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Strategic Sport Sponsorship Marketing in Ghana: Corporate Perspectives in the Ghana Premier League

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative research was to understand the perspectives of corporate entities in Ghana in their attempt to partner and/or invest in the Ghana Premier League underpinned by grounded theory. ***Methodology*:** The data collection instrument included nineteen open-ended interview questions. The validity and reliability of the instruments were determined using Lawshe's content validity and Cohen Kappa index respectively. The respondents consisted of twenty corporate entities sampled purposively through maximum variation technique from Accra and Kumasi. Data analysis was performed using the grounded theory guidelines – comparative analysis, open coding, axial coding and selective coding. ***Findings*:** The study revealed corporate bodies in Ghana perceive leadership, marketing tactics, standard facility, promotion, experience and policy as key considerations to invest and or partner the Ghana Premier League. ***Practical Implications*:** Based on the findings, a model is presented for implementation to refine existing sponsorship model that's unfruitful. ***Research contribution*:** The findings fill sponsorship gap in Ghana and present an urgent practical approach to the Ghana Football Association to re-orient sponsorship marketing to attract investors, thereby generating revenue for the league, as the current approach is unsustainable to attract sponsorship.

Keywords: Sport Sponsorship, Marketing Model, Ghana Premier League, Corporate Motivation, Financial sustainability

INTRODUCTION

Sport Sponsorship

Sponsorship has continued to see an early lift in its development and Fechner et al. (2023) note that it has received more attention from industry than it has within academic circles. This imply that while sponsorship is been discussed less by academicians, it is making head way in the sport industry. Many corporations are now pursuing sponsorship as a strategy of marketing communications in an attempt to enter the advertising zone that is associated with high audience (Jacobs et al., 2025). What is seen now is that, companies allocate significant amount of money to sponsor events or endorse players (International Event Group (IEG), 2017). This was not so in the past, when the available mode of communications were advertising, sales promotions and public relations. However, sponsorship is now an additional tool used by companies to communicate to the masses or audience (Jacobs et al., 2025).

The meaning and explanation of sponsorship in sport have been defined in diverse ways. The explanation of Toscani and Prendergast (2019) states that sponsorship is when a corporation or other investor creates a link with an outside event or program, and hopes to influence the people (audience) around the event through the link it creates. These authors further explain that, the difference between sponsorship and other promotional strategies is the link that is been created around the event or subject, a kind of a relationship which the other promotions do not have. This relationship or link enables sponsor or the investor to place their products in the minds of consumers (People around the event) and also to have access to promotional benefits such as television exposure, brand association, print media etc. with the event.

Patronage of sport sponsorship over the years, has increased more than the traditional marketing communications, and has become more effective than regular advertising (Tsordia et al., 2018). It has created many advantages of marketing mix, and is the choice of many investors/ sponsors recently (Tsordia et al., 2018). Mega events, such as the Olympic Games, have high audiences around the event and is classified as "Short-term event with long-term consequences (Smart, 2018). This mega-event has many sponsors around it known as the Olympic top program. These sponsors pay huge sums of money in order to have association with the event and its audience. Since inception of the Olympic Games, sponsorship around the games has increased considerably, and among the companies that sponsor the event are Coca-Cola, Samsung, and McDonalds. These companies invest huge sums of money into the events with the hope of reaching sport fans, families, athletes, among others, and in the long term place their products on the minds of consumers. Consequently, sponsorship is used most widely in the sport industry Smart (2018) and, the sport sector has attracted approximately 54-65 % on sponsorship (IEG, 2017). Thus, Kim et al. (2017) states that in the sport environment, sport sponsorship has gained an influence because it is flexible and it reaches a broad audience as well.

Brand Visibility and Social Engagement

Visibility of corporate products and/ or services has been underpinned through sponsorship vis-à-vis social engagement and interaction of products and services. For example, a study by Khalil (2025) indicated that sponsorship was a favorable medium of consideration to purchase products and services of corporate entity by fans. In fact, the study indicated that culturally aligned sponsorship significantly boost brand recall and trust. In another study by Sarpong and PraiseGod Zungu (2025) on the Ghana Premier League, it was revealed that sport sponsorship positively and significantly influenced brand image and purchase intent. A further study in the Danish football clubs by Marshall-Heyman (2022) showed that sponsorship affected brand loyalty and emotional attachment, and that clubs prioritize long-term partnership.

Global Corporate Sport Sponsorship

It is estimated that global sport sponsorship spending will increase by 4.5% in 2017 to $62.8 billion compared to 2016 spending of $60.1 billion which was around a rate of 4.6% in 2016 (IEG, 2017). However, recent statistics indicates that sport sponsorship spending on the global scale was estimated at $57 billion in 2020, which was lower relative to spending in 2017 possibly due to coronavirus pandemic, and it is projected to rise to $90 billion by 2027 (Gough, 2021). Global sport sponsorship spending from 2007 to 2018 was reported at $65.8 billion. In North America alone, spending in sport sponsorship from 2014 to 2024 was projected at $16.4 billion. A corresponding spending in the same region on sport sponsorship in 2019 was $17.87 billion, with a projected revenue from sport sponsorship within the same region by the end of 2023 projected at $20.65 billion (Gough, 2021).

According to Dixon (2023), the annual study by European Association Sponsorship (ESA), recorded €20.69 billion (US$22.21 billion) in 2022 from the Europe's sports sponsorship market which surpassed the pre-pandemic record of €20.26 billion in 2019. While literature on sport sponsorship spending in Africa remains scanty, a study in South Africa looked at the connection that exist between sport sponsorship and corporate financial returns found that, companies that sponsored in sports experienced high income growth relative to companies not involved in sports sponsorship (Blake et al., 2019). In another study by Okpalaoka and Olaniyi (2022) on 'identity and sports marketing in Africa', revealed that the sports industry has the prospect of significantly impacting Africa's economy.
In addition, the sport sponsorship literature reveals the growing demand of sponsorship as a form of marketing in the past twenty years, which has out run the pace of media and sales promotion, with companies allocating an average of 19 % of their overall marketing budget to sponsorship (IEG, 2017).

Recently, corporate interests in sponsoring sporting events have seen exponential increase, particularly by the cryptocurrency industry, followed by automotive and insurance industries (IEG, 2017). This new interest and exponential growth seem promising for sponsorship deals in the Ghana Premier League if the Ghana Football Association (GFA) will enhance its marketing tactics to attract such industries, which is the focus of this research. Again, according to Eshghi (2022), even though there are trepidations about financial accountability in sports sponsorships in the last decade, there have been many factors that have increased the effectiveness of sports sponsorship relative to other marketing communication mix.

The extreme increase in the number of TV and radio stations, the exponential usage of digital gadgets, rise of social media, and the evolution of personal video recorder (PVR) and over-the-top (OTT) streaming channels have tremendously altered the sports marketing place, requiring new tactics and strategies to meet the changing demand (Eshghi, 2022). Sports sponsorship has become very attractive and lucrative for companies as an apt opportunity to reach consumers and fans watching live matches and engaging with their favorite clubs, players, facilities, and interacting with occasions on social media. This dynamic engagement has positioned sports sponsorship marketing as a competitive advantage for both companies and leagues (Eshghi, 2022) .

In addition, the sports sponsorship literature, particularly on image transfer, supports the assertions that sponsorship, if well-orchestrated and communicated, serves as convincing interface that can increase the financial price to a brand, hinged on the fact that consumers are exposed to three images in a sponsorship – the sponsor, the sponsee and the combination of the two (O'Reilly & Lafrance Horning, 2013). Fundamentally, the sponsorship literature suggests that often, the sponsee exhibits some traits that the sponsor may desire to transfer to its products and or brand. In retrospect, the sponsorship association has been proven to enable the transfer of images in consumer's mind, which then drives purchase of sponsor products and or services (O'Reilly & Lafrance Horning, 2013).

African Corporate Sport Sponsorship

A plunge into sport sponsorship in the major football leagues in Africa, such as the Egypt Premier League, for instance, has WE as title sponsor. The league has had different title sponsors since its inception, with little or no partners, and has received calls on imbalance in its competition (Ebrahim et al., 2018), with the researchers proposing the need for organizational and competitive issues. Again, the Moroccan League is known as Botola Pro Inwi for sponsorship reasons, with little or no other major partners of the league. The Tunisia soccer league known as Tunisian Ligue Professionnelle 1 has no title sponsor, however, Boga, Sabrine, and Ooredoo are shirt sponsors for some clubs of the Ligue, but the Club Africain, a premier club of the Ligue Professionnelle 1 has sponsorship with Qatar Airways with no other major sponsorship deals. Further, the Cameroon soccer league is known as MTN Elite One for title sponsorship reasons with no other major partners.

A further plunge into the Nigerian Professional Football League (NPFL) shows that, the league was known as Bet9ja as official title sponsor of the league, with Hero Lager as a partner, but a recent drop of title sponsorship to elite sponsors. The Senegal Premier League has no title sponsorship, and search for information on the league sponsorship is scanty. The Premier Soccer League (PSL) of South Africa also known as DSTV Premiership for sponsorship reasons creates a link with the MultiChoice brand which associates itself with the league on a five-year deal taken over from Absa Bank (a financial institution) on a 13-year long contract when ended. Some other partners of the PSL are Vodafone, Nedbank, MTN, Black Label, GladAfrica and Kaizer Chiefs.

The Botswana Premier League has had title sponsorship deals from 1991 to date. It is currently known as the BTC Premiership for sponsorship reasons with little or no major partners of the league. Also, the Zimbabwe Premier Soccer League secured its sponsorship deal in 2011 with Delta Beverages; producers of Castle Larger and Chibuku, and therefore the league is known as Castle Lager Premier Soccer League for sponsorship reasons, with little or no other major partners of the league (The Multimedia, 2021). According to Fletcher (2021) , the Kenyan Premier League sponsorship with BetKing, which was signed for a five year period, has been cancelled in the first season for no stated reasons. Thus, currently the Kenyan Premier League has no major sponsorship for the league since 2019 after SportPesa withdrew from the Kenyan league. The Ethiopian Premier League also known as BetKing Premier League for sponsorship reasons, has other partners such as DStv Ethiopia, and SuperSport for an exclusive rights to broadcast the league, lasting a five year deal (Tolesa, 2021).

It is clear from the major leagues in Africa as mentioned above, the PSL seem to be doing well in terms of sport sponsorship compared to their contemporaries, however, a strategic sport sponsorship marketing model could make it compete globally.

Nonetheless, Africa has also seen some sport sponsorship associations from corporate bodies on major sporting events. First, the Egypt 2019 Total Africa Cup of Nations was a sponsorship deal where Total, as a title sponsor, provided cash to the African Cup of Nations event organised by the Confederation of African Football (CAF), in return for promotional value. Again, the 2021 Africa Cup of Nations in Cameroon where Total Energies, as title sponsor, donated cash to the event for promotional benefits and this deal since its inception in 2016 continues for the next eight years (TotalEnergies, 2022). Another instance is the engagement of Betway South Africa with the South African based Rugby where the betting company's logo will be displayed on the perimeter branding on the field at home test matches, as well as on the springboks' shorts for the next three years. Betway South Africa seeks promotional benefits as returns on the sponsorship with South Africa Rugby. Betway South Africa again has engaged in a sponsorship agreement with Cricket South Africa which will be branded as Betway T20 Challenge. Similarly, a subsidiary of the Betway Group; Betway Ghana has secured a sponsorship deal with four Ghana Premier League clubs; Aduana Stars, Liberty Professionals, Medeama FC and Ashanti Gold FC as headline sponsor of the clubs. Again, the Qatar Airways has agreed on a sponsorship deal with the Tunisia's top tier football league club Africain- the first of such deal by the Gulf airline. This is a four-year deal worth $8 Million which will allow the sponsor to trade its brand of the airline on the various sports kits of the club (North African Post, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

The Grounded Theory (GT) perspective adopts a systematic and relative modus of analysis to comprehend patterns of social processes over a period in order to generate a theory (Urcia, 2021). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), Grounded Theory, "is a design of inquiry where both objective and subjective data collection and conceptual analysis undergo an emergent iterative process to develop a theory." From the perspective of Urcia (2021) , pragmatic steps can be adopted through grounded theory approach that can unveil the paradigm of participants' social interpretation of a phenomenon to proffer an understanding as reasonable knowledge which can be translated into theory grounded with data. Thus, this study adopted this approach to better understand the motives that drive investors into sponsoring the Ghana Premier League.

Again, adopting the GT approach enabled the researchers of this study to gather subjective data on corporate entities in Accra and Kumasi that have history of investing in the GPL, potential entities which may desire to associate with the Ghana Premier League (GPL) that pertains to their interest and motives to create a link with the league.

GT approach is hinged on effect from symbolic interactionism, deep-seated from pragmatism and takes the notion that, reality is symbolically discussed and interpreted between multifaceted connection of people who interact with one another (Urcia, 2021). The complex network of people around the GPL (i.e. Sport fans, Sponsors, Athletes, Ghana League Club Association, Supporters union, club chapters, etc.) interacting together in a common front of football will demand the adoption of an appropriate approach and theory that will rail the research on its tangent into a successful outcome, and thus the grounded theory approach.

Noble and Mitchell (2016) share that GT study was developed by Glaser and Strauss in the Global North, precisely in California in their study – 'Awareness of Dying'. The researchers further iterate that, Grounded Theory study follows a generic methodology adopted for building a theory that is grounded in evidence which is scientifically gathered and analyzed. GT study possesses characteristics that make it unique in its application such as the simultaneous collection and analysis of data, the ability to categorize and code concepts and themes from the data, inductive coding technique and the social processes unearthed in the data (Noble & Mitchell, 2016).

Furthermore, Engward (2013) is of the view that Grounded Theory study is vital taken into consideration the researcher not predetermining *a priori* about what will be discovered, and what or how social phenomenon should be perceived. Thus, the import of GT methodology hinges on the fact that, it is devoid of assumptions, but instead adopts a neutral perspective of human action within a social phenomenon (Engward, 2013). These perspectives on GT study falls in line with the philosophy of the researchers in this study–positivist perspective and thus, the GT approach in this research.

However, Charmaz (2014) is of the view that Grounded Theory study approach even though flexible, is a multifaceted methodology, and often poses a challenge to novice researchers in their attempt to ascertain the process and procedures, and the pragmatic implications of the themes and concepts that emanate from GT study.

Research Question

1. What motivates corporate sponsorship of football in Ghana?
2. What challenges do corporate sponsors encounter?
3. What sponsorship marketing model can be adopted for the Ghana Premier League?

Research Design

Stemming from the literature review and research questions, a qualitative research methodology founded on Grounded Theory is adopted. This method presents varying opportunities to approaching complex problems as it provides philosophical guidelines of interpretivism (Dawadi et al., 2021) in a manner that brings meaning, opinions, feelings, and in-depth views to bare. Qualitative methods also give away a logical platform, flexibility in methods, and a deeper understanding of societal problems (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Furthermore, the use of qualitative approach offers an in-depth understanding of the problem being studied, placing in high esteem the feelings, opinions and expressions of participants. In summary, in as much as quantitative data offer breadth to a study, qualitative data affords depth to same (Dawadi et al., 2021).

Population, Sample and Sampling Technique

Corporate entities with track record of previously sponsoring the GPL, those sponsoring now and potential organizations which have expressed interest in football association with the GPL in Accra and Kumasi served as population for this study. In Grounded Theory study, Creswell and Poth (2018) share that researchers may recruit 20-60 interviews in data collection until saturation for the qualitative approach. However, the researchers note that often predicting the number of interviews desired to marinade a given theory is challenging. Again, Charmaz (2014) recommends 25 interviews are enough in GT study, while Glaser (1992) propose a smaller amount of participants may suffice. More so, Charmaz (2014) further share that, until theoretical saturation is reached in GT study, researchers may continue to add participants to the sample until data unearths no new primary categories. In view of these propositions as a guide to sample for this study, 20 corporate entities in Accra and Kumasi were selected.

In GT study, Morse and Field (2013) recommend purposive sampling in recruiting participants who have different experiences of a phenomenon to explore multiple dimensions of social processes aimed toward theory construction, and this has also been reiterated (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thus, purposive sampling technique was adopted in this study to select corporate participants, and precisely, maximum variation technique adopted. This variation technique enabled the researchers of this study to select from a diverse sections of equal distribution among the sample to ascertain diverse perspectives and input of data, minimizing skewness (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Instrument

The research instrument for this study was an interview guide, which included open-ended questions made of 19 items. Face and content validity was used for the coherence, readability, and feasibility of items, where seven expert panel judgement was adopted. The Lawshe's Content Validity Ratio (CVR) was used, and the Cohen's Kappa Index used to determine the instrument's reliability and internal consistency.

Validation of Research Instrument

Lawshe's Content Validity Ratio (CVR)

The CVR computation is considered acceptable hinging on the scope of agreement between panelists on a particular item of a research instrument. According to Lawshe, for a panel of seven assessing items, the indicating CVR value should be greater or equal to 0.75, a value that guarantees statistical validity (Romero Jeldres et al., 2023).

Lawshe's Formula

$$\mathbf{CVR} = \frac{N_e - N_{ne}}{N}$$

where N_e is the number of panelists in agreement, N_{ne} is the number of panelists in disagreement, N is the total number of items.

Research Instrument Validation Procedure

The research instrument was face validated by seven (7) experts in sport management and marketing. Following from the face validity, the Lawshe's Content Validity Ratio (CVR) was used to test for the validity of the research instrument. The items were categorized as 'Relevant' with a scale of 4 and 'Not Relevant' with a scale of 1. The I-CVI is indicated as the content validity for each item, S-CVI is indicated as the scale content validity of the whole items and CA is the common agreement among the experts. The content validity index propose that, a value of 0.75 indicates a valid instrument (Romero Jeldres et al., 2023; Taherdoost, 2016). The items on the research instrument in this study recorded a validity index, **S-CVI of 0.96** in Table 1. Thus, the items were adopted for this study.

Table 1. **Expert and Content Validity of Research Instrument**

Items	**Rater 1**	**Rater 2**	**Rater 3**	**Rater 4**	**Rater 5**	**Rater 6**	**Rater 7**	**Number of Agreement**	**I-CVI**
Item 1	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	7	1
Item 2	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	6	0.8
Item 3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	7	1
Item 4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	7	1
Item 5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	7	1
Item 6	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	7	1
Item 7	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	7	1
Item 8	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	7	1
Item 9	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	6	0.8
Item 10	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	7	1
Item 11	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	7	1
Item 12	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	6	0.8
Item 13	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	7	1
Item 14	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	7	1
Item 15	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	7	1
Item 16	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	6	0.8
Item 17	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	7	1
Item 18	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	7	1
Item 19	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	7	1
								S-CVI/Ave	**0.96**
								Total Agreement	15
								S-CVI/CA	0.78

Reliability of Research Instrument

Reliability of Research Instrument Procedure

Following the validation of the research instrument, the Cohen's Kappa Index (K) was used to check for the inter-rater consistency and reliability. Experts' response to each item of questions was categorised as 'Relevant' with a scale of 4 and 'Not Relevant' with a scale of 1 and the Cohen Kappa formula deduced. A reliability index of 0.7 minimum indicates inter-rater reliability of the research instrument (Taherdoost, 2016). The Cohen Kappa Index for the items on the research instrument recorded, K= 0.8 indicating a near perfect agreement among rater 1 and rater 7, and hence the items were adopted for this study.

Reliability of Research Instrument Using Cohen Kappa Index, K.

$$\mathbf{K} = \frac{P_0 - P_e}{1 - P_e}$$

P_0= Number of Agreement/ Total Item

P_e= Number of Agreement + Number of Disagreement/ Total items

Cohen Kappa Index measures inter-rater reliability between two experts.
Thus, from the validity analysis, the researcher analyses reliability between Rater 1 and Rater 7

P_0= (Both Agree + Both Disagree)
76+0=76/19
4

P_e= 76+0/19*76+0/19
4*4
16
K= 4-16/1-16
0.8
Thus, K=0.8, Near Perfect Agreement

Data Gathering Procedures

Data gathering started in the national capital, Accra, due to researchers' proximity, from December 20, 2023. Data gathering in Accra took approximately three months due to availability of respondents and their schedule, and then continued to Kumasi on April 10, 2024. Collection of data in Kumasi took approximately two months due to recommendations of respondents in Accra to some selected companies in Kumasi. Overall, it took approximately six months in data gathering. Corporate entities which were purposively selected were approached, and the purpose of the study explained and upon consent, interviews were conducted.

Data Analysis

Data gathered was analyzed using GT constant comparative analysis. The literature on Grounded Theory study supports that the core strategy at the centre of all forms of GT study adopts constant comparative analysis (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Constant comparative analysis is an "inductive analytical process of concurrent data collection while contrasting data, concepts, categories, and theoretical claims to produce knowledge" (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015) . This involved using manual inductive coding to code as categories develop (open coding), detailing extra categories (axial coding) that form a conceptual model, intersecting categories (selective coding) that predict relationships, and integrating by developing a substantial-level theory (theoretical coding) that explains the processes and propositions of a phenomenon.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was sought from the research committee of the Graduate School of Business and Management of Philippine Christian University with certification letter dated December 1, 2023. Also, support letter was sought from the National Sports Authority, Ghana, with reference number *NSA/HQ/SF/DEC/23*, and the Ghana League Clubs Association (GHALCA) letter dated January 10, 2024.

RESULTS

Findings from this study indicates the demographics of the interview respondents from corporate entities in Accra and Kumasi (Table 2). The study recorded 9 female participants who were heads of the marketing departments where the interview was conducted, with 5 of them coming from Kumasi in the Ashanti Region, while the remaining 4 came from Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The male counterparts' recorded 11 participants in similar positions with majority of them seven (7) coming from Greater Accra Region, and the remaining four (4) from Greater Kumasi. The education level of participants recorded master's degree qualification across majority of the respondents, with only a few with first degree and doctorate degrees. The average years of work experience among respondents is 12 years indicating a vast range of exposure and experience to contribute to the study. The education level of participants were high enough to have recorded rich and deep thoughts to underpin the findings.

Table 2. Demographic of Respondents

Participant	Location	Years of Work	Education	Gender
Participant 1	Kumasi	20	Masters	Female
Participant 2	Accra	15	Master	Male
Participant 3	Kumasi	12	Master	Male
Participant 4	Kumasi	10	Doctorate	Male
Participant 5	Kumasi	18	Master	Male
Participant 6	Accra	10	Master	Male
Participant 7	Accra	7	Master	Male
Participant 8	Kumasi	20	Master	Male
Participant 9	Accra	12	Master	Female
Participant 10	Accra	15	Master	Female

Participant 11	Accra	13	Master	Female
Participant 12	Accra	12	Master	Male
Participant 13	Accra	8	Master	Male
Participant 14	Accra	14	Master	Male
Participant 15	Accra	11	Master	Male
Participant 16	Accra	10	Master	Female
Participant 17	Kumasi	8	Master	Female
Participant 18	Kumasi	9	First Degree	Female
Participant 19	Kumasi	10	First Degree	Female
Participant 20	Kumasi	12	Master	Female

Table 3. RQ 1: What motivates corporate sponsorship of football in Ghana?

	Quotation Reference
RQ 1: What motivates corporate sponsorship of football in Ghana?	" The leadership of the GFA seems not open and it pushes investment away" "Many investors over the years do not renew their contract due to contract infringements" "Currently BetPawa has pulled away from the title sponsorship of the GPL with no stated reasons and this creates some perceptions at the GFA" "The league seems not attractive currently to warrant attachment" "The return on investment for the league is not worthwhile" "Fans do not attend stadium to watch premier league clubs, and so it makes it difficult to create visibility of our products/services" "The amount of money paid over a stated period for sponsorship do not yield adequate results by the end of the contract" "If there can be transparency and accountability from the GFA, considering investing into the league may be considered" "The GFA does not engage stakeholders regularly with changing trends of marketing tactics, and this is crucial for investment"

Stemming from the theoretical guidelines from the Grounded Theory (GT) perspective on data analysis used in this research, the constant comparative analysis, open coding, axial coding and selective coding's were adopted from the quotations in Table 3.

Table 4. Constant Comparative Analysis for RQ 1

Open coding	***Axial Coding***	***Selective Coding***	***Theoretical Factor***
• *Lack of openness*			Leadership
• *Contractual issues*	Lack of Standards		
• *Sponsorship withdrawal*		Leadership	
• *Need of transparency*	Poor Governance		
• *stakeholder engagement*			
• *League unattractiveness*			Marketing Tactics
• *Return on Investment (RoI)*	Revenue Streams		
		Marketing Tactics	
• *Ticket pricing*			
• *Modern facilities*			Standard Facility
	Infrastructure	Standard Facility	

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Table 5. RQ2 what challenges do they encounter?

	Quotation Reference
RQ 2: What challenges do they encounter?	"The ticket prices for the league should be reviewed to generate revenue while making the league attractive" "Premium seating options may be ideal to market our products and services as companies" "Sleeve sponsorship on the jerseys may be preferred to other categories if the viewership of the league is improved" "The GFA should ensure the league is advertised and promoted to the attention of Ghanaians and other jurisdiction" "The stadiums used for the GPL matches should be improved to a modern standard facility to create more convenience and comfort for fans to allow them to interactive with our products" "The GPL should consider creating their websites for fans to engage and interact with the league thereby creating more visibility" "The performance of the clubs and players alike can be a distinguishing factor to attract fans" "Endorsements of local players in the GPL should be factored into sponsorship deals at the GFA to build on player reputation" "Talents and local players should be provided with adequate training facilities to build on their market value which can attract investors and fans alike"

Table 6. Constant Comparative Analysis for RQ 2

Open Coding	***Axial Coding***	***Selective Coding***	***Theoretical Factor***
• *League ticket prices* • *Premium seating license* • *Sleeve Sponsorship* • *League viewership*	Pricing Advertisement	Promotion	Promotion
• *Developing standards stadiums* • *Developing league websites* • *Player and club performance* • *Endorsement deals*	Standard facilities Performance	Experience	Experience
• *Developing talents*	Talent identification programs	Policy	Policy

Discussion

This grounded theory study sought to explore the corporate perspective on sponsoring the Ghana Premier League (GPL) by responding to three basic questions. The study found a complex interplay of motivations and significant barriers, which eventually call for key strategic changes in the management of the GPL. This section seeks to interpret the findings based on the research questions while integrating them in existing literature.

One of the key issues that this study sought to explore what motivates corporate sponsorship of football in Ghana. It was found out that, in consistent with factors that drive global sponsorship, this study recorded issues relating to consumer engagement, brand visibility and Return on Investment (ROI) (Fechner et al., 2023; Toscani & Prendergast, 2019). Specifically, it was established that most organizations consider the GPL as a budding stage to reach out to a huge and zealous audience. This they believe gives them the opportunity to register their products and services in the minds of consumers. The crave to have access to audience, as established in this study, corroborates existing and widely-practiced trend, where corporate sponsors seek to utilize the emotional connection of fans and their clubs to help build brand loyalty and emotional attachment, as witnessed in European football (Marshall-Heyman, 2022). Furthermore, the motivation for a positive image transfer (O'Reilly & Lafrance Horning, 2013) was implicit. Obviously, corporate organizations are inspired by the possibility of associating their brands with the positive values of football, provided there is a positive perception of the league among stakeholders. Nevertheless, these motivations are more abstract than reality among corporate bodies in Ghana. Their willingness to sponsor is significantly linked to the ability of the management of GPL to resolve fundamental challenges bedeviling the league.

Another theme that came up in this study was the existence of multifaceted challenges, which have become stumbling blocks for prospective sponsors from seeing the impact of the motivations mentioned above. First, the study identified the challenge of governance and leadership as a significant barrier hindering corporate bodies from considering sponsoring the GPL. Specifically, study participants mentioned a lack of trust, which can be traced to perceived opacity, records of contractual breaches, and the absence of proper stakeholder engagement from the GFA. Consistently, the abrupt withdrawal of sponsors, particularly, BetPawa scenario, was used as evidence of unfavorable and risky environment to sponsor. Such situations produce unpredictable business climates, which eventually impact sustaining investments in the GPL. This finding is not uncommon in other African leagues, such as the cancelled sponsorship in Kenya (Fletcher, 2021), predicting a regional pattern of poor governance impeding commercial development.

Aside the governance and leadership challenge, another emerging theme that came from this study was challenges with the product (the league) and infrastructure. As it is, organizations are hesitate to invest in a product which has less or no commercial appeal. Interestingly, the participants identified a weak league, characterized by low stadium attendance, poor facilities, and inadequate promotion. Largely, the poor fan experience at the dilapidated sports venues will ultimately obstruct sponsors from achieving their goals: visibility and engagement, without which the promised ROI becomes unattainable. This, thus, creates a situation of no/less fans leading to no/less sponsors, eventually leading to no/less revenue for improvements. Finally, an identified theme was the issue on value proposition and activation challenges. It was uncovered that beyond the initial investment that sponsors make, it was difficult for them to extract the expected value. Clearly, it was perceived that the league's offerings are outdated and inflexible, with participants identifying the absence of modern sponsorship models (like the sleeve sponsorship, and premium seating), and the absence of strategic support from the GFA to help sponsors activate their partnerships effectively. This is an indication that the GPL is not providing the needed sophisticated, and multi-faceted partnerships that modern corporations expect (Eshghi, 2022).

A Proposed Model for the Ghana Premier League

As a response to the final objective of this study, a proposed strategic sport sponsorship marketing model is presented under this section, and illustrated in Figure 1. This model presents a comprehensive framework to address the identified challenges impeding corporate bodies' motivations for sponsorship. This hierarchical model explains the various initiatives required from the management of the GPL, as well as the relationships that exists among the various layers.

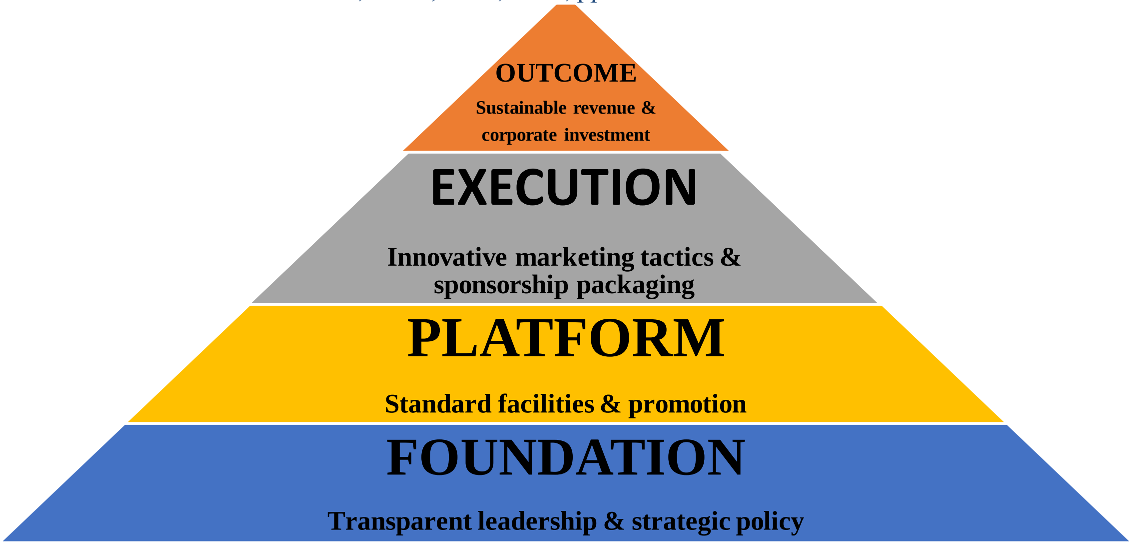

Figure 1: Proposed strategic sport sponsorship marketing model

At the base of the model is a prerequisite layer, the foundation, which explains that attracting effective sponsorship for the GPL requires intentional efforts targeted at addressing the leadership and policy deficits identified. It demands the managers of the league to put in place structures for transparent governance, resulting in contractual fairness, and long-term strategic policies for football development. With this in place, the model's second layer, the platform, describes how aggressive investment should be made in the league's tangible and intangible assets. Such investments could include upgrades in standard facilities, including the stadia, to enhance fan experience. Further, leadership of the league should make strategic investments in promoting the league to help improve its visibility and brand equity. These efforts will ultimately lead to a more attractive product for both fans and sponsors.

Building on the existence of a solid foundation and an improved platform, the model requires the GFA to execute sophisticated marketing tactics. Such tactics could include the creation of tiered, and flexible sponsorship packages like digital rights, sleeve sponsorships, and category exclusivity. This layer provides the platform for value proposition to be packaged and sold. Finally, at the peak of the model is the outcome layer. It builds on the integrated success of the various layers, and further seek to a positive fan experience and a valuable commercial property. Such successes will ultimately lead to the attraction of corporate investments, leading to the generation of sustainable revenues for the league. The implication is that, attracting investment for the league involves various strategic initiatives by the league leaders to gain the trust of both fans and prospective sponsors.

CONCLUSION

This study establishes that while the motivations for sponsoring the GPL are aligned with global trends, they are currently stifled as a result of existing structural challenges. The proposed model provides a clear roadmap for the GFA. It echoes that getting sustained sponsorship requires a transformation that begins with governance and infrastructure. There is thus, the need for the GFA to re-orient its approach from simply selling sponsorship slots to building a valuable, professional, and trustworthy commercial product that corporations would be eager to associate with. Such investment is worthwhile, as the prospects of the Ghana Premier League's commercial viability depends on this fundamental shift.

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Data availability

The authors declare data availability upon request.

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