

Added Value for Sponsors: A Study of Network in Football 2011–2018

Abstract

Purpose: This study identifies the outcomes prioritised by the sponsors of a sport, specifically football. Our novel thesis is that the network collaboration between sponsors as well as with the sponsorship object (i.e. the football club) is a significant determinant of sponsor satisfaction and the likelihood of renewing the sponsorship deal. This perspective has not been adequately addressed in existing sponsorship research.

Design/methodology/approach: We use an original dataset to empirically analyse networks and their business value for football sponsors. Our data covers sponsors of the Norwegian football club Rosenborg Ballklub (RBK) from 2011 to 2018, which we analyse using regression models.

Findings: The results indicate that network effects are extremely important for sponsors in the RBK network. Our analyses also indicate that network effects are more important than exposure.

Practical implications: When planning, sponsors must analyse their motives for being a sponsor and assess how well their network functions by exploring its cohesiveness and scope. It is also very important that the sponsorship object be aware of the value of the network and enable interaction between the sponsors.

Originality/value: This study confirms that functioning networks contribute to the satisfaction and renewal of sponsorships and can attract a growing number of sponsors for sports clubs, thus serving as an important source of income.

Keywords: Sport sponsorship, sponsorship network, network effect, relationship, sponsor satisfaction, renewing sponsorship

Paper type: Research paper

Introduction

Since 2008, the global sponsor market in sports has increased by more than 50% (IEG, 2018), and a similar tendency can be observed in Norway (Sponsor Insight, 2018). According to the International Events Group (IEG, 2018), sponsorship comprises a growing portion of the marketing budget of several companies. In other words, sponsorship has become an increasingly significant source of income for sports clubs.

However, global sports sponsorship spending was projected to fall from £33.5 billion in 2019 to £21 billion in 2020 (Two Circles, 2020), a decrease of 37%. Sponsorship industry forecasting suggests that decision-makers expect spending to continue its decrease due to the sports and entertainment shutdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (IEG Outlook, 2020). The pandemic has caused new sponsorship agreements to be put on hold, and many existing agreements will end as sponsors implement major cost-cutting measures. Sponsors will also be given sponsorship collateral and cash rebates due to the postponement and cancellation of live sports. This means that it is more important than ever to study the effects of sponsorship. Despite the above-mentioned challenges, sponsorship is an increasingly significant source of income for sports clubs. The statistics outlined above indicate the importance of sponsorship as a marketing communication tool over the last decades for businesses seeking to associate themselves with sports (Biscaia *et al.*, 2013; Cornwell *et al.*, 2005; Crompton, 2004; Zaharia *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, we must take into consideration how of sponsorship is activated.

The activation (leveraging) of sponsorship agreements incurs costs. Leveraging is a marketing method used by a sponsor to communicate its sponsorship to relevant target groups (Choi *et al.*, 2006). There are no official representative figures on the activation of sponsorship agreements worldwide; however, we can assume that the sums are significant. Given the large budgets involved, analysing the value of sponsorship investments is critical (Farrelly and Quester, 2005; Farrelly *et al.*, 2006). Sponsors want to know what returns they can expect, and

owners of sponsorship objects want to know what qualities they should promote in their negotiations with sponsors and consider while pricing sponsorship agreements (Farrelly and Quester, 2005; Farrelly *et al.*, 2006).

Former research has focused on outcomes such as exposure, brand awareness, image, fit, attitudes to sponsors, purchase intention, and actual purchase in the context of sport sponsorship (Biscaia *et al.*, 2013; Cornwell *et al.*, 2005; Cornwell *et al.*, 2006; Grohs and Reisinger, 2014; Keller, 1993; Kim *et al.*, 2015; Olson, 2010; Zaharia *et al.*, 2016) and, to a lesser extent, on networks that are established in connection with sponsorships and the value they have for sponsors and sponsorship objects. We contribute to this research by examining the value of the network. A network is ‘a set of two or more connected business relationships in which each exchange relation is between business firms that are conceptualised as collective actors’ (Anderson *et al.*, 1994, p. 2). This study answers the call of Cobbs (2011) for deeper research into the networks and network theory related to sponsorship. He states that the network aspect has been neglected in the research, despite the fact that companies in the business-to-business (B2B) market have invested millions of dollars in sponsorship. Wagner *et al.* (2017) also maintain that networks are an understudied area in sponsorship research. Other researchers assert that growth in studies that take a network or relationship perspective is sluggish, especially the research on sponsors (Farrelly and Quester, 2005). Ryan and Fahy (2012) point to the growing interest in networking and network theory in the sponsorship context. However, neither sponsorship nor networking has been the focus of recent research (Jin, 2017, Maldonado-Erazo *et al.*, 2019). The use of ‘sponsorship–relationship’ and ‘sponsorship network’ as terms in articles on sponsorship refers almost exclusively to the sponsor–sponsorship object relationship. Very few studies examine the networks that sponsorship objects establish and that facilitate the creation of value for sponsors (the few that do include

Cobbs (2011), Junghagen (2018), Olkkonen (2001) Olkkonen *et al.* (2000), Pieters *et al.* (2012), Ryan and Fahy (2012), Street and Cameron (2007), and Wagner *et al.* (2017)).

According to Cobbs (2011) the lack of access to sponsor networks and of empirical data on networks are important reasons for the limited research performed on sponsor networks. Our study uses quantitative data on the sponsorship network of Norway's largest football club, RBK, covering the period 2011 to 2018. Our survey seeks to reveal whether participation in the RBK's network is important for sponsors. This study emphasises the managerial implications for stakeholders – particularly the consequences for the sponsorship object.

In Norway, football is the most attractive sponsorship object (Sponsor Insight, 2019; Gammelsæter *et al.*, 2011). The majority of Norway's football clubs at the highest levels have established networks for their sponsors. In his study of the professionalisation of football in Scandinavia (Norway, Sweden, and Denmark), Gammelsæter *et al.*, (2011) showed that the amateur rule in football in Norway changed as late as 1991. He also claimed that, 'in Norway, many clubs established partnerships with an affiliated shareholder company that purchased exclusive rights to the club name for merchandising purposes. The revenue from this transaction equalled the budget that was required to run the club, so in many instances the club was (and is) run by the company' (Gammelsæter *et al.*, 2011, p. 79). In Norway, however, clubs are owned by club members and not by companies. Income related to sponsors is therefore very important. Being owned by a company provides opportunities for financial support and contributes to financial predictability. When a club is owned by club members consisting of individuals with no tradition to support the club financially connected to ownership, ownership is not a source of funding. Other revenues such as ticket revenues, media revenues, sales of club effects, and sponsorship revenues thus become the central sources of funding. This has probably helped motivate football clubs in Norway to focus on their sponsors and be innovative concerning them.

Sponsor contributions to the RBK increased from £5 million to £8.5 million from 2011 to 2018 and accounted for 26% to 37% of the club's total revenue in the same period (RBK, 2019). Due to large fluctuations in total income, the percentage share of income related to sponsorship varied during the period, but the amount related to sponsorship has increased from year to year.

Classic approaches to the value of sponsorship

Sponsorship has been defined in many ways. Of these definitions, that of Meenaghan (1983) is frequently used: 'Sponsoring can be regarded as an enterprise's way of supporting, either economically or otherwise, a sponsorship object in order to achieve commercial objectives' (p. 9). Cornwell (1995) goes further and defines sponsorship-linked marketing as 'the orchestration and implementation of marketing activities for the purpose of building and communicating an association to a sponsorship' (p. 15). Sponsorship motivations have been discussed in several ways. Ryan and Fahy (2012) list five motivation types: philanthropical, return on investment, consumer-oriented, strategic resources, and relations and networks. This study integrates the last four. We exclude the philanthropical type because it regards sponsorship as a gift and consequently does not meet the requirement for return on investment.

Cornwell *et al.* (2005) introduced a comprehensive model for studying sponsorship-linked marketing. The model summarised and extended the theoretical understanding of the topic by considering potential underlying information-processing mechanics, individual- and group-level factors, market and management factors, and theorised sponsorship outcomes. The sponsorship outcomes consisted of awareness, image, attitudes, liking, preferences, purchase intent, purchase commitment, and purchase. Many sponsorship researchers have applied this model, including Biscaia *et al.* (2013), Grohs and Reisinger (2014), Tsordia *et al.* (2018), Kim

et al. (2015), and Zaharia *et al.* (2016). Consumer-oriented sponsorship is central in the classic approaches to the value of sponsorship.

Consumer-oriented sponsorship

Sponsorship has the capacity to reach a broad target group and has the potential to deliver several effects (Meenaghan, 2001). Logo exposure is perhaps the easiest measure to evaluate and has been widely considered in the literature on sponsorship. Several studies on conditioning research have found that logo exposure increases the attention paid to the sponsor (Bornstein, 1989; Cornwell and Maignan, 1998; Cornwell *et al.*, 2006; Grohs and Reisinger, 2014; Kim *et al.*, 2015; Lardinoit and Derbaix, 2001; Meenaghan and Shipley, 1999; Olson and Thjømøe, 2009; Speed and Thompson, 2000; Zaharia *et al.*, 2016; Zajonc, 1968). A sponsor is given the opportunity to present itself to fans and spectators in different arenas as well as to viewers across different media channels. The ability to communicate with such a variety of stakeholders is a clear advantage of sponsorship over other communication strategies (Crowley, 1991; Parker, 1991). In this way, sponsorship contributes to positive publicity for the sponsor or its brand names.

In addition, Parker (1991) discovered that attention to and awareness of sponsors increase when sponsorship is employed in an integrated campaign, as in advertisements or promotions; this is the so-called 'leveraging of sponsorship' (Choi *et al.*, 2006). However, the sponsors who receive the most exposure are not necessarily those who gain the most out of it (Grohs and Reisinger, 2014; Kim *et al.*, 2015). There are also several challenges to studying measurable effects such as exposure (Tripodi, 2001).

Sponsorship is one of several strategies used by companies in their communication; sponsorship in an integrated market communication strategy, along with other measures, such as advertising, promotion, PR, digital communication, word of mouth, sales, and late-stage

marketing, used to produce measurable effects for the enterprise (Kitchen and Schultz, 1999; Duncan and Everett, 1993). Thus, it is difficult to isolate the effect of sponsorship on integrated market communication. There may be spillover effects from previous communication activities, the sponsor may be trying to achieve several ambitions at once, and various uncontrollable environmental factors may be at work (Hastings, 1984; Hoeck *et al.*, 1997).

As mentioned, most of the sponsorship research takes a consumer-oriented approach focusing on efforts to improve awareness and image, among other outcomes. Cornwell *et al.*'s (2005) comprehensive model does not consider business-to-business-focused sponsorship in connection with the sponsor network. Therefore, this study takes the network approach and examines the sponsors' objectives related to sponsorship and participation in sponsorship networks. The aim is to outline a broader framework for sponsorship that includes network and network theories.

Network approach to sponsorship: The need for a broader perspective

As stated earlier a network is 'a set of two or more connected business relationships in which each exchange relation is between business firms that are conceptualised as collective actors' (Anderson *et al.*, 1994, p. 2). Several studies on sponsorship have focused on consumer response effects (Biscaia *et al.*, 2015; Cornwell *et al.*, 2005; Cornwell and Maignan, 1998; Farrelly *et al.*, 2006; Grohs and Reisinger, 2014; Kim *et al.*, 2015; Olson, 2010; Zaharia *et al.*, 2016). Wagner *et al.* (2017) argue that sponsorship is a complex field that requires scholars to look at sponsorship from different perspectives. As emphasised earlier, research related to network-based sponsorship is perceived to be deficient (Cobbs 201, Wagner et al. 2017 and Junghagen 2018). Maldonado-Erazo *et al.* (2019) examine the sports sponsorship research and identify 484 articles related to sports sponsorship from 1978 to September 2018; networks are not addressed in any of them, suggesting a gap in the research on this topic. In her study of

research articles published in the *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship* from 1999 to 2015, Jin (2017) found 282 articles on sports marketing and sponsorship. She presents a list of keywords related to the 40 most central concepts; ‘equity’, the least central concept, is mentioned 12 times. Jin (2017) found no studies that focused on networks. Finally, a recent analysis of 20 years of sponsorship research discovered an excessive focus on the consumer-based approach to sponsorship (Jensen, 2020).

Cobbs (2011) points out that not all sponsors are interested in reaching a consumer market. Crowley (1991) maintains that over a quarter of sponsors use sponsorship as a marketing tool in a ‘business to business arena’. Crowley claims back in 1991 that “virtually universal acceptance of sponsorship as a component of the marketing mix is due to capacity of sponsorship to perform certain key marketing tasks particularly well” (p. 11). What about sponsorship and the value of the network? Cobbs (2011) notes that knowledge of sponsor relationships and networks must be established; however, the weak competence of the researchers who analyse networks is a problem. Olkkonen *et al.* (2000) also suggest that sponsorship researchers lack the required communication competence. Further, they argue that the challenge of analysing interactions and relationships in dyads and networks could be solved by considering concepts related to network approach. Olkkonen (2001) emphasizes the value of looking at network theory and how network theory can contribute to a greater understanding of sponsorship. Olkkonen (2001) also presents various theoretical approaches to networks and relationships that can be linked to sponsor networks.

Cobbs (2011) states that the lack of focus on networks is due to the challenge of gaining access to a sports-related network and obtaining data from it, as well as the mass media’s concentration on the consumer market, and its extensive reporting on the sports industry. A broader approach to evaluating the value of sponsorship is thus necessary. One approach

involves looking at relationships and networks. Ryan and Fahy (2012) claim that network theory is beginning to arouse interest in the sponsorship context.

Pieters *et al.* (2012) maintain that those who own and manage a sponsorship object may have much to learn from social network theory. They point out how dependent sports are on sponsors as a source of income, and how uncertain the relationship between a sponsor and sponsorship object can be. Building and creating value through a network and creating trust in the relationship are decisive factors. Their work can be viewed as a contribution towards analysing and developing management capability in network management, as indicated by Olkkonen (2001). Ryan and Fahy (2012) maintain that a key factor in the concept of ‘sponsorship network management’ is the ability to handle relationships in a network. They describe a timeline, development attitudes, and thought processes regarding sponsorship wherein ‘sponsorship as interaction’ is relevant. They list the following central capabilities: network-specific, including network visioning and orchestration, and relationship portfolio management (Ryan and Fahy, 2012).

It is therefore important to ensure that sponsorship serves as more than a mass communication tool and that sponsors do not consider the consumer market only. The business market is the primary consideration for many sponsors, and some sponsors consider both markets. Although logo exposure and its effects are important, other effects can also be important for less visible sponsors and B2B enterprises. Therefore, it is necessary to understand how interactions between sponsors in a network occur and how they can be developed.

The value of a network to the owner is a direct consequence of the value the network is perceived to add for the sponsor. Wagner *et al.* (2017) emphasise that ‘knowledge about what motivates sponsors to join a network is a precondition for discussing inter-organisational expectations and benefits from sponsorship network engagement’ (p. 428). Researchers who examine sponsorship networks attempt to identify the motivational factors for participating in

sponsorship networks, as well as the qualities of the network. Olkkonen (2001) states that ‘The role of network research is to ‘sensitise’ managers to network thinking, to deepen ‘practitioners’ understanding of what is happening in an interorganisational context, and, in this way, help them to ‘manage in the broadest sense’’ (p. 322).

Value of network for sponsors and sponsor objects

In networks, interaction takes place in a relationship between two actors (a dyad) and between interconnected relationships (a network; Olkkonen *et al.*, 2000). They argue that one must look at communication as an important aspect of interaction and networking. Relationships are a product of interpersonal communication between actors in a relationship or network. In other words, relationships/networks are essentially formed by interpersonal communication processes, which are in turn affected by contextual and structural factors. By contrast, communication processes may cause changes in the contextual and structural characteristics of relationships or networks (Olkkonen *et al.*, 2000). Olkkonen *et al.* (2000) maintain that studying competent dyads and networks linked to the research field of interpersonal communication can expand our knowledge of sponsorship.

Sponsorship objects have tailored roles and one is to mediate between different sponsors (Cobbs, 2011). By tailoring a collaboration between two or more sponsors, the team as the sponsorship object provides a B2B service that increases value over time relative to traditional brand awareness and image transfer processes (Ballantyne and Aitken, 2007).

In his case study of top Swedish football club Malmö FF, Junghagen (2018) found that exposure had a lower-than-expected value for several sponsors. Exposure was not a target in the agreement for this sponsor group; what was valuable for this type of sponsor group involved the network itself. The recommendation for the owner of the sponsor network is to work with stakeholder management beyond the sponsor–club dyad (Junghagen, 2018). The arbitrator’s role is, among other things, to visualise the network, lead the portfolio of sponsors, and set up

an interaction between the sponsors (Cobbs, 2011; Ryan and Fahy, 2012). The arbitrator is employed by the sponsor object and is the sponsorship manager for the property being sponsored. An appropriate use of the network enables sponsorship objects to find new sources of potential income in addition to traditional sponsor income, TV rights income, and income from the public. In other words, there is a potential to generate new business areas and growth for sponsorship objects and create value for partners involved in the network. Wagner *et al.* (2017) found that as many as 59% of the sponsors in the network they studied preferred to do business with other network members as opposed to non-members. Sponsor Insight (2019) indicates that the major interest for sponsors in top-level sports in Norway is logo exposure on uniforms and in the arena (86%). The ‘business to business meeting arena’ is considered important by 52% of top-level sports sponsors. Research done in Denmark reveals that network effects – such as sales to the network, increased social relations, and business agreements signed with companies outside the network via companies in the network – are important reasons for taking part in a sponsor network (Wagner *et al.*, 2017). Participants in networks - here referred to as partners - are to be understood as customers of the sponsor object. They buy service through partnerships. We replaced the term customer with partner. The customers here are partners in the network owned by the sponsor object. Based on the above, and with ‘satisfaction’ defined as a customer’s overall experience with a product or service provider (Fornell *et al.*, 1996), we formulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Satisfaction with a partnership and the intention to renew it are motivated by network participation.

Wagner *et al.* (2017) emphasise that the value of a network can be increased by using it to enhance relationships and by taking advantage of the opportunity to access other partners in the network, thereby obtaining business possibilities with a third party through dialogue or collaborations with network partners (Cobbs, 2011; Wagner *et al.*, 2017). Serving as an

arbitrator between network partners creates value for them. We do not look at third parties, although this can be an option when you belong to a network, in that you can access the external relationships of others. It is the value of being able to have relationships with the partners in the sponsor network itself that is our main focus.

Cobbs (2011) mentions that the arbitrator can render itself superfluous when contact is established between parties; they may no longer need an arbitrator when contact and trust are established. The task of the arbitrator is to initiate new contacts between actors in a network (Cobbs, 2011). The network research indicates that the participation of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in a network can impact their success and profitability (Junghagen, 2018; Street and Cameron, 2007). Building reputation and establishing competence in B2B markets are also important motives for sponsorship in many industrial enterprises (Blombäck and Axelsson, 2007).

Cornwell *et al.* (2005) state that ‘advertising is often sponsorship’s most valuable leverage’ (p. 1). Jensen and Cornwell (2021) point out that ‘Sponsorship may be utilized to foster both consumer-focused and industrial-focused relationships, including community and employees’ (p. 791). Knowledge of what motivates a sponsor is vital. That sponsorship is an important marketing and communication tool has been confirmed in many studies, but it is important to determine what other motivations may exist. We use SMEs as a criterion with which to differentiate between participation motivations, following Wagner *et al.* (2017). Wagner *et al.* (2017) examine the value of networks and how they should be managed by the owner, focusing on networks comprising SMEs. They claim that research related to networks, local clubs, and SMEs acting as sponsors should be deepened. They argue that smaller clubs in local communities are often SMEs. They also point out that other networks in smaller societies are scarce, which means that networks linked to sports and clubs are significant. They conclude that participation in sponsorship is strategically anchored and motivated by business

considerations. In our study, SME sponsors are in both network and business categories. Virtually all partners, except the main collaborator and those in the collaborator category, are SMEs. There is every reason to assume that sponsors' choice of sponsor category is related to their sponsorship purpose. We thus propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Participation in the network is more important for smaller sponsors than for larger ones.

Customer satisfaction indexes (CSI) were introduced in 1992 (Fornell, 1992; Fornell *et al.* 1996) and are used for both business-to-consumer and business-to-business interactions. The immediate consequence of increased customer satisfaction is increased customer loyalty (Bloemer and Kasper, 1995; Zeithaml *et al.*, 1996; Kandampully *et al.*, 2015), which is a customer's predisposition to repurchase from a particular supplier. Customer loyalty is the main dependent variable in the model because of its value for customer retention (Fornell *et al.* 1996). This model has similarities to research in cognitive psychology. According to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), attitudes are functionally related to behavioural intentions, which predict behaviour. Oliver (1999) claims that both practitioners and academics understand that consumer loyalty and satisfaction are strongly linked, and he concludes that customer satisfaction is a necessary step in customer loyalty formation.

Satisfaction with the partnership is an explanatory variable in the model. Our dependent variable, intention to renew the partnership, expresses a certain degree of loyalty. The intention to renew the partnership is the most useful indicator of sponsor loyalty, as extensive research has concluded that satisfaction correlates with loyalty. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Satisfaction with the partnership has a direct positive effect on the intention to renew it.

Methodology

Our case: Rosenborg Ballklub (RBK)

RBK generates the third most sponsorship revenue of all sport organizations in Norway and the most of football teams. Only the Norwegian Ski Federation and Norwegian Football Association are larger (Sponsor Insight, 2019). The club has been the leading Norwegian football club for decades and has won the national league championship title 26 times and the cup 12 times. It has also taken part in 11 Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) group playoffs in the UEFA Champions League and reached the quarter finals in 1997. For the last three seasons (2016–2019), RBK has represented Norway in the UEFA Europa League.

Data

A hallmark of our study is the use of unique survey data covering the experience of sponsors. The data were gathered over a period of eight years, from 2011 to 2018, from a network of sponsors associated with RBK. The network is called the “RBK partner network” and includes more than 100 partners that consist of both local businesses as well as larger companies (both national and international). The network was established in the late 1990s and survey have been carried out since 2009. The relevant questions for the present paper were included in 2011, and since then the survey has had a core of questions that have been repeated yearly. The data were collected in a commercial context for use by the football club.

The survey respondents are representatives of firms that collaborate with RBK. As such, our unit of analysis is the firm; and in cases where more than one respondent from the same firm answered the questionnaire each year, we employ the mean of the individual values

belonging to that firm. Due to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) we were not allowed to include a unique identifier for each respondent from survey to survey. As such, our analysis is restricted to the year level.¹

The goal of the partner network is to help create extra income for the club, as well as create an arena wherein companies can meet other partner members at various events in order to build business relations. Sponsor contributions, as previously mentioned, connected to the RBK's partner network have increased from £5 million to £8.5 million from 2011 to 2018 and accounted for 26% to 37% of the club's total revenue in the same period (RBK, 2019). Due to large fluctuations in total income, the percentage share of income related to sponsorship varied during the period, but the amount related to sponsorship has increased from year to year.

This survey was intended to map how the partners experience collaboration in different areas and includes an assessment of the respondents' satisfaction and their evaluation of the importance of the survey topics. It includes background questions about the respondents and their companies, as well as questions regarding their overall satisfaction with the partnership and various aspects of it. These include questions about events hosted by the soccer club, the degree of their importance, the skill of RBK, and their satisfaction with subtopics related to the partnership.

The dependent variables are *satisfaction with partnership* (1–10) and *intention to renew partnership* (1–10).² We include two sets of explanatory variables. The first addresses the *importance* of a given area, such as the respondents' perception of the importance of brand exposure. The second set addresses respondents' satisfaction with the same areas. These items, coded (1–10), are as follows: *brand exposure*, *business profiling*, *mingling*, *venue to meet new partners*, *venue to strengthen customer relations*, *opportunity to purchase from other partners*,

¹ We received the data in a form where it was not possible to link units from survey to survey. The treatment of data has been undertaken in close contact with Statistics Norway (NSD).

² These variables are worded as follows: "How satisfied are you overall with the partnership with RBK?" and "How likely is it that you will renew/develop your partnership with RBK?"

sales possibilities to other partners, collaboration projects, match day arrangements, success of RBK, use of the RBK brand, focus on return of investment, care for potential customers, and sales possibilities for RBK (see Appendix 1 for explanation of these variables). In addition, we control for the number of years the firms have been partners with RBK and test for interaction effects, assuming that the results are moderated by the category (size) of the partners. Category (size) is measured as the amount of money the sponsor invests in its partnership with RBK. The dataset comprises four types of partner, ranging from small to large: *network partner, business partner, collaborator, and main collaborator*. Because of the low N of the *main collaborator* category, these four are merged into two categories (the former two and the latter two categories are merged). This produces two partner categories: Category 1 comprises smaller partners (network and business partners), and category 2 comprises larger ones (collaborators and main collaborators). The larger partner category is coded 1, and the smaller partner category is coded 0. The annual N values are presented in Table 1.

There are substantial differences between the partner categories. The main collaborators and collaborators are large companies that are either international or national actors or the largest regional companies. The main collaborators have sponsorship deals worth hundreds of thousands of pounds annually and include the extensive use of billboards at the club's home stadium. Collaborator partnership is priced at 35 to 40,000 pounds annually and includes billboard presence and other agreements with the club. Both categories include logos on uniforms, a presence at events, and other types of exposure that are separate from the actual network. The regular partner categories are comprised mainly of smaller local firms that pay in the range of 12 to 15,000 pounds annually to participate in the network.

Most of the partners in RBK's network are SMEs according to the European definition (European Commission, 2019). SMEs are used as a criterion with which to differentiate between the partners' motivations for participation, following Wagner *et al.* (2017). The SME

sponsors are in both the network and business categories. Virtually all the partners, except the main collaborator and those in the collaborator category, are SMEs.

Table 1. Yearly *N* in our analysis

Year	<i>N</i>	Total number of partners
2011	60	95
2012	70	100
2013	60	100
2014	68	109
2015	72	100
2016	77	110
2017	79	120
2018	96	120

Analysis

We employ pooled ordinary least squares (OLS) models to investigate the items that drive satisfaction and the intention to renew the partnership. The observations are clustered by year, and we relax the assumption that the standard errors are independent of each other (Huber, 1967; White, 1980). The regression models were developed in a stepwise manner. First, all available items were included in the dataset, and the least significant items eliminated. The results of the regression models are presented in Table 2. Models 1 and 2 employ items that rate the importance of different areas of the partnership, while Models 3 and 4 employ items that rate satisfaction with RBK in those areas. In the models with *intention to renew partnership* as a dependent variable (Models 2 and 4), *satisfaction with partnership* is included as an explanatory variable in addition to the different items. Since many of the items also have an indirect effect through *satisfaction with partnership*, the direct effects of the items are reduced.

Table 2. Pooled OLS regression models on *satisfaction* and *intention to renew sponsorship*.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	<i>Satisfaction</i>	<i>Intention</i>	<i>Satisfaction</i>	<i>Intention</i>
	<i>partnership</i>	<i>to renew</i>	<i>partnership</i>	<i>to renew</i>
	Importance items		Satisfaction items	
Brand exposure	0.031* (0.008)	---	0.102 (0.054)	0.040 (0.117)
Business profiling	0.103 (0.047)	---	---	---
Satisfaction with partnership	---	0.685** (0.086)	---	0.570** (0.117)
<i>Network</i>				
Mingling	0.159* (0.044)	0.118 (0.062)	0.160* (0.060)	0.012 (0.035)
Opportunity to purchase	0.139* (0.036)		0.078 (0.033)	0.036 (0.080)
Collaboration projects	0.017 (0.011)	---	---	---
Venue to meet partners	---	---	0.227** (0.040)	0.093 (0.075)
Venue custom. relat.	---	0.079* (0.030)	0.081* (0.030)	0.079 (0.057)
Sales pos. oth. partners	---	---	0.023* (0.009)	0.014 (0.019)
<i>Sports</i>				
Success of RBK	0.084* (0.032)	---	0.071 (0.026)	0.068* (0.019)
Match day	0.066 (0.034)	0.080 (0.033)	0.072 (0.044)	0.037 (0.055)
<i>Other</i>				
Sales to RBK	0.026 (0.011)	---	---	---
Focus on ROI	---	0.050 (0.045)	0.102* (0.037)	0.005 (0.074)
Use of RBK brand	---	0.050* (0.015)	0.027* (0.008)	0.033* (0.012)
Potential customers	---	0.027 (0.013)	-0.011 (0.012)	0.043 (0.023)
Partner category	0.132 (0.200)	0.234 (0.189)	-0.007 (0.148)	0.136 (0.194)
Years of partnership	-0.029 (0.027)	0.062 (0.036)	0.058 (0.028)	0.118* (0.035)
Constant	3.324** (0.640)	-0.661 (0.333)	1.573* (0.497)	-0.461 (0.498)
Observations	410	400	377	370
R^2	0.284	0.474	0.484	0.484

Note: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

As shown in Table 2, we find that the importance of *brand exposure*, *mingling*, *opportunity to purchase from other partners*, and *success of RBK* are significantly and positively related to

satisfaction with partnership (Model 1). As expected, *satisfaction with partnership* is the most influential variable in explaining the *intention to renew partnership* (Models 2 and 4). In addition to satisfaction, *venues to strengthen customer relations* and *use of the RBK brand* have significantly positive direct effects on intention to renew (Model 2). When the satisfaction items in Model 3 are employed, other network-related items have a stronger effect than in Model 1. Here, *venue to meet new partners*, *venue to strengthen customer relations*, and *sales possibilities to other partners* have significantly positive effects on satisfaction with the partnership. The differences between the models, regarding which items are included, are caused by the stepwise process eliminating the least significant items.

Models 1 and 3 show that network-related areas of collaboration are related to overall satisfaction with the partnership, supporting Hypothesis 1. The models also show that satisfaction with partnership is an important driver of intention to renew the sponsorship, supporting Hypothesis 3.³

To investigate whether network participation is more important for smaller sponsors than for larger ones, we run additional models including interaction terms for each of the network-items. Table 3 presents a summary of these results. These models are identical to Models 1 and 3 except for the interaction terms.

³ We have also conducted a path analysis, see Appendix 2. Following this analysis, the items mingling and opportunity to purchase have the strongest indirect effects on intention to renew the partnership.

Table 3. Tests of interaction, network items and partner category.

	Model 1 <i>Satisfaction</i> <i>partnership</i> Importance items	Model 3 <i>Satisfaction</i> <i>partnership</i> Satisfaction items
Mingling # Partner category	-0.020 (0.088)	0.114 (0.086)
Opportunity to purchase # Partner category	0.022 (0.072)	0.200* (0.075)
Collaboration projects # Partner category	0.008 (0.036)	---
Venue to meet partners # Partner category	---	0.111 (0.121)
Venue custom. relat. # Partner category	---	0.031 (0.116)
Sales pos. oth. Partners # Partner category	---	-0.013 (0.028)

Note: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

As we can see from the results in Table 3, there are close to zero significant interaction effects between network and partner categories in our models. Therefore, we do not find support for Hypothesis 2.

Discussion

This study assessed how a sponsor network might provide additional value to sponsors. Our principal goal was to outline a broader framework for sponsorship that includes network and network theories. Discussing the details of network theory is beyond the scope of this study, but network theory and the network approach can help increase our understanding of sponsorship. Our findings demonstrate that networks are important for RBK sponsors, as shown by the network measures tested in Table 2. Thus, our first hypothesis is confirmed. This result holds for large, primary sponsors as well as many smaller networks and business partners. We do not find significant interaction effects between the network items and partner category (Table 3). It is perhaps surprising that large sponsors consider network effects to be important;

one might expect other effects to be more central to large, primary sponsors. Based on our empirical data, it emphasizes to an even greater extent the value of networking related to sponsorship, regardless of the size of the sponsor's investment. Models 2 and 4 show that satisfaction with partnership has a strong and significant effect on the intention to renew the partnership. Therefore, our third hypothesis is confirmed.

As mentioned, much of the research on sponsorship effectiveness focuses on consumer-oriented responses, such as logo exposure, image transfer, fit, attitudes, purchase intention, and actual purchase (Bornstein, 1989; Cornwell and Maignan, 1998; Ferran and Pages, 1996; Grohs, 2015; Meenaghan, 1983; Rifon *et al.*, 2004; Zaharia *et al.*, 2016). Our study supplements the research by offering valuable novel insights. Our purpose was not to cover all the topics and perspectives related to sponsorship but rather to argue for a more focused investigation of networks and sponsorship, due to the value of networks for sponsors and owners of sports products/events. The literature on network theory has identified several potential effects of entering sponsor networks (Anderson *et al.*, 1994; Blombäck and Axelsson, 2007). A sponsor network is not isolated from traditional networks; instead, it will open the door for new business opportunities. Sponsor Insight conducts an annual investigation of the Norwegian sponsor market (2019). They determine the most common return on investment in the sponsorship of top-level sports. Sponsor Insight (2019) found that as many as 52% of sponsors in 2018 regarded the 'business to business meeting arena' as an important return on investment in their sponsorship of big-time sports. This comprehensive investigation supports our finding concerning the importance of networks, which is also a central finding of Junghagen (2018). Wagner *et al.* (2017) confirm that enterprises involve themselves in sponsorship primarily to do business with others.

It is important to ascertain how the amount of time invested in a network impacts success. Do those who have been in the network longer obtain more business relationships? In

our survey, years of partnership had no significant influence on return on investment. We find this result counterintuitive because many of today's RBK partners have stayed for a long period, and many sponsors choose to renew their partnership. For example, Wagner *et al.* (2017) found that it takes time before an enterprise can enjoy the benefits of its engagement in a network, typically more than two years. They also found that those who have spent more than two years in the network are more likely to form relationships with third-party companies than are those who are not members of the network. In addition, partners engage with third-party companies through their network partners. Wagner *et al.* (2017) indicated that the value of the network is not decisive for all the network participants they studied, and that exposure is also regarded as important. They further claim that some sponsors support a club for social reasons. Although business reasons dominate, social motives (such as a local interest in supporting a professional sport) also seem to contribute to a sponsor's commitment to a network (Wagner *et al.*, 2017, p. 436). Ryan and Fahy (2012) point out that pure philanthropy is also a motive for sponsorship.

Research has shown that logo exposure is a central motive for sponsoring and that logo exposure increases the attention paid to sponsors (Bornstein, 1989; Cornwell and Maignan, 1998; Grohs and Reisinger, 2014; Kim *et al.*, 2015; Lardinoit and Derbaix, 2001; Meenaghan and Shipley, 1999; Olson and Thjømøe, 2009; Speed and Thompson, 2000; Zaharia *et al.*, 2016; Zajonc, 1968). In our investigation, exposure did not have the same importance. The simple reason is that exposure potential is not as favourable for SME sponsors as it is for large sponsors. Thus, it may be difficult for a sponsor that chooses to link itself to a network with many sponsors to attract much attention via exposure and image transfer. There may be internal competition for attention, and small sponsors may lose out to the large ones.

Our findings indicate that the exposure effect is not as important as the network effect in sponsorship that embraces many partners. The largest sponsors (e.g. collaborators and main collaborators) pay more than the small sponsors and will consequently be given more and

greater rights to the use of the sponsorship object's logo in the arena and on uniforms and equipment. However, the largest sponsors in our survey reported that the network was the most important factor, more important than exposure. When the sponsorship is expanded to include many partners, the sponsors do not consider the exposure effect to be as important as the network effect (Junghagen, 2018).

Implications

Choosing the best sponsorship object and the optimal solution for an enterprise is complicated. In its planning, the enterprise must analyse the various motives for being a sponsor. Our focus is on networks and enterprises that must assess the dynamics of the network they enter. It is important to obtain insight and clarity regarding how well the network functions by examining its cohesiveness and scope (Cobbs, 2011). Have those in the network managed to create connections with network partners, and have the arbitrators (sponsorship objects) managed to generate trust and a sense of mutual obligation among the partners? After entering a network, it is essential to engage and activate membership to obtain beneficial effects. There is a big difference in how individual sponsors take advantage of the network. This means that each sponsor must use additional resources to activate the network's potential. It is not just money that is a concern; central persons working to connect and create relationships with others in the network are more important.

From the sponsorship object's perspective, it is important to be aware of the value of the network. Networks are crucial for sponsors. It is important to obtain knowledge of how the network functions, how it is constructed, and how it develops. Network theory has much to offer in this area. This insight can also be used to obtain new partners. Among other things, the arbitrator's role is to visualise the network, lead the portfolio of sponsors, and facilitate interaction between the sponsors (Ryan and Fahy, 2012). In Norwegian and international

football, it is common for clubs to have many different sponsors, and one important success factor is how well this is facilitated. Given the decline in income generated from the public in Norwegian football since 2017, this expanded partner network will provide important additional income.

Insight into RBK and their network of partners

RBK is a leader in Norway in terms of enabling sponsors to obtain benefits from their network collaboration. They managed to develop trust and long-term commitment among partners in the network. As is reflected in the survey, RBK has created a vehicle for strengthening customer relationships and mingling opportunities, meeting new partners, engaging in buying and selling with other partners, and obtaining favourable purchases from others in the collaboration. In addition, the sponsors can make direct contact with other partners whenever they desire. Below, we briefly discuss some of the activities by which RBK makes interactions available in the network.

First, RBK features all the partners on its website, where each sponsor can submit an offer to another sponsor. Moreover, a Facebook page has been set up for relationship building, and RBK arranges for monthly meetings throughout the year (outside of the football season) where company presentations are delivered. In addition, a partner cup is arranged in an arena where the partners have stands and visit each other, and a ‘meeting cup’ with ‘speed dating’ between the partners is arranged, where the focus is on buying and selling. Each year, there is an open day at the stadium where the partners can set up a stand. In its dialogue with network partners, RBK explicitly instructs its marketing team to stimulate trade between network partners. Thus, RBK takes its arbitrator role seriously and employs a number of resource personnel to energise the dialogue between partners in the network. RBK has an internal professional team that manages and develops the network and supports its members.

Limitations and future research

Our investigation is a case study of the sponsors of a specific football club that uses data covering a specific period. Thus, the findings have limited generalisability. Our analysis should be reproduced in case studies that, for example, examine other football clubs. Wagner *et al.* (2017) point out that their research could be expanded by including all the networks associated with top football and handball clubs in Denmark, since all these clubs accommodate and administer sponsor networks.

All sponsors require and expect a return on investment. Zaharia *et al.* (2016) claim that enterprises expect that the attention gained through sponsorship activities will increase purchase intention, and thus increase the return on sponsorship investments. We maintain that it is easier to calculate return on investment in terms of network effects than in terms of logo exposure and its outcomes, as network effects are concrete results and are easier to measure. The relevant research is lacking, however. This kind of research could help substantiate the concept of returns and arrive at a more comprehensive perspective on the benefits of participating in a sponsor network. The fact that networks are considered more important than exposure was confirmed by our investigation.

References

- Anderson, J.C., Håkansson, H. and Johansson, J. (1994), "Dyadic business relationships within a business network context", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 58 No. 4, pp. 1-15.
- Ballantyne, D. and Aitken, R. (2007), "Branding in B2B markets: insights from the service-dominant logic of marketing", *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 22 No. 6, pp. 363-371.
- Biscaia, R., Correia, A.F., Rosado, A.F., Ross, S.D., and Maroco, J. (2013), "Sport sponsorship: the relationship between team loyalty, sponsorship awareness, attitude toward

the sponsor and purchase intentions”, *Journal of Sport Management*, Vol 27 No. 4, pp. 288-302.

Bloemer, J. M. M. and Kasper, H.D.P. (1995), “The complex relationship between consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty”, *Journal of Economic Psychology*, Vol. 16 No. 2, pp. 311-329.

Blombäck, A. and Axelsson, B. (2007), “The role of corporate brand image in the selection of new subcontractors”, *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 22 No. 6, pp. 418-430.

Bornstein, R.F. (1989), “Exposure and effect: overview and meta-analysis of research 1968–1987”, *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 106 No. 2, pp. 265-289.

Choi, J.A., Stotlar, D.K. and Park, R.S. (2006), “Visual ethnography of on-site sponsorship activation: LG Action Sports Championship”, *Sports Marketing Quarterly*, Vol. 15 No. 2, pp. 71-79.

Cobbs, J.B. (2011), “The dynamics of relationship marketing in international sponsorship networks”, *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 26 No. 8, pp. 590-601.

Cornwell, T.B. (1995), “Sponsor-linked marketing development”, *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, Vol. 4 No. 4, pp. 13-24.

Cornwell, T.B., Humphreys, M.S., Maguire, A.M. and Tellegen, C.L. (2006), “Sponsorship-linked marketing: the role of articulation in memory”, *Journal of Consumer Research*. Vol. 33 No. 3, pp. 312-321.

Cornwell, T.B. and Maignan, I. (1998), “An international review of sponsorship research”, *Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 27 No. 1, pp. 1-21.

Cornwell, T.B., Weeks, C.S. and Roy, D.P. (2005), “Sponsorship-linked marketing: opening the black box”, *Journal of Advertising*. Vol. 34 No. 2, pp. 21-42.

Crompton, J.L. (2004), “Conceptualization and alternate operationalizations of measurement of sponsorship effectiveness in sport,” *Leisure Studies*, Vol. 23 No. 3, pp. 267-281.

Crowley, M.G. (1991), “Prioritising the sponsorship audience”, *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 25 No. 11, pp. 11-21.

Duncan, T.R. and Everett, S.E. (1993), “Client perceptions of integrated marketing communications”, *Journal of Advertising Research*, Vol. 33 No. 3, p. 30.

European Commission (September 2019), “User guide to the SME Definition”, available at: file:///C:/Users/A0210356/Downloads/sme_definition_user_guide_en.pdf.

Farelly, F. and Quester, P. (2005), “Examining important relationship quality constructs of the focal sponsorship exchange”, *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 34 No. 3, pp. 211-219.

- Farrelly, F., Quester, P. and Burton, R. (2006), "Changes in sponsorships value: competencies and capabilities of successful sponsorship relationships", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 35 No 8, pp. 1016-1026.
- Ferran, A. and Pages M. (1996), "Image sponsoring: a methodology to match event and sponsor", *Journal of Sport Management*, Vol. 10 No. 3, pp. 278-291.
- Fishbein, M. and Ajzen, I. (1975), "*Belief, attitude, intentions and behavior: An introduction to theory and research*", Addison-Wesley, Reading,
- Fornell, C. (1992), "A national customer satisfaction barometer: The Swedish experience", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 56 No. 1, pp. 6-21.
- Fornell, C., Johnson, M. D., Anderson, E. W., Cha, J. and Bryant, B. E. (1996), "The American customer satisfaction index: Nature, Purpose, and Findings", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 60 No. 4, pp. 7-18.
- Gammelsæter, H., Storm, R. K. and Söderman, S. (2011), "Diverging Scandinavian approaches to professional football", in Gammelsæter, H and Senaux B., *The organization and governance of top football cross Europe*. Routledge.
- Grohs, R. (2015), "Drivers of brand image improvement in sport event-sponsorship", *International Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 35 No. 3, pp. 391-420.
- Grohs, R. and Reisinger, H. (2014), "Sponsorship effect on brand image: the role of exposure and activity involvement", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 67 No. 5, pp. 1018-1025.
- Hastings, G.B. (1984), "Sponsorship works differently from advertising", *International Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 171-176.
- Hoeck, J., Gendall, P., Jeffcoat, M. and Orsman, D. (1997), "Sponsorship and advertising a comparison of their effects", *Journal of Marketing Communications*, Vol. 3 No. 1, pp. 21-32.
- Huber, P.J. (1967), "The behaviour of maximum likelihood estimates under nonstandard conditions", LeCam, L. and Weyman, J. (Eds.), *Proceedings of the Fifth Berkeley Symposium on Mathematical Statistics and Probability* (Vol. 1 No. 1), University of California Press, Berkley, pp. 221-346
- IEG Sponsorship Report (Jan 8, 2018), "Signs point to healthy sponsorship spending in 2018". Retrieved from: <https://www.sponsorship.com/Report/2018/01/08/Signs-Point-To-Healthy-Sponsorship-Spending-In-201.aspx>
- IEG Outlook (April 8, 2020). "Forecasting the future for sponsorship industry", available at: <https://www.sponsorship.com/IEG/files/f4/f41dfd0c-ae4a-49e8-8d88-d22f4793ed7f.pdf>.
- Jensen, J.A. (2020), "Are firms like fair-weathered fans? Examining decision-making in B2B relationships", *Journal of Businesses & Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 36 No. 2, pp. 281-291.

- Jensen, J.A. and Cornwell, B.T. (2021), "Assessing the dissolution of horizontal marketing relationships: the case of corporate sponsorship of sport", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 124, pp. 790-799.
- Jin, C-H. (2017), "Retrospection and state of sports marketing and sponsorship research in IJSM from 1999 to 2015", *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, Vol. 18 No. 4, pp. 363-379.
- Junghagen, S. (2018), "Football clubs as mediators in sponsor-stakeholder relations", *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 8 No. 4, pp. 335-353.
- Kandampully, J., Zhang, T. and Bilgihan A. (2015), "Customer loyalty: a review and future directions with a special focus on the hospitality industry", *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 27 No. 2, pp. 379-414.
- Keller, K.L. (1993), "Conceptualizing, measuring and managerial customer-based brand equity", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 57 No.1, pp. 1-22.
- Kim, Y., Lee, H.W., Magnusen, M.J. and Kim, M. (2015), "Factors influencing sponsorship effectiveness: a meta-analytic review and research synthesis", *Journal of Sport Management*, Vol. 29 No. 4, pp. 408-425.
- Kitchen, P.J. and Schultz, D.E. (1999), "A multi-country comparison of the drive for IMC", *Journal of Advertising Research*, Vol. 39 No. 1, pp. 21-38.
- Lardinoit T. and Derbaix, C. (2001), "Sponsorship and recall of sponsors", *Psychology and Marketing*, Vol. 18 No. 2, pp. 167-190.
- Maldonado- Erazo. C.P., Duran-Sanches, A., Alvarez-Garcia, J. and Del Rio-Rama, M. (2019), "Sport sponsorship: scientific coverage in academic journals", *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Public Policy*, Vol. 8 No. 1, pp. 163-186.
- Meenaghan, J.A. (1983), "Commercial sponsorship", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 17 No. 7, pp. 5-73.
- Meenaghan. T. (2001), "Understanding sponsorship effects" *Psychology and Marketing*, Vol. 18 No. 2, pp. 95-122.
- Meenaghan, T. and Shipley, D. (1999), "Media effect in commercial sponsorship", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 33 No. 3/4, pp. 328-347.
- Oliver, R. L. (1999), "Whence consumer loyalty", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 63 No. 4, pp. 33-44.
- Olkkonen, R. (2001), "Case study: the network approach to international sport sponsorship arrangement", *The Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 16 No. 4, pp. 309-329.

Olkkonen, R., Tikkanen, H. and Alajoutsijarvi, K. (2000), "Sponsorship as relationships and networks: implications for research", *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, Vol. 5 No. 1, pp. 12-19.

Olson, E.L. (2010), "Does sponsorship work in the same way in different sponsorship contexts?" *European Journal of Marketing*. Vol. 44 No. 1/2, pp. 180-199.

Olson, E. L. and Thjøemøe, H.M. (2009), "Sponsorship effect metric: assessing the financial value of sponsoring by comparisons to television advertising", *Journal of Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 37 No. 4, pp. 504-515.

Parker, K. (1991), "The sponsorship: the research contribution", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 25 No. 11, pp. 22-30.

Pieters, M., Knobens, J. and Pouwles, M. (2012), "A social network perspective on sports management: the effect of network embeddedness on the commercial performance of sports organizations", *Journal of Sports Management*, Vol. 26, pp. 433-444.

Rifon, N.J., Choi, M.S., Trimble, C.S. and Li, H. (2004), "Congruence effects in sponsorship", *Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 33 No.1, pp. 29-42.

RBK (January 21, 2019). *Rosenborg Ballklub: Annual Report 2011–2018*, RBK, Trondheim.

Ryan, A. and Fahy, J. (2012), "Evolving priorities in sponsorship: from media management to network management", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 28 No. 9-10, pp. 1132-1158.

Speed, R. and Thompson, P. (2000), "Determinants of sport sponsorship response", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 28 No. 2, pp. 226-238.

Sponsor Insight. Sponsor market (2017/18), "Norway's most comprehensive report on the Norwegian sponsorship market". Retrieved from: <https://www.sponsorinsight.no/det-norske-sponsormarkedet>.

Sponsor Insight. Sponsor Market (2019), "Norway's most comprehensive report on the Norwegian sponsorship market"

Street, C.T. and Cameron, A.F. (2007), "External relationships and the small business: a review of small business alliances and network research", *Journal of Small Business Management*, Vol. 45 No. 2, pp. 239-266.

Tripodi, J.A. (2001), "Sponsorship: a confirmed weapon in the promotional armoury", *Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, Vol. 3 No. 1, pp. 82-103.

Tsordia, Ch., Papadimitriou D. and Parganas P. (2018), "The influence of sport sponsorship on brand equity and purchase behavior", *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, Vol. 26 No. 1, pp. 85-102.

Two Circles (May15, 2020), "Global sports sponsorship spend (2018–2020), projected", available at: <https://twocircles.com/eu-en/articles/projections-sponsorship-spend-to-fall-17-2bn/>.

Wagner, U., Persson, H.T.R. and Overbye, M. (2017), “Sponsor networks and business relations orchestrated by teams’ sports clubs”, *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 7 No. 4, pp. 426-443.

White, H. (1980). “A heteroskedasticity-consistent covariance matrix estimator and a direct test for heteroskedasticity”, *Econometrica: Journal of the Econometric Society*, Vol. 48 No. 4, pp. 817–838.

Zaharia, N., Biscaia, R., Gray, D. and Stotlar, D. (2016), “No more ‘good’ intentions: purchase behaviors in sponsorship”, *Journal of Sport Management*, Vol. 30 No. 2, pp. 162-175.

Zajonc, R.B. (1968), “Attitudinal effect of mere exposure”, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 9 No. 2, pp. 1-27.

Zeithaml, V.A., Berry, L.L. and Parasuraman, A. (1996), “The behavioral consequences of service quality”, *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 60 No. 2, pp. 31-46.

Appendix 1. Operationalization of variables.

Variable	Brief Explanation	Representative Studies
Brand exposure	Exposure of sponsors own brand in connection with the sponsor object in various contexts.	Bornstein, 1989; Cornwell, 1995; Cornwell and Maignan, 1998; Cornwell <i>et al.</i> , 2006, Grohs and Reisinger, 2014; Lardinoit and Derbaix, 2001; Meenaghan and Shipley, 1999; Olson and Thjømøe, 2009; Zaharia <i>et al.</i> , 2016; Zajonc, 1968.
Business profiling	Building an image for the sponsors business.	Biscaia <i>et al.</i> , 2013; Cornwell <i>et al.</i> , 2001; Grohs 2015, Grohs and Reisinger, 2014; Keller, 1993; Kim <i>et al.</i> , 2015; Lee <i>et al.</i> , 2018; Meenaghan and Shipley, 1999; Zaharia <i>et al.</i> , 2016.
Satisfaction with partnership <i>dependent variable</i>	A partner's overall experience with a product or service provider.	Biscaia <i>et al.</i> , 2017; Cornwell, 1995; Farely <i>et al.</i> , 2006; Fornell, 1992; Fornell <i>et al.</i> , 1996.
Intention to renew partnership <i>dependent variable</i>	Expresses a certain degree of loyalty.	Biscaia <i>et al.</i> , 2017; Bloemer & Kasper, 1995; Cornwell <i>et al.</i> , 2005. Oliver, 1999; Zeithaml <i>et al.</i> , 1996
<i>Network</i>		
Mingling	Informal activity to stimulate dialogue and interaction in the network.	Cobbs, 2011; Cornwell, 1995; Ryan and Fahy, 2012; Wagner <i>et al.</i> , 2017; Olkkonen <i>et al.</i> , 2000.
Opportunity to purchase	Focus and facilitation for purchases from the parties in the network.	Biscaia <i>et al.</i> , 2017; Cornwell, 1995.
Collaboration projects	The possibilities for establishing cooperation between the parties in the network.	Ballantyne and Aitken, 2007; Blombäck and Axelsson, 2007; Farrelly <i>et al.</i> , 2006; Wagner <i>et al.</i> , 2017.
Venue to meet partners	Formal and adapted arena to stimulate dialogue and interaction in the network.	Cobbs, 2011; Cornwell, 1995; Ryan and Fahy, 2012; Wagner <i>et al.</i> , 2017.
Venue to strengthen customer relations	Activities directed by the network where the partners can take care of their own customers.	Jensen and Cornwell, 2021; Ryan and Fahy, 2012
Sales possibilities to other partners	Focus and facilitation of sales to the parties in the network.	Cornwell, 1995; Farrelly <i>et al.</i> , 2006; Wagner <i>et al.</i> , 2017;
<i>Sports</i>		
Success of RBK	The sponsor object's sporting achievements.	Chanavat and Desbordes, 2016; Gladden <i>et al.</i> , 1998.
Match day arrangement	The experience and quality of being present at the stadium match day.	Biscaia, <i>et al.</i> , 2017; Gladden <i>et al.</i> , 1998.
<i>Other</i>		
Sales to RBK	The partners possibility to sell to the sponsor object.	Wagner <i>et al.</i> , 2017.
Focus on ROI	The sponsor object focuses on return on investment - added value to the sponsor.	Cornwell, 1995; Jensen and Cornwell, 2021; Junghagen, 2018; Ryan and Fahy, 2012; Street and Cameron, 2017.
Use of RBK brand	Use of the sponsor object's brand in different contexts.	Biscaia <i>et al.</i> , 2013; Cornwell <i>et al.</i> , 2005; Jensen and Cornwell, 2021; Keller, 1993; Olson and Thjømøe, 2009; Speed and Thompson, 2000; Zaharia <i>et al.</i> , 2016.
Potential customers	The opportunity a sponsor has to attract new customers outside the network.	Biscaia <i>et al.</i> , 2017; Farrelly <i>et al.</i> , 2006.

Partner category	Different levels of partnership - defined in financial terms.	Wagner <i>et al.</i> , 2017.
Years of partnership	How many years a sponsor has been a sponsor.	Farrelly <i>et al.</i> 2006; Jensen and Cornwell, 2021; Wagner <i>et al.</i> 2017.

Appendix 2. Path analysis of *satisfaction and intention to renew partnership*.

	Path analysis Importance items	Indirect effect on <i>intention to renew partnership</i> (standardized coef.)
<i>Satisfaction with partnership</i>		
Brand exposure	0.034*** (0.010)	0.028*** (0.008)
Business profiling	0.101* (0.049)	0.084* (0.040)
Mingling	0.162*** (0.043)	0.134*** (0.035)
Opportunity to purchase from other partners	0.121*** (0.036)	0.100*** (0.027)
Collaboration projects with other partners	0.022* (0.011)	0.019* (0.009)
Success of RBK	0.087* (0.034)	0.072* (0.029)
Match day	0.070 (0.038)	0.058* (0.029)
Sales possibilities to RBK	0.024* (0.012)	0.020 (0.011)
Years of partnership	-0.024 (0.025)	-0.020 (0.021)
Constant	3.367*** (0.653)	
<i>Intention to renew partnership</i>		
Satisfaction with partnership	0.830*** (0.054)	
Constant	1.300*** (0.409)	
Observations	399	
R ² Satisfaction with partnership	0.276	
R ² Intention to renew partnership	0.412	

Note: *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05