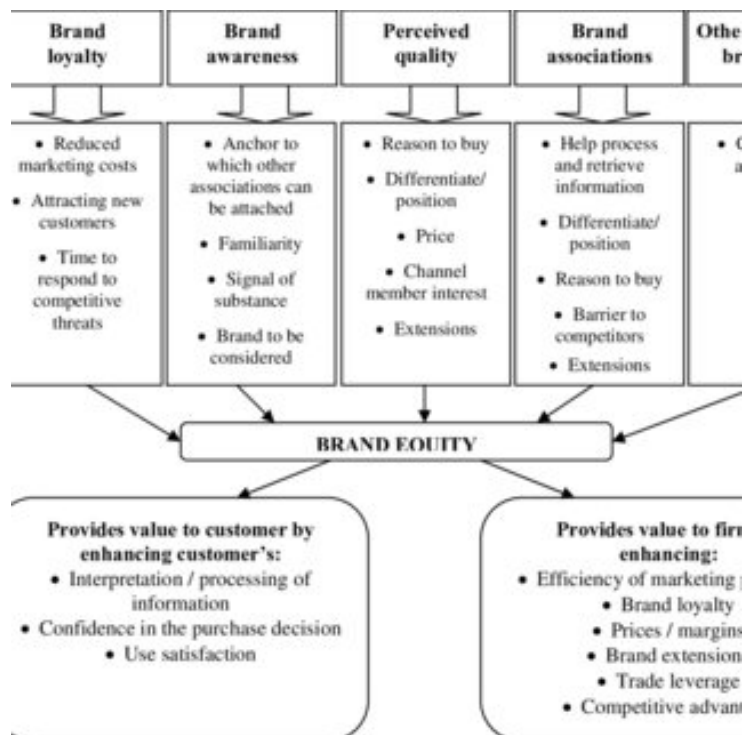


Figure 2. Aaker's Brand Equity Model 2

Note From "The Concept of Brand Equity - A Comparative Approach", By Ovidiu I. Moises, 2005, (https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Aakers-Brand-Equity-Model-2_fig1_254444124)

The concept of brand equity as the sum of brand assets and liabilities affecting a product or service's perceived value was introduced by Aaker (1991) in a multidimensional framework of consumer-based brand value. This includes brand awareness, product attributes, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and other proprietary brand assets (Christodoulides and de Chernatony, 2010) as shown in figure 2. Although Aaker's model lays out a very clear structure and encompasses the

consumer's expectations, it limits itself to the brand in question and the value that the brand brings is implicit. Its specialized terminology thus may hinder consumers from assessing brand value by themselves, which impacts their consumption decisions (Ansary and Nik Hashim, 2011).

3.2 Keller's Consumer Equity Framework

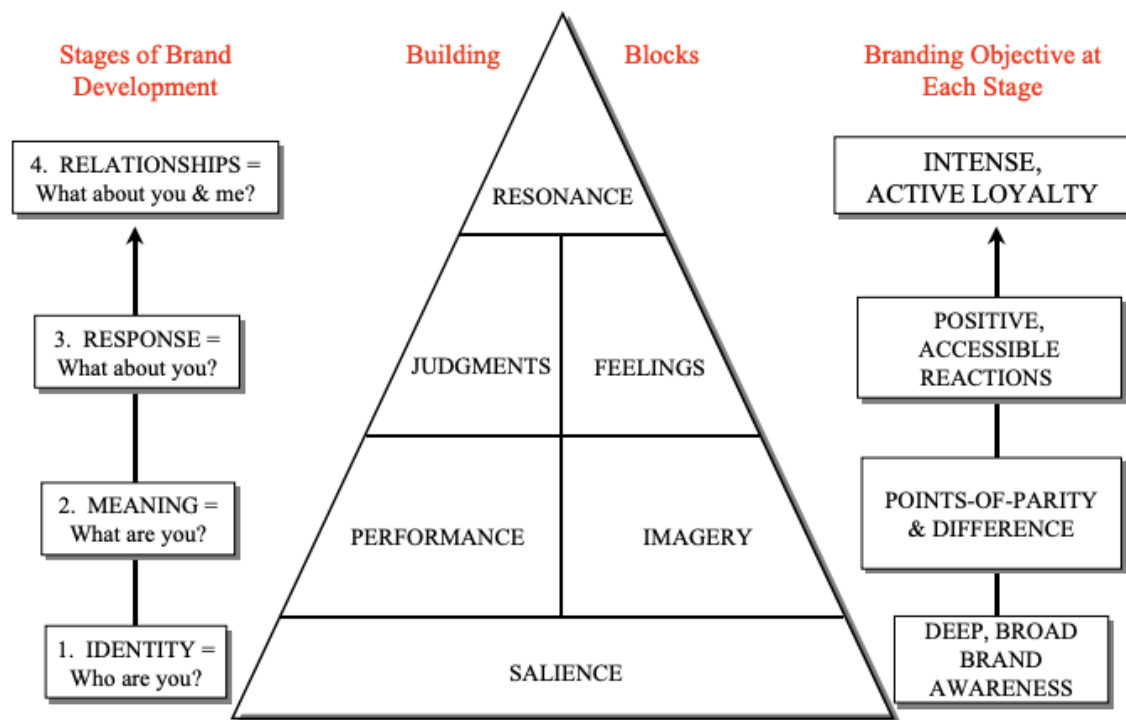


Figure 3. Customer-Based Brand Equity model pyramid (Keller, 2009)

Note From "The Digital Marketing Power of Transmedia: Applying Keller's Brand Resonance Pyramid to the Marvel Cinematic Universe", By Asher Rospigliosi, 2019, (https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Customer-Based-Brand-Equity-model-pyramid-Keller-2009_fig1_341840657)

Keller (1993) built upon Aaker's model by introducing a theoretical approach focusing on the comparative influence of brand awareness on consumer reactions to brand marketing. As illustrated in figure 3, customer-based brand equity occurs when customers know a brand and are able to remember positive, strong and unique brand associations (Keller, 1993). This framework is about brand perception and image, which live in the mind of the consumer. As such, consumers aware of a brand with positive and memorable brand associations proactively fortify the image of the brand, creating good feelings and maintaining distinct associations with the brand (Baker, Nancarrow and Tinson, 2005). There are however, both strengths and weaknesses with Aaker's and Keller's frameworks. Thus, a combination of two frameworks is recommended to confirm readiness of the constructs of the research framework. Notably, this paper will focus on Keller's (1993) framework of consumer brand value, integrating key components of the multidimensional model proposed by Aaker (1991) to defend against deficiencies. This theoretical framework will be used as a combined theoretical model in this study.

3.3 Brand Value Elements in the Context of Beijing Winter Olympics Sponsorship

The study focuses on determining the primary sponsorship brands for the Beijing Winter Olympics would garner the most consumer support and create maximum values for sponsors. Chinese consumers are very familiar with the fundamentals of brand equity, which are brand awareness, brand

loyalty, brand quality, cognitive association, etc. These factors help guide the direction of sponsorships for the organizing committee. Through this questionnaire, the recipients' response will be collected and also it will help in defining the types of brands to be sponsored which can be beneficial for the decisions made in times of sponsorship in future. But there is a lack of relevant literature and research, which would require more inquiries and data collection. According to Anantachart (2005), one of the most important things for a brand is to establish its connection in the consumers' memory structures which is done through brand communication. Sponsorship should create audience-brand familiarity because effective relationships with brands require some level of acquaintance (Cornwell & Maignan, 1998). When brand image transfer occurs at a level deeper than perception, sponsorship effectiveness is improved (Roy & Cornwell, 2004). Although sponsorship can exploit spillover image associations within the sponsorship property, its communication function through product category associations is often problematic (Cornwell & Maignan, 1998). So the third research question in this paper is: 'Does a sponsorship affect higher order aspects of brand equity beyond perception?' via consumer perception, thus attempting to empirically prove the positive brand value of a sponsorship brand in terms of perceived quality by consumers. This study investigates the potential of sponsorship to leverage the brand equity beyond mindset, and the other profiting effects there are for the sponsor.

3.4 The Significance of Brand Equity in Marketing

In marketing management, brand equity became of increased importance from 1990's (Cobb-Walgren, Ruble and Donthu, 1995). In the subsequent decades, a variety of antecedents and outcomes affecting consumer brand equity in the context of broader marketing exchanges have been examined. For example, according to Yoo, Donthu and Lee (2000), low brand equity was associated with frequent price promotion and high advertising expenditure, higher prices, superior shop image and broad distribution intensity were associated with high brand equity. Despite limited systematic research on the measurements of the consumer-based scales of brand equity, general brand equity knowledge has become widespread and common among the general public. In addition, a pioneer academic research study performed in 2001 was conducted with volunteers representing different countries and ethnicities, collectively reaching the conclusion that consumer brand equity analysis can be replicated across cultures and product categories (Yoo and Donthu, 2001). By the consumer-brand identification, this study showed that brands can transcend national boundaries and become one of the universally accepted brands for the consumers regardless of their nationality or ethnicity (Farjam and Hongyi, 2015). Although brand value is well-researched within the business marketing domain, literature on consumer brand value is much scarcer—particularly as the analysis of brand value pertains to the sports sponsorship literature. Thus, Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) proposed some theoretical models which can be of great significance for the sports industry as well, and they are considered as widely acknowledged theoretical frameworks in the literature. Although in the marketing literature there is considerable research on consumer brand value, research in the sports sector is lacking. The theoretical implications of this research is extremely relevant to the advancement of sports sponsorship and consumers preferences in the sports industry. These studies may generate real experiences and contribute to the enhancement of sports in developing countries. A review of related works shows the importance of this research and in the description of the methods employed in this work, the following chapters will detail the methods used in this study. This debate intends to the challenges that have been set up with the main sponsorship brands of the Winter Olympics (1), the brands are able to provide and favoring the spending of the organizing committee in the aspects of the competing sports consumption (2), the reasons for the consumers with full strength support for them as offering positive impact (3), and weakening on certain popular representative sports brands (4). The knowledge obtained from conducting consumer research will then aid in formulating the next chapter which will generate recommendations and suggestions from a new standpoint that be utilized by the organizing committee of the Gangwon 2024 Winter Youth Olympics.

4. Result Discussion

4.1 Problems with Existing Tier 1 Sponsorship Brands for Gangwon 2024 Winter Olympics

Most of the Tier 1 sports sponsorship brands are essential in being a daily part of consumers' lives, but many of these brands lack experience in snow and ice sports promotions. Resulting in consumers having little knowledge of and contact with level 1 sports sponsorship brands for the Winter Olympics. Sponsorships are intended to be mutually beneficial for the sponsor and organizer, they are largely expected to and are responsible for the attraction of audiences to the event and implementing activation strategies that can maximize sponsorship value (Biscaia et al., 2013). As a result out of such reciprocally beneficial relationship, most sports organization today, or sports event promoters typically depend upon their sponsors' inputs—resources and finances—to successfully execute their events, while many companies are focused on opportunities to sponsor events that reach their marketing goals, such as building brand equity (Mazodier and Quester, 2014). Unlike other sponsors, modern Tier 1 Sponsorship Brands have developed a focus on catering to the daily needs of consumers. These brands include PetroChina, Bank of China, and Air China, which are not naturally linked with the Winter Olympics and, at least to some degree, appear not to be experts in promoting winter sports. This reveals a definite weakness within sports sponsorship brands.

In addition, the Tier 1 sports sponsorship brands revealed are not necessarily the brands that best shape the image of China among Chinese consumers. As evidenced by the open-ended interviews made to the focus group (see appendix), consumers seem to prefer sports brands they buy frequently, such as Li Ning, instead of Anta, a Tier 1 sponsored brand. This preference originates from the belief that Li Ning is a more embodied Chinese brand since it integrates Chinese elements into its products and creates an independent brand image, which exudes a more symbolic essence of Chinese identity. A study in 2013 claimed that association with the sponsor, subsequently leveraged for branding purposes, is the basis of consumer sponsor engagement through evaluative conditioning and predictive learning (Mao et al., 2013). As such, with the inclusion of uncharacteristic brands within the sponsorship lineup for the 2022 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games Committee (2021), there comes the real threat of a dilution in consumer interest and ultimately, a lack of general admiration and meaningful relatability and resonance to such Tier 1 sponsorship brands. This, consequently, undermines their role as intermediaries between the event and consumers (Gijzenberg, 2014).

4.2 Types of Sponsorship Brands Supported

Sport related brands are preferred by consumers — it especially includes sportswear and healthy food products. Content analysis of the written responses from the focus group interview (see appendix) showed a remarkable consistency in the types of brands consumers prefer to see sponsoring them. Club affiliations positively influence the sponsor brand perception, but interestingly extra-role fan engagement does not influence this (Pradhan, et al., 2020). Contrary to previous beliefs, the research shows that participants at major sporting events have an inconsistent attitude towards sponsors, regardless of whether they are actively involved or not. For example, most of the respondents showed a much higher preference for brands like Li Ning, Hongxing Erke, Tebu: in the mind of consumers in China, these brands in apparel category has a good brand image and are more frequently consumed (Mao, Lun and Zhang, 2018). Best of all, consumers have already been open to spend on national name brands, such as Golden Dragon Fish that are frequently used in local events, and at the same time household names because of their use in local events. Going forward, the Gangwon 2024 Winter Olympics Organizing Committee may expand local sporting events affiliated Chinese culture brands and traditional national brands with a larger consumer base.

4.3 Analysis of Positive Impact Achieved by Sports Sponsorship Brands through the Olympic Committee

Analysis of results from the questionnaire and focus group interviews supports the conclusion that consumer behavior conforms to the theoretical framework for consumer brand value proposed in

Chapter 2. Four internal mechanisms under human psychology identified in the framework justify this alignment: brand conceptualization, brand awareness, brand quality, and brand loyalty. Brand conceptualization, which covers brand perception and image, strongly affects consumer readiness for engaging with sponsored brands (Handayani and Rashid, 2013). Thus, the positive brand image is positively affected by perceived attractiveness and interest—fitting the case of sponsored brands consumer-affinity (Close et al., 2006). What I mean is, two different opportunities have created a desire to sell certain brands. Foremost, in June 2021 and now, Chinese consumers' preference for local brands over foreign ones has grown owing to negative remarks made by some foreign corporate brand regarding China. One of the most recognized and representative Chinese brands Li Ning. Second, the flood occurrence in Henan province in July 2021 had brought in numerous donations to assist victims, while Hongxing Erke's 2 million RMB donation not only augmented its corporate reputation but also drew widespread customer support.

A sponsor of the Winter Olympics in China, the sports brand is seen positively among the people, which not only improves brand value but also advocates a patriotic image and unity after all difficulties. In most parts of the world, this is a positive cultural influence. As mentioned, interviewees had reported a willingness to purchase well-known national brands, such as Golden Dragon Fish, which are related to Chinese traditional culture and have high consumer groups. These brands help create the beneficial cultural image the OCOG can leverage. But the representative brands like Li Ning, Hongxing Erke, Tebu, and eq are not only there. Interviews revealed that these brands are considered "high quality" in China. In addition to liking the store, many respondents noted that they prefer to buy those brands, both to support local businesses, as well as their quality. These brands have a wide base of fans and built brand loyalty.

For the OCOG, the choice of these brands also works to bolster China's image in another two ways. First, these brands stand for strict quality control in line with China's rise as a manufacturing nation. Secondly, brands like Li Ning, which integrate unique Chinese cultural elements and are welcomed by Chinese athletes, express the image of China to the global setting, allowing the global audience to understand Chinese history and culture. In conclusion, the most prominent finding is that consumers are likely to be supporting sports-related brands, particularly sportswear and all types of health related food brands. To meet consumer needs in a positive cultural manner, the subsequent success of local brands linked to sports events and traditional national brands matches consumer behavior. Sports sponsorship brands positively affect consumer perceptions of brand conceptualization, awareness, quality, and loyalty. With this information, the OCOG has guided alignment with sponsorship brands that develop a positive image of China, connect with Chinese consumers and drive the successful outcome of the Gangwon 2024 Winter Olympics.

4.4 Limitations of Potential Sponsorship Brands

It is apparent from the questionnaire results that consumers majorly link brand conceptualization to the brand spokesperson. According to Anawati (2019), creating a good image to a company/organization in front of the community (society) became a necessity to earn social appreciation, because the image of an agency/organization is the perception of society. Well-known or notable sports brands are often excluded from the first-tier sponsorship of the Winter Olympics due to scandals involving the spokespersons they have chosen during the endorsement period. Hence the image of the spokesperson plays a direct role in how consumers see the brand image, and any negative associations can keep the brand out of the higher tier sponsors.

Moreover, the boost enjoyed by brands with positive Chinese cultural influences, described in the earlier section, is quite recent, taking place around mid-2021. But the selection process for brands that will sponsor the Winter Olympics started in 2019. So these brands failed to leverage their popularity because sponsors were selected when they were still emerging brands.

Moreover, there is a limited publicity for these brands. According to a 2018 study, social media marketing activities play an important role in improving brand image and brand loyalty and brand awareness (BİLGİN, 2018). Had it not been for the combination of the aforementioned two

opportunities these brands may well have remained little known outside their niche. Another reason why these brands are not the top-tier sponsorship brands at the Winter Olympics is that they have limited publicity, and their brand awareness is low. The study highlights how much of an aid in landing high exposure sponsorship deals a well-managed brand and effective hype can be. If they want to earn the best sponsorships for events such as the Gangwon 2024 Winter Olympics, brands need to ensure they are properly managing the public images of their spokespersons, making full-use of social media marketing methods to build brand awareness and cultivate brand loyalty. Factors like these, if addressed, can help bridge the gap between consumer familiarity with brands and their sponsorships, leading to wins for both brands on the shelf and the events they back.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study provides useful insights into the factors that affect the selection of sponsorship brands, as well as their effectiveness, in the context of major events like the Gangwon 2024 Winter Olympics. These results underscore the critical importance of thoughtful brand management and successful public relations in landing and retaining top-tier sponsorship deals.

The results highlight the need to manage the images of brand spokespersons. The spokesperson for a brand significantly affects consumer perceptions; thus, any negative associations can preclude a brand from inclusion in exclusive sponsorship categories. Thus, brands should take due diligence before availing any spokesperson and should keep an eye on them in the long run, as they represent what the brand stands for. It is believed that leveraging social media marketing is an important strategy for improving brand awareness and brand loyalty. Brands must invest in comprehensive social media campaigns to get noticed and gain traction during a time when digital platforms are the primary market influencer. This is especially important for brands with positive cultural influencers that might have come to light after the original sponsorship selection process. The answer for those promoting their own unique cultural and quality features is to realize this and turn increasing popularity into correctly placed sponsorship.

These results suggest that the identified limitations such as timing problems and lack of attention must be addressed to bridge the gap between brand popularity and sponsorship recognition. If brands successfully manage the influence of these factors, they are more likely to win these coveted sponsorships, allowing for increased visibility and a boost to the overall success of the event. Additionally, the findings of this research have great relevance for brands and event organizers. These results highlight the critical importance of a holistic and proactive strategy for brand management, especially surrounding major events, for brands. Understanding what affects consumer perceptions of sponsorship can help event organizers select sponsors that align with the overall ethos of the event, attracting more attendees and generating good publicity for both the event and their sponsors. In essence, the art of sponsorship partnerships during occasions such as the 2024 Winter Olympics lies in finding a precarious equilibrium among brand strategy, meaningful promotion, and cultural resonance. Focusing on these aspects can significantly increase brand opportunities to have top-tier sponsorship while giving event organizers peace of mind in ensuring that their sponsors help develop the best image for the event, as well as legacy integration.

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