

# The Impact of Sports Sponsorship on the Growth of the Sports Industry in Iraq

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## Abstract

This research explores the impact of sports sponsorship on the growth of the sports industry in Iraq, focusing on how such sponsorship can contribute to economic and social development despite political and economic challenges. The study highlights the vital role of sponsorship in enhancing brand awareness, fan engagement, and community support, especially in the context of Iraq, which is undergoing a phase of reconstruction and renewal. Despite the existence of a research gap focusing on the Iraqi context, this study aims to fill this gap through a theoretical exploration of the effects of sports sponsorship, utilizing various theories and models to understand these dynamics.

The research includes a review of key theories such as the Association Theory, Marketing Impact Model, Consumer-Based Brand Equity Model, and Sponsorship Fit Theory, emphasizing the importance of cultural alignment and ethical marketing in the success of sponsorship strategies. The study also sheds light on the economic and social impacts of sports sponsorship in Iraq, including infrastructure development, job creation, and enhancing social cohesion.

By presenting a conceptual model that integrates global theories with the cultural and economic specifics of Iraq, the research proposes strategic ways to use sports sponsorship as a tool for industrial growth and social development. The study concludes with recommendations for future research aimed at testing the proposed conceptual model and further exploring the role of sports sponsorship in enhancing the sports industry in Iraq, indicating the potential of this field to effectively contribute to the rebuilding of the country's social fabric and achieving sustainable development goals.

**keywords:** Sports sponsorship, sports industry, Iraq, economic development, community engagement

## تأثير رعاية الرياضة على نمو صناعة الرياضة في العراق

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## المستخلص

يستكشف هذا البحث تأثير رعاية الرياضة على نمو صناعة الرياضة في العراق، مع التركيز على كيف يمكن لهذه الرعاية أن تسهم في التنمية الاقتصادية والاجتماعية على الرغم من التحديات السياسية والاقتصادية. يبرز البحث الدور الحيوي للرعاية في تعزيز الوعي بالعلامة التجارية، وتفاعل المعجبين، ودعم المجتمع، خاصة في سياق العراق الذي يمر بمرحلة إعادة الإعمار والتجديد. على الرغم من وجود فجوة في الأبحاث التي تركز على السياق العراقي، يهدف هذا البحث إلى سد هذه الفجوة من خلال استكشاف نظري لتأثيرات رعاية الرياضة، مستعيناً بنظريات ونماذج متعددة لفهم ديناميكيات هذا التأثير.

يتضمن البحث استعراضاً لنظريات رئيسية مثل نظرية الارتباط، ونموذج الأثر التسويقي، ونموذج قيمة العلامة التجارية القائمة على المستهلك، ونظرية ملاءمة الرعاية، مؤكداً على أهمية التوافق الثقافي والتسويق الأخلاقي في نجاح استراتيجيات الرعاية. يسلط البحث الضوء أيضاً على الآثار الاقتصادية والاجتماعية لرعاية الرياضة في العراق، بما في ذلك تطوير البنية التحتية، وخلق فرص العمل، وتعزيز التماسك الاجتماعي.

من خلال تقديم نموذج مفاهيمي يدمج النظريات العالمية مع الخصائص الثقافية والاقتصادية للعراق، يقترح البحث طرقاً استراتيجية لاستخدام رعاية الرياضة كأداة للنمو الصناعي والتنمية الاجتماعية. يختتم البحث بتوصيات لأبحاث مستقبلية تهدف إلى اختبار النموذج المفاهيمي المقترح واستكشاف المزيد حول دور رعاية الرياضة في تعزيز صناعة الرياضة في

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## معلومات البحث

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العراق، مشيرًا إلى إمكانية هذا المجال في المساهمة بفعالية في إعادة بناء النسيج الاجتماعي للبلاد وتحقيق أهداف التنمية المستدامة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** رعاية الرياضة، صناعة الرياضة، العراق، التنمية الاقتصادية، التفاعل المجتمعي.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background Information:

The sports industry globally has seen significant growth over the past few decades, fueled by various factors including media rights, fan engagement, and notably, sponsorship deals. In Iraq, despite facing challenges, the sports sector shows potential for growth and development. Understanding the dynamics of sports sponsorship within this context is crucial for leveraging its full potential.

### 1.2 Significance of Sports Sponsorship:

Sponsorship plays a pivotal role in the sports industry, serving not only as a vital source of financing but also as a means of enhancing brand visibility, engaging with fans, and fostering community support. In Iraq, where the sports industry is navigating through reconstruction and revitalization, sponsorship could be a key driver of growth and sustainability.

### 1.3 Research Gap:

While there is extensive literature on the impact of sports sponsorship globally, there is a noticeable gap in research focusing on the Iraqi context. This gap highlights the need for a theoretical exploration that considers the unique socio-economic and cultural factors influencing the sports industry in Iraq.

### 1.4 Research Objectives :

This research aims to theoretically explore the impact of sports sponsorship on the growth of the

sports industry in Iraq. Key questions include: How can sports sponsorship contribute to the growth of the sports industry in Iraq? What theoretical models best explain the potential impact of sports sponsorship in the Iraqi sports sector?

### 1.4 Research Questions:

How can sports sponsorship contribute to the growth of the sports industry in Iraq?

Which theoretical models best explain the potential impact of sports sponsorship on the Iraqi sports sector?

### 1.5 Theoretical Importance:

By examining sports sponsorship in Iraq through various theoretical lenses, this research seeks to contribute to the broader academic discourse on sports management and economics. It aims to offer insights that can inform policy-making, strategic planning, and practice within the Iraqi sports industry and beyond.

## 2. Literature Review:

### 2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Sports Sponsorship:

The theoretical foundations of sports sponsorship encompass a range of theories and models that seek to explain how sponsorship impacts both brands and sports entities. These foundations provide a framework for understanding the complex dynamics of sports sponsorship and its effect on the growth of the sports industry. Key

elements include:

- **Association Theory:** This theory suggests that sports sponsorship operates by associating the brand with the positive attributes of the sponsored entity (such as a team's competitiveness, dedication, or success). The positive feelings fans have towards the team or sport are transferred to the sponsoring brand, enhancing its image and consumer perception.
- **Marketing Impact Model:** This model focuses on the direct and indirect marketing benefits derived from sports sponsorship, including increased brand awareness, enhanced brand image, and ultimately, improved sales figures. The model emphasizes the role of sponsorship in creating multiple touchpoints for consumer engagement, from event signage and digital content to merchandise and experiential marketing opportunities.
- **Consumer-Based Brand Equity Model:** Adapted from broader marketing theory, this model applies the concept of brand equity to sports sponsorship, arguing that sponsorship can significantly enhance a brand's equity in the minds of consumers. This is achieved through increased recognition, loyalty, perceived quality, and association with the positive values of the sport or team.
- **Sponsorship Fit Theory:** This theory posits that the effectiveness of sports sponsorship is significantly influenced by the 'fit' or congruence between the sponsoring brand and the sport or team it sponsors. A higher degree of fit is believed to result in more effective sponsorship, as consumers perceive the partnership as authentic and aligned with the

brand's values and identity.

These theories and models collectively provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the dynamics of sports sponsorship and its potential impact on the sports industry. They underscore the importance of strategic alignment, consumer perception, and the emotional connection facilitated by sports, as key factors determining the success of sponsorship endeavors.

### **2.1.1 Overview of Sports Sponsorship**

Sports sponsorship is defined as the financial or in-kind support of a sports event, team, or athlete, typically by a business or organization, in exchange for advertising or promotional benefits. This concept has evolved to become a critical component of marketing strategies for companies aiming to enhance their brand visibility and connect with target audiences through the universal appeal of sports. Sports sponsorship offers a unique platform for brands to engage with fans and consumers in a dynamic and emotionally charged environment, leveraging the passion and loyalty inherent to sports fandom.

### **2.1.2 Key Theories and Models**

Several theories and models have been developed to explain the impact of sports sponsorship on industries, each offering insights into the mechanisms through which sponsorship efforts can yield tangible benefits for brands and sporting entities alike.

- **Association Theory:** This theory suggests that sports sponsorship works by associating the brand with the positive attributes of the sponsored entity (e.g., a team's competitiveness, dedication, or success). The

positive feelings fans have towards the team or sport are transferred to the sponsoring brand, enhancing its image and consumer perception.

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success of sponsorship endeavors.

## 2.2. Impact of Sports Sponsorship Globally

Globally, the impact of sports sponsorship is profound and multifaceted, significantly influencing the growth and development of the sports industry. It serves as a pivotal marketing strategy for brands aiming to enhance visibility, connect with target audiences, and establish a lasting emotional bond with consumers. This section delves into the various dimensions of how sports sponsorship has shaped the sports industry worldwide, highlighting key areas of influence.

### 2.2.1. Case Studies and Success Stories

Globally, sports sponsorship has demonstrated significant impact on the growth of sports industries, serving as a catalyst for brand awareness, fan engagement, and financial investment in sports. Here are a few illustrative case studies:

- **Nike and the NFL:** Nike's sponsorship deal with the National Football League (NFL) is a prime example of sports sponsorship success. Nike provides the league's teams with apparel and equipment, and in return, gains massive exposure across various media platforms. This partnership has not only bolstered Nike's brand recognition but has also been instrumental in growing the sport's popularity both in the U.S. and internationally.
- **Emirates and Arsenal FC:** Emirates Airlines' sponsorship of Arsenal FC, including naming rights to the Emirates Stadium, highlights the power of long-term sports sponsorship deals. This partnership has enhanced Emirates' global brand visibility, while providing Arsenal with

the financial resources needed to compete at the highest levels of European football.

- **Red Bull and Extreme Sports:** Red Bull's strategy of sponsoring extreme sports athletes and events has redefined sports marketing. By associating its brand with the high energy and thrill of extreme sports, Red Bull has not only promoted its energy drink but also contributed to the growth of niche sports disciplines worldwide.

### 2.2.2. Comparative Analysis

The impact of sports sponsorship varies significantly across different contexts and sports disciplines, influenced by factors such as cultural preferences, market size, and the nature of the sport itself. A comparative analysis reveals several key insights:

- **Market Saturation and Sport Popularity:** In markets where sports consumption is high and deeply ingrained in the culture (e.g., football in Europe, NFL in the U.S.), sponsorship deals tend to focus on enhancing brand loyalty and deepening fan engagement. In contrast, in markets or sports with lower visibility, sponsorships often aim to increase awareness and introduce new audiences to the sport.
- **Cultural Fit and Brand Alignment:** The success of a sponsorship can also depend on the cultural fit between the brand and the sport or team it sponsors. For instance, brands that embody speed, performance, and precision, such as luxury car manufacturers, often find success in sponsoring motorsports due to the natural alignment of brand and sport values.
- **Economic Impact:** Economically, sports

sponsorships can have a transformative effect on sports at both the professional and grassroots levels. In regions with developing sports industries, sponsorship can provide essential funding for infrastructure, youth programs, and talent development, laying the foundation for long-term growth.

- **Digital vs. Traditional Sponsorships:** The digital age has introduced new sponsorship formats, including social media partnerships and digital content collaborations. These digital sponsorships offer more measurable ROI and direct engagement with fans, contrasting with the broader brand exposure typically associated with traditional sponsorships like stadium naming rights or uniform branding.

the global impact of sports sponsorship is multifaceted, with its effectiveness shaped by a complex interplay of cultural, economic, and strategic factors. Successful sports sponsorships are those that not only achieve brand objectives but also contribute to the development and growth of the sport itself, creating a symbiotic relationship between sponsors and the sports industry.

### 2.3. Sports Sponsorship in Iraq

In Iraq, the landscape of sports sponsorship is emerging as a vital component in the resurgence and development of the sports industry. This section aims to explore the evolving nature of sports sponsorship within the country, considering the unique challenges and opportunities that define the Iraqi context. Despite historical setbacks and current challenges, there's a growing recognition of sports sponsorship's potential to contribute significantly to the sports sector's growth, driving

economic and social benefits alike.

2.3.1. Historical Context

The history of sports sponsorship in Iraq reflects the broader socio-economic and political changes the country has undergone. In the earlier decades, sports in Iraq, much like in many other countries, relied heavily on government funding and support. This support was pivotal in establishing a foundation for sports but also meant that sports entities were largely dependent on public funds, with little involvement from private sector sponsorships.

During the 1980s and 1990s, despite political and economic challenges, Iraq saw significant achievements in sports, particularly in football, with the national team achieving notable success on the Asian stage. However, the potential for commercial sports sponsorship during this period was limited, primarily due to economic sanctions and political instability.

The early 2000s marked a turning point as Iraq sought to rebuild its sports infrastructure and re-engage with the international sports community. This period saw a gradual increase in private and international interest in Iraqi sports, laying the groundwork for the development of sports sponsorships [1].

2.3.2. Current Trends and Examples

In recent years, sports sponsorship in Iraq has begun to evolve, reflecting a growing recognition of the value of sports as a platform for brand exposure and engagement. Several trends and examples highlight this shift:

- **Telecommunications and Banking Sponsorships:** Companies in the

telecommunications and banking sectors have become prominent sponsors of sports teams and events in Iraq. For example, mobile operators and banks have sponsored football leagues and teams, seeing value in the widespread popularity of the sport among the Iraqi population.

- **International Sponsorships:** International brands have also shown interest in the Iraqi sports market. Although still in the early stages, these sponsorships signal growing confidence in Iraq's sports industry as a viable platform for brand promotion.
- **Local Business Support:** Local businesses have started to sponsor sports events and teams, recognizing the mutual benefits of such partnerships. These sponsorships not only help companies build their brand locally but also support the development of sports at the grassroots level [2].
- **Focus on Football:** Football remains the most popular sport in Iraq, attracting the majority of sponsorship deals. The Iraqi Premier League and the national team have seen increased sponsorship activities, with companies seeking to leverage the passionate fan base of the sport.
- **Emergence of Niche Sports Sponsorships:** While football dominates, there is a growing interest in sponsoring other sports, including basketball, volleyball, and even martial arts. These sponsorships are often driven by a desire to tap into niche communities and support the diversification of sports in the country.

The current trends in sports sponsorship in Iraq



reflect a market that is gradually maturing, with increasing involvement from both local and international brands. These developments suggest a positive trajectory for the sports industry, offering opportunities for growth and greater engagement with the global sports community. However, challenges related to infrastructure, governance, and economic stability remain key factors that will influence the future of sports sponsorship in Iraq.

## **2.4 Challenges and Opportunities of Sports Sponsorship in Iraq:**

The realm of sports sponsorship in Iraq is marked by a complex interplay of challenges and opportunities that reflect the country's unique socio-economic conditions and the evolving nature of its sports industry. As Iraq strives to rebuild and advance its sports sector, understanding these challenges and opportunities is crucial for stakeholders aiming to leverage sports sponsorship effectively. This section provides an overview of the key factors influencing sports sponsorship in Iraq, offering insights into the obstacles to be navigated and the potential pathways for growth and impact.

### **2.4.1. Economic and Political Challenges**

The landscape of sports sponsorship in Iraq is significantly influenced by both economic and political factors that pose challenges to its growth and effectiveness.

**Economic Challenges:** Iraq's economy, while rich in resources, has faced considerable instability due to fluctuating oil prices, conflict, and reconstruction efforts. This economic volatility impacts the availability of funding for sports sponsorships, as companies may be hesitant to

allocate budgets to sports marketing in uncertain financial times. Additionally, the limited diversification of the Iraqi economy means fewer industries have the capital to invest in sports sponsorship.

**Political Challenges:** Political instability and security concerns have historically affected Iraq's ability to host international sporting events, which are crucial for attracting global sponsorships. Furthermore, bureaucratic hurdles and a lack of clear regulations for sports marketing and sponsorships can deter potential sponsors due to the perceived risk and complexity of engaging in the sports sector [3].

### **2.4.2. Opportunities for Growth**

Despite these challenges, there are significant opportunities for the growth of sports sponsorship in Iraq, driven by the country's passion for sports and a young, enthusiastic population.

**Youth and Community Engagement:** With a large and young population, Iraq presents a valuable demographic for brands looking to build long-term loyalty. Sports sponsorship, particularly in football and other popular sports, offers a way to engage these communities, fostering brand recognition and affinity.

**Digital Media and Technology:** The rise of digital media provides an avenue for innovative sports sponsorships. Social media platforms, online streaming, and mobile applications offer new ways for brands to connect with fans, allowing for targeted campaigns and interactive fan experiences. This digital shift opens up sponsorship opportunities beyond traditional banners and broadcast ads.

**Diversification of Sports:** While football enjoys the lion's share of attention, there's growing interest in other sports such as basketball, volleyball, and martial arts. This diversification allows for niche sponsorship opportunities, where brands can align with specific sports communities and values.

**International Partnerships:** The global sports community's interest in supporting the development of sports in post-conflict regions presents an opportunity for international sponsorships and partnerships. Such collaborations can bring in not only funding but also expertise and international standards to the Iraqi sports sector.

**Government Support and Policy Reform:** Initiatives to stabilize the economy and improve the political landscape, coupled with targeted support for sports development, can create a more favorable environment for sports sponsorships. Policy reforms that simplify the process of sports marketing and provide incentives for sponsors can further stimulate growth in this sector.

In conclusion, while sports sponsorship in Iraq faces significant challenges, the underlying passion for sports among the Iraqi population and the untapped market potential offer a fertile ground for growth. By navigating the economic and political landscapes carefully and leveraging the opportunities presented by digital engagement and diversification, stakeholders in the Iraqi sports industry can harness sports sponsorship as a powerful tool for development and engagement [4].

## 2.5. Theoretical Application to the Iraqi Context

Applying theoretical models of sports sponsorship to the Iraqi context involves navigating a unique landscape shaped by the country's historical, cultural, and socio-economic conditions. This exploration seeks to adapt and apply global sports sponsorship theories to understand and maximize their impact within Iraq, recognizing the nuances that distinguish the Iraqi sports sector from others around the world. This section delves into how theoretical frameworks can inform and guide the development of effective sports sponsorship strategies in Iraq, addressing both the challenges and leveraging the opportunities inherent in the Iraqi market.

### 2.5.1. Applicability of Global Theories

The global theories of sports sponsorship, while foundational and broadly applicable, require contextual adaptation to fully capture the nuances of the Iraqi sports landscape. The Association Theory, Marketing Impact Model, Consumer-Based Brand Equity Model, and Sponsorship Fit Theory all provide valuable frameworks for understanding the potential impacts and mechanisms of sports sponsorship. However, their direct application in Iraq must consider the unique socio-economic, cultural, and political context.

**Association Theory:** This theory's applicability in Iraq is evident, as local and national pride strongly influence consumer behavior. Sports teams and athletes who embody resilience, perseverance, and success can significantly enhance the image and appeal of associated brands in the Iraqi market.

**Marketing Impact Model:** Given the increasing digital connectivity and media consumption in



Iraq, this model is relevant for understanding how digital and social media platforms can amplify the marketing impacts of sports sponsorship. However, strategies must be adapted to the specific media usage patterns and preferences of the Iraqi population.

**Consumer-Based Brand Equity Model:** This model's focus on brand recognition, loyalty, and quality perceptions aligns with the Iraqi context, where trust and brand reputation are crucial for consumer engagement. Sponsorships that enhance these elements can be particularly effective in building long-term brand equity.

**Sponsorship Fit Theory:** The cultural fit between the sponsor and the sport is crucial in Iraq, where cultural values and national identity play significant roles in consumer engagement. Sponsorships that resonate with these cultural aspects are likely to be more successful [5].

### 2.5.2. Adaptation and Localized Models

Adapting these global theories to the Iraqi context involves developing localized models that consider Iraq's cultural, economic, and political specificities.

**Cultural Adaptation:** Any sports sponsorship model in Iraq must deeply understand and reflect Iraqi culture, values, and social norms. This includes recognizing the importance of community, national pride, and the role of sports in societal cohesion.

**Economic Considerations:** Given the economic challenges in Iraq, sponsorship models must be cost-effective and provide clear ROI. This might involve leveraging digital platforms for broader reach at lower costs or focusing on grassroots

sports sponsorships that engage communities directly.

**Political and Security Context:** The models must account for the potential volatility in the political and security landscape, offering flexibility and contingency planning for sponsorships. This might involve shorter-term engagements with clear exit strategies or focusing on sports that can be conducted safely under various conditions.

**Localized Models:** Developing models that specifically cater to the Iraqi market could involve:

- **Community-Focused Sponsorship:** Leveraging sports sponsorship to build community relations and support local development projects, aligning brands with community upliftment.
- **Youth Engagement:** Focusing on sports and athletes that resonate with Iraq's young population, utilizing platforms like social media to engage directly and build brand loyalty.
- **Cultural Celebrations:** Integrating sponsorships with cultural and national celebrations through sports, enhancing brand visibility and emotional connection.

By adapting global theories and developing localized sponsorship models, stakeholders can create more effective and meaningful sports sponsorship strategies in Iraq. These adapted models should aim to not only achieve marketing objectives but also contribute positively to the development of sports and the broader societal context in Iraq.

## 2.6. Research Gaps and Future Directions

The exploration of sports sponsorship in Iraq uncovers a landscape rich with potential yet marked by significant research gaps. These gaps highlight areas where further investigation is needed to fully understand and harness the power of sports sponsorship within the Iraqi context. Addressing these gaps is crucial for developing informed strategies that can contribute effectively to the growth of Iraq's sports industry and its broader socio-economic development. This section outlines the critical areas lacking in current research and proposes future directions to expand our understanding and application of sports sponsorship in Iraq.

### 2.6.1. Identification of Gaps

The literature on sports sponsorship, while extensive globally, reveals significant gaps when it comes to the specific context of Iraq. These gaps include:

- **Lack of Empirical Studies:** There is a notable shortage of empirical research focusing on the outcomes and effectiveness of sports sponsorship in Iraq. This includes data on brand awareness, consumer behavior, and ROI from sports sponsorship activities.
- **Cultural and Societal Impact:** Few studies explore how sports sponsorship intersects with cultural and societal values in Iraq, an area crucial for understanding consumer engagement and the broader implications of sponsorship [6].
- **Economic Impact Analysis:** The economic benefits of sports sponsorship, such as job creation, industry growth, and infrastructural

development within the Iraqi context, are underexplored.

- **Digital Sponsorship Strategies:** As digital platforms become increasingly important for sports marketing, there is a gap in research on the use and effectiveness of digital and social media in sports sponsorship in Iraq.
- **Sport-Specific Studies:** Most of the existing research is general, with a lack of sport-specific studies that examine the nuances of sponsorship across different sports popular in Iraq.

### 2.6.2. Suggestions for Future Research

To address these gaps and enhance our understanding of sports sponsorship in Iraq, future research could focus on several key areas:

- **Empirical Studies on Sponsorship Effectiveness:** Conducting research that measures the direct impact of sports sponsorship on brand awareness, consumer loyalty, and sales within the Iraqi market.
- **Cultural Impact Assessments:** Exploring how sports sponsorship can be leveraged to reinforce or shape cultural and societal norms, and how these efforts are received by the Iraqi population.
- **Economic Contribution Analysis:** Investigating the broader economic impacts of sports sponsorship, including its role in supporting local economies, creating jobs, and fostering industry growth.
- **Digital and Social Media Strategies:** Examining the role of digital platforms in sports sponsorship, including the effectiveness

of different digital marketing strategies tailored to the Iraqi audience.

- **Comparative Sport-Specific Research:** Conducting studies that compare the impact and effectiveness of sponsorship across different sports, providing insights into the unique dynamics of each sport within the context of Iraq [7].
- **Longitudinal Studies:** Implementing long-term studies that track the evolution of sports sponsorship in Iraq over time, offering insights into trends, shifts in consumer behavior, and the long-term impacts of sponsorship activities.

By addressing these research gaps, scholars and practitioners can develop a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of sports sponsorship in Iraq. This, in turn, could inform more effective sponsorship strategies that not only achieve marketing objectives but also contribute to the social and economic development of the country.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

#### 3.1. Integration of Global Theories into the Iraqi Context

Integrating global theories of sports sponsorship into the Iraqi context involves a nuanced approach that recognizes the specific socio-economic, cultural, and political landscape of Iraq. This integration aims to adapt and apply established sponsorship theories in a way that resonates with the Iraqi audience, addresses local market dynamics, and contributes to the broader goals of sports development and societal cohesion in Iraq. This section explores how global sponsorship

theories can be contextualized and applied to the unique challenges and opportunities within Iraq, facilitating a strategic approach to sports sponsorship that leverages its potential for positive impact.

##### 3.1.1. Cultural Adaptation of Sports Sponsorship Models

The adaptation of global sports sponsorship models to the Iraqi context requires a nuanced understanding of the country's unique cultural and societal norms. Iraq's rich history, diverse cultural landscape, and the significant role of community and national identity in daily life profoundly influence consumer behavior and engagement with sports. This section explores how global sponsorship strategies are modified to resonate with these cultural aspects, ensuring that marketing efforts are not only effective but also culturally sensitive and aligned with Iraqi values.

Key considerations include:

- **National Pride:** Leveraging sports sponsorship to foster national pride, especially through support of teams and athletes that represent Iraq in international competitions.
- **Community Engagement:** Designing sponsorship activities that promote community involvement and support local development, aligning with the communal values prevalent in Iraqi society.
- **Cultural Symbols and Messaging:** Incorporating local symbols, narratives, and themes into sponsorship campaigns to ensure cultural relevance and deeper emotional connection with the audience [8].

### 3.1.2. Economic Realities and Sponsorship Strategies

Iraq's economic environment presents unique challenges and opportunities for sports sponsorship. The fluctuating oil market, political instability, and ongoing efforts at economic diversification impact how companies approach sports sponsorship. This section examines the economic factors influencing sports sponsorship in Iraq and how companies can navigate these realities to develop effective sponsorship strategies.

Areas of focus include:

- **Resource Allocation:** Strategies for allocating sponsorship budgets in a manner that maximizes visibility and impact, considering the economic constraints and priorities of businesses operating in Iraq.
- **ROI Measurement:** Approaches for measuring the return on investment of sports sponsorships, which is crucial in justifying sponsorship expenditures. This includes both direct impacts, such as sales increases, and indirect benefits, such as enhanced brand image and customer loyalty.
- **Economic Diversification:** Opportunities for leveraging sports sponsorship as a tool for economic diversification, supporting sectors beyond oil and gas, such as tourism, retail, and telecommunications, through strategic partnerships with sports entities.

By integrating global theories with a deep understanding of Iraq's cultural and economic context, sports sponsorship strategies can be tailored to meet the unique needs and opportunities

of the Iraqi market. This approach not only enhances the effectiveness of sports sponsorships but also contributes to the broader goals of community development and economic growth in Iraq [9].

### 3.2. Theoretical Models Specific to Iraq

#### 3.2.1. Community-Centric Sponsorship Model

The Community-Centric Sponsorship Model is designed to harness the power of sports as a unifying force, promoting social cohesion and national pride within the Iraqi context. Recognizing the integral role sports play in the fabric of Iraqi society, this model prioritizes initiatives that support community development, from grassroots sports programs to national team sponsorships. The model emphasizes the importance of sponsorships that go beyond mere brand visibility, aiming to create lasting impacts on local communities through sports[1].

Key components of the Community-Centric Sponsorship Model include:

- **Grassroots Development:** Supporting youth sports programs, local clubs, and school-based sports initiatives to encourage participation from an early age, fostering a sense of community and teamwork.
- **Infrastructure Investment:** Contributing to the development and maintenance of sports facilities that serve as community hubs, offering safe spaces for sports and recreation.
- **Cultural Celebrations:** Utilizing sports events to celebrate Iraqi culture and heritage, reinforcing national identity and pride through shared experiences.

### 3.2.2. Digital Engagement Model

The Digital Engagement Model recognizes the growing importance of digital and social media platforms in the Iraqi market, particularly among the youth demographic. This model focuses on leveraging these platforms for sports sponsorship activities, tailored to the digital consumption habits and preferences of the Iraqi audience. By engaging fans where they spend a significant portion of their time, this model offers innovative ways for brands to connect with consumers, enhance fan experiences, and measure the impact of their sponsorship investments more effectively.

Together, the Community-Centric Sponsorship Model and the Digital Engagement Model offer a comprehensive approach to sports sponsorship in Iraq, one that not only achieves marketing objectives but also contributes to the social and digital development of the sports landscape in the country. These models reflect a deep understanding of the Iraqi context, ensuring that sponsorship strategies are both effective and culturally aligned[10]

## 3.3. Adaptation of Consumer Behavior Theories

### 3.3.1. Brand Association and Loyalty in Sports

The theories of brand association and consumer loyalty are crucial in understanding how sports sponsorship influences brand perception and consumer behavior, especially in a unique market like Iraq. This adaptation examines the extent to which sports can be a vehicle for enhancing brand association and fostering loyalty among Iraqi consumers.

- **Brand Association in the Iraqi Context:** Sports teams and athletes in Iraq often carry

deep emotional and cultural significance for their fans, making sports sponsorship an effective strategy for brands to associate themselves with these positive sentiments. This section explores how brands can leverage the emotional engagement and communal experiences provided by sports to build stronger associations with consumers.

- **Building Consumer Loyalty Through Sports:** The loyalty fans feel towards their favorite sports teams or athletes can be transferred to the sponsoring brand, provided the sponsorship is authentic and adds value to the fan experience. This part of the model discusses strategies for brands to not only initiate but also sustain loyalty among consumers by consistently supporting and enhancing the sports ecosystem in Iraq.

### 3.3.2. The Role of Sponsorship Fit

The concept of sponsorship fit plays a pivotal role in determining the effectiveness of sports sponsorships. In the Iraqi context, where cultural values and national pride are significant, the alignment between a brand's values and the essence of the sports entity it sponsors can significantly impact consumer perceptions and behaviors.

**Analyzing Sponsorship Fit:** This section delves into how perceived fit—or the lack thereof—can influence consumer attitudes towards both the sponsoring brand and the sports entity. It will explore how brands can ensure alignment with sports entities that share similar values or appeal to similar demographic and psychographic segments within the Iraqi market.

**Strategies for Enhancing Sponsorship Fit:**

Practical strategies for brands to enhance the perceived fit with their chosen sports entities will be discussed. This includes leveraging shared cultural narratives, engaging in co-branded community initiatives, and adopting tailored communication strategies that resonate with the values and preferences of the target audience.

By adapting these consumer behavior theories to the Iraqi sports sponsorship context, brands can gain deeper insights into how to effectively engage with Iraqi consumers through sports. This involves not just a superficial sponsorship agreement but a strategic alignment that considers the cultural, emotional, and societal impact of sports on Iraqi consumers. Through such tailored approaches, sports sponsorship can become a powerful tool for building meaningful brand associations and fostering long-term consumer loyalty in Iraq.

**3.4. Socio-Economic Impacts of Sports Sponsorship****3.4.1. Economic Impact on Local Sports Industry**

Sports sponsorship in Iraq can play a significant role in stimulating the local sports industry, with both direct and indirect economic benefits. This section explores how investment in sports through sponsorships can lead to infrastructure development, job creation, and overall economic growth within the sports sector [11].

**Infrastructure Development:** Sponsorships can fund the construction and maintenance of sports facilities, from stadiums to training grounds and community sports centers. These projects not only provide immediate construction jobs but also long-term employment opportunities in facility management, maintenance, and event organization.

**Job Creation:** Beyond infrastructure, sports sponsorships contribute to job creation in related industries, including sports marketing, merchandise manufacturing, and hospitality. This broadens the economic impact of sports, supporting a wider ecosystem that includes small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and startups.

**Economic Growth and Diversification:** By investing in sports, sponsors can help diversify the Iraqi economy, reducing its reliance on oil by promoting sectors like sports tourism, retail, and entertainment. This diversification is crucial for sustainable economic development.

**3.4.2. Social Impact and Community Development**

The social implications of sports sponsorship extend beyond economic benefits, contributing significantly to community development, youth engagement, and the promotion of healthy lifestyles. This part of the framework considers how sports sponsorships can be leveraged to achieve broader social objectives.

**Community Development:** Sports events and teams sponsored by brands can become focal points for community pride and cohesion, offering a sense of belonging and collective identity. Sponsorships can also include initiatives aimed at community improvement, such as renovating public spaces or supporting local charities.

**Youth Engagement:** By providing resources for youth sports programs, sponsorships can engage young people in productive and healthy activities, steering them away from negative influences and fostering a sense of discipline, teamwork, and achievement. This engagement is crucial for the social development of the youth population.



**Promotion of Healthy Lifestyles:** Sponsorships that focus on sports participation rather than just spectatorship can encourage the broader population to adopt more active and healthy lifestyles. Campaigns and programs designed to increase physical activity can have long-term health benefits for the community, reducing healthcare costs and improving quality of life.

The socio-economic impacts of sports sponsorship in Iraq highlight the potential of strategic investment in sports to yield significant benefits not just for the sports industry but for the broader economy and society. By carefully aligning sponsorship strategies with economic and social development goals, sponsors can contribute to the sustainable growth and improvement of Iraqi communities.

### 3.5. Ethical Considerations in Sports Sponsorship

#### 3.5.1. Ethical Marketing Practices

In the context of Iraq, a post-conflict society striving for stability and growth, the ethical dimensions of marketing practices in sports sponsorship are of paramount importance. Ethical marketing in sports sponsorship involves ensuring transparency, honesty, and social responsibility in all sponsorship activities. This section highlights the critical need for sponsors to adopt practices that are not only effective but also ethically sound and socially beneficial [12].

**Transparency:** This involves clear communication about the nature of the sponsorship, the roles of the parties involved, and the objectives of any campaign. Transparency builds trust among consumers, participants, and

the broader community, fostering a positive image of both the sponsoring brand and the sports entity.

**Social Responsibility:** Sponsors should aim to support sports initiatives that contribute positively to society, such as programs promoting inclusivity, education, and community development. Ethical marketing practices require that sponsors consider the wider impacts of their investments, choosing to support initiatives that align with societal values and contribute to the public good.

**Avoiding Exploitation:** Ethical marketing also means avoiding the exploitation of the sports entity's image or the fans' loyalty. This includes ensuring that marketing messages are respectful, inclusive, and free from misleading claims or unhealthy associations.

#### 3.5.2. Protecting Vulnerable Groups

Vulnerable groups, such as children, youth, and marginalized communities, often form a significant part of the sports audience and participant base. Protecting these groups in the context of sports sponsorship is crucial to ensure that marketing practices do not exploit their vulnerability or expose them to harm.

**Child-Friendly Content:** Marketing content associated with sports sponsorships should be appropriate for all ages, especially when children and youth are a significant part of the audience. This includes avoiding content that promotes unhealthy behaviors, such as excessive consumption of junk food or alcohol.

**Inclusivity and Accessibility:** Sports sponsorship programs should strive to be inclusive, providing opportunities for participation and engagement to all members of society, regardless of their

background, ability, or economic status. This involves thoughtful consideration of how sponsorships can be designed to be accessible and welcoming to all.

#### **Community Consent and Engagement:**

Engaging with communities and obtaining their consent and input in the development and implementation of sponsorship programs ensures that initiatives are respectful and aligned with the community's needs and values. This participatory approach helps safeguard the interests and well-being of vulnerable groups.

Ethical considerations in sports sponsorship are not just legal or regulatory obligations but are fundamental to building sustainable and positive relationships between brands, sports entities, and communities. By prioritizing ethical practices and the protection of vulnerable groups, sponsors can contribute to the development of a healthy, inclusive, and socially responsible sports culture in Iraq.

## **4. Conceptual Model**

### **4.1. Development of the Conceptual Model**

The conceptual model for understanding the relationship between sports sponsorship and industry growth in Iraq integrates key insights from the literature review and theoretical framework. This model posits that sports sponsorship acts as a catalyst for industry growth through direct and indirect pathways, influenced by the unique socio-economic and cultural context of Iraq.

#### **4.1.1 Components of the Model:**

- **Sports Sponsorship:** Defined as the investment by businesses in sports entities

(teams, events, facilities) for marketing and community engagement purposes.

- **Industry Growth:** Measured in terms of economic impact (revenue, job creation), infrastructure development, community engagement, and international visibility.
- **Mediating Factors:** Cultural alignment, ethical marketing practices, digital engagement, and community-centric initiatives that influence the effectiveness of sports sponsorships.
- **Outcome Variables:** Enhanced brand visibility and loyalty, increased sports participation, and strengthened community ties[13].

#### **4.1.2 Pathways:**

1. **Economic Pathway:** Direct financial investments into sports entities stimulate local economies, supporting infrastructure development and job creation.
2. **Social Pathway:** Sponsorships that align with local culture and values foster community engagement and national pride, indirectly supporting industry growth by increasing sports participation and fan base.
3. **Digital Pathway:** Leveraging digital platforms for sports sponsorship amplifies brand and sports visibility, engaging a broader audience and facilitating international exposure.
4. **Ethical Pathway:** Ethical marketing practices and the protection of vulnerable groups enhance the social responsibility profile of sponsors, contributing to sustainable industry growth.

## 4.2. Justification of the Model

The development of this conceptual model is grounded in the comprehensive literature review and theoretical framework previously outlined. The literature review highlights the significant impact of sports sponsorship on both the sports industry and broader socio-economic development, particularly in contexts similar to Iraq. The theoretical framework provides the basis for understanding how global sponsorship theories apply and need to be adapted to the Iraqi context, considering cultural, economic, and ethical dimensions.

### 4.2.1 Literature Review Insights:

- The importance of cultural and societal norms in shaping sports marketing effectiveness in Iraq.
- The economic benefits of sports sponsorship, including infrastructure development and job creation, as highlighted in studies from various contexts.
- The role of digital engagement in modern sports sponsorship, offering new avenues for growth and community engagement.

### 4.2.2 Theoretical Framework Contributions:

- The adaptation of consumer behavior theories to the Iraqi context, emphasizing the role of brand association, loyalty, and sponsorship fit.
- The socio-economic impacts of sports sponsorship, highlighting the potential for community development and the promotion of healthy lifestyles.
- Ethical considerations in sports sponsorship, underscoring the need for responsible

marketing practices and the protection of vulnerable groups.

This conceptual model is designed to capture the complex and multifaceted nature of sports sponsorship in Iraq, providing a structured approach to understanding its potential impacts on industry growth. By considering the unique challenges and opportunities within the Iraqi context, the model offers insights into strategic planning for sports sponsorship that can contribute to sustainable development in the sports industry and beyond.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Theoretical Implications of Sports Sponsorship on the Growth of the Sports Industry in Iraq

The theoretical exploration of sports sponsorship within the Iraqi context reveals significant implications for the growth and development of the sports industry. The integration of global theories with local nuances suggests that sports sponsorship can serve as a vital mechanism for not only enhancing brand visibility and consumer engagement but also for fostering economic development, community cohesion, and national pride. These implications are rooted in the understanding that sports can act as a powerful platform for social and economic transformation, particularly in post-conflict societies like Iraq.

**Economic and Social Development:** The theoretical models highlight sports sponsorship's potential to drive economic growth through infrastructure development, job creation, and the stimulation of related industries. On a social level, sponsorship initiatives that are community-centric and ethically grounded can significantly contribute

to community development, youth engagement, and the promotion of inclusivity and healthy lifestyles.

## 5.2. Potential for These Theories to Explain the Current State and Future Directions of Iraq's Sports Industry

The current state of Iraq's sports industry, characterized by its gradual recovery and growth, can be partly explained by the increasing interest in sports sponsorship. As local and international companies begin to recognize the value of associating with sports entities in Iraq, there is a clear pathway toward a more robust and sustainable sports industry. The theories discussed offer a framework for understanding how continued and strategic investment in sports sponsorship can propel the industry forward.

- **Future Directions:** Looking ahead, the potential for sports sponsorship in Iraq is vast. The growing digital landscape, combined with Iraq's young and sports-enthusiastic population, presents opportunities for innovative sponsorship models that leverage digital media, engage communities, and support grassroots sports programs. These developments could significantly enhance the visibility and competitiveness of Iraqi sports on a global stage.

## 5.3. Critical Examination of the Applicability and Limitations of Existing Theories in the Iraqi Context

While the theoretical frameworks provide valuable insights into the potential impacts of sports sponsorship, their applicability in the Iraqi context is not without limitations.

- **Applicability:** The core concepts of brand association, loyalty, and sponsorship fit are universally applicable and offer a solid foundation for developing effective sports sponsorship strategies in Iraq. The emphasis on ethical considerations and community engagement aligns well with Iraqi societal values and the need for post-conflict reconstruction and development.
- **Limitations:** However, the unique challenges facing Iraq, including political instability, economic volatility, and infrastructural deficits, may limit the direct application of some global theories. For instance, the economic impact model's effectiveness might be constrained by the current economic environment, requiring adaptations to account for these challenges.
- **Adaptation and Localization:** To overcome these limitations, it is crucial to adapt and localize global theories to fit the Iraqi context. This includes tailoring sponsorship strategies to address local needs, leveraging digital platforms to engage with the youth demographic, and ensuring that sponsorship activities are designed with a deep understanding of local cultural and societal norms.

The discussion underscores the importance of a nuanced approach to sports sponsorship in Iraq, one that acknowledges both the potential benefits and the challenges of applying global theories in a distinct local context. By critically examining these theories and adapting them to meet Iraq's specific needs, stakeholders can harness sports sponsorship as a powerful tool for industry growth and societal development.

## Conclusion

The exploration of sports sponsorship within the Iraqi context has unveiled its multifaceted impact on the growth of the sports industry, highlighting the significant potential for economic development, community engagement, and the strengthening of national identity. Through the development of a conceptual model and a comprehensive theoretical framework, this discussion has underscored the importance of adapting global sponsorship strategies to the unique cultural, economic, and societal landscape of Iraq. The analysis reveals that, when thoughtfully executed, sports sponsorship can transcend its traditional marketing objectives, contributing to the broader goals of social cohesion and post-conflict reconstruction.

The critical examination of existing theories in relation to the Iraqi context has illuminated both the applicability and limitations of global models, advocating for a nuanced approach that considers Iraq's specific needs and challenges. The emphasis on ethical considerations, digital engagement, and community-centric initiatives offers a roadmap for leveraging sports sponsorship in a manner that is not only effective but also socially responsible and culturally resonant.

Recommendations for future research have been identified, highlighting the need for empirical studies to test the proposed conceptual model and further explore the areas within the theoretical framework that require development. These studies are essential for refining our understanding of sports sponsorship's role in Iraq and for crafting strategies that are both impactful and sustainable.

In conclusion, sports sponsorship in Iraq stands at

the intersection of marketing and social development, offering a unique opportunity to foster industry growth while contributing to the country's healing and unity. As Iraq continues to navigate its post-conflict recovery, the strategic use of sports sponsorship can play a pivotal role in rebuilding not just the sports industry but also the nation's social fabric. By embracing the insights provided by theoretical models and adapting them to the local context, stakeholders can harness the power of sports sponsorship to achieve a wide range of economic and social objectives, paving the way for a brighter, more inclusive future for Iraq's sports industry and its people.

## Results

- The research underscores the capacity of sports sponsorship to increase brand awareness and enhance fan engagement, contributing to community initiative support.
- Sports sponsorship in Iraq faces challenges such as economic instability, a lack of sports infrastructure, and the need for a clearer regulatory framework.
- Brands and sports organizations in Iraq should seek strategic alignment, ensuring sponsorship agreements reflect shared values and objectives, enhancing impact on targeted audiences.
- Sponsors are encouraged to design initiatives that not only promote their brands but also positively contribute to local communities, using sports as a platform for social cohesion and national pride.

Digital Innovation: Adoption of digital platforms for sponsorship activations is advised, utilizing social media, online streaming, and interactive fan engagement tools to reach wider audiences and

measure the effectiveness of sponsorship strategies.

### Recommendations:

- Brands and sports organizations in Iraq should seek strategic alignment, ensuring that sponsorship agreements reflect shared values and objectives, enhancing the impact on targeted audiences.
- Sponsors are encouraged to design initiatives that not only promote their brands but also contribute positively to local communities, leveraging sports as a platform for social cohesion and national pride.
- Embrace digital platforms for sponsorship activations, utilizing social media, online streaming, and interactive fan engagement tools to reach wider audiences and measure the effectiveness of sponsorship strategies.
- **Infrastructure Investment:** Stakeholders, including government bodies, should consider investments in sports infrastructure as part of sponsorship deals, facilitating the growth of the sports sector and improving the quality of sports events.
- Ensure that sports sponsorship activities adhere to high ethical standards, promoting transparency, social responsibility, and the protection of vulnerable groups within the context of sports marketing.

### Suggestions for Future Research:

- Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impacts of sports sponsorship on the sports industry in Iraq, tracking changes over time in brand

perception, fan engagement, and economic outcomes.

- Investigate how sports sponsorship can be tailored to align with Iraq's cultural values and societal norms, exploring the role of national identity in shaping sponsorship success.
- Develop and test sector-specific sponsorship models that address the unique needs of different sports, evaluating the applicability and effectiveness of various sponsorship strategies across sports disciplines.
- Conduct studies to examine the existing policy and regulatory frameworks governing sports sponsorship in Iraq, identifying gaps and proposing reforms to facilitate sponsorship activities.
- Further research is needed to explore the ethical dimensions of sports sponsorship, particularly focusing on strategies that enhance the social responsibility of brands and contribute to societal well-being through sports.

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