

Exploring the impact of commercial sponsors on spectator's satisfaction of the Euroleague Basketball

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Dissertation Supervisor: Alessandra Vecchi

Elisabet Lopez Sagrera

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Dedication

I am dedicating this dissertation to my incredible parents Rosa and Ricardo and my grandmother Manoli (Abueli). Thank you for all the support, love and all the encouragement throughout the tough moments we experienced during the completion of my degree. Also, I would like to express my special thanks to my closest friends and, despite the distance, they have supported me in every stage of my master's degree. Lastly, I would like to recognize all the loving support from my partner who has always helped me in every possible way throughout the tough times and hard work towards the completion of this dissertation.

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Finally, I want to thank the participants who contributed in completing the survey and the certified EB Coach who has taken his valuable time to meet with me and has helped me to gather more qualitative data through the interview.

Abstract

Exploring the impact of commercial sponsors and spectator's satisfaction of the Euroleague Basketball

Elisabet L. Sagrera

The main purpose of this dissertation is to explore the link between spectator's satisfaction and sponsors of the Euroleague Basketball (EB) with special focus on social identity theory. The problem statement relies on understanding how the Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner's, (1979) social identity theory shapes sponsorship effectiveness of the EB in light of the satisfaction levels of spectators when attending live games.

The approach of this exploration research was taken from a deductive point of view and it is interpretivist in nature. The research design is conducted using the triangulation method which combines both qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data was gathered conducting a Content Analysis of social media platforms using NVivo and an in-depth individual (IDI) interview. Quantitative data was gathered conducting a survey using a non-probability sampling based on the purpose of the research and the conceptual framework. The survey was distributed via Facebook in three major EB groups and resulted in 66 participants.

Findings showed that positive spectator's satisfaction involving positive game satisfaction and service quality influence brand recognition and awareness, revisit intentions and purchasing intentions. High team identification levels influenced brand recognition and awareness, revisit intentions and it significantly influenced purchasing intentions regardless of game satisfaction and service quality.

While this analysis lacks strong conclusions, since the work is exploratory and interpretative, the data focused on presenting every element of the conceptual framework developed with respect to the research objective and can be used for future studies to further extend the research in this context.

Table of Contents

CANDIDATE DECLARATION	II
DEDICATION.....	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	IV
ABSTRACT.....	V
LIST OF FIGURES.....	VIII
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 OVERVIEW.....	1
1.2 RESEARCH PURPOSE	1
1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY	3
1.4 AIM AND OBJECTIVES.....	4
1.5 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY	5
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	7
2.1 OVERVIEW.....	7
2.2 SPORTS SPONSORSHIP AS A FUNDAMENTAL MARKETING TOOL	8
2.3 SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY	10
2.4 SPECTATOR’S SATISFACTION	12
2.5 HOW SOCIAL IDENTITY SHAPES SPONSORSHIP EFFECTIVENESS.....	15
2.6 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	18
2.7 CONCLUSION.....	20
3 METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN	21
3.1 OVERVIEW.....	21
3.2 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY AND APPROACH.....	22
3.3 RESEARCH STRATEGY	23
3.4 COLLECTION PRIMARY DATA	26
3.4.1 Sources.....	26
3.4.2 Access and Ethical Issues.....	28
3.5 APPROACH TO DATA ANALYSIS	29
3.6 CONCLUSION.....	30
4 PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS	31
4.1 OVERVIEW.....	31
4.2 FINDINGS	31
4.2.1 NVivo Social Media Content Analysis Findings.....	32
4.2.2 IDI Interview Findings	37
4.2.3 Survey Findings.....	42
4.3 DISCUSSION	47
4.4 CONCLUSION.....	53

5	CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF THIS RESEARCH, ITS LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH	57
5.1	IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS FOR THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	57
5.2	CONTRIBUTIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH.....	58
5.3	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE.....	61
5.4	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	62
5.5	FINAL CONCLUSION AND REFLECTIONS.....	63
	REFERENCES	64
	APPENDICES.....	A
	<i>Appendix A – Content Analysis Codes</i>	A
	<i>Appendix B – Interview Guide Introduction</i>	A
	<i>Appendix C – PLS and Consent Form</i>	B
	<i>Appendix D – IDI Interview Transcript</i>	A
	<i>Appendix E - Graph 1 from NVivo IDI results</i>	F
	<i>Appendix F – Survey Questionnaire Design</i>	G
	<i>Appendix G – Charts and Graphs from Survey Results</i>	I
	<i>Appendix G – Graph 2 & 3: Hypothesis 1</i>	K
	<i>Appendix G –Graph 3: Hypothesis 2</i>	L
	<i>Appendix G –Graph 4 & 5: Hypothesis 3</i>	M
	<i>Appendix G – Graph 6: Hypothesis 4</i>	N

List of Figures

FIGURE 1 – CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	19
FIGURE 2 – WORD CLOUD FROM CONTENT ANALYSIS	33
FIGURE 3 – SUNBURST FROM CONTENT ANALYSIS	35
FIGURE 4 – WORD CLOUD IDI.....	39
TABLE 1 - HYPOTHESIS TEST OF SURVEY VARIABLES	52
TABLE 2 – CONTENT ANALYSIS CODES	A

1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

This research will be focused on the Euroleague Basketball (EB), an international leader in the sports and entertainment industry, committed to managing the top professional basketball club European competitions. This exploratory research will investigate the impact of spectator's satisfaction in light of commercial sponsors of the EB. In modern sports, it has been recognized that sports aren't just about sportsmanship but are also about commercialization and promotion (Yeravdekar, 2015). However, sports have always been a repository of a culture's values, mirroring and shaping society (Reinharz et al., 2000). Previous researchers have noted that a key objective of sponsorship-linked marketing is to create strong and lasting values-based connections between fans and sponsors which results into sponsorship effectiveness (Aiken *et al.*, 2015).

The areas upon investigation involve how social identity theory and spectator's satisfaction shape sponsorship effectiveness in the EB's on-site venues.

1.2 Research Purpose

The purpose of the research is to explore the link between sponsorship and spectator's satisfaction assessed under social identity theory. In this research, sports sponsorship will encompass the marketing area of the business focusing on how sponsorship practices are delivered to spectators, to assess the connection perceived between sponsors and viewers as well as if sponsorship effectiveness is associated to positive spectator's satisfaction and levels of spectator identity.

The EB is comprised of the best 18 basketball teams across Europe creating an atmosphere that brings together an international diverse cultural background; it has been growing substantially since the joint venture with IMG in 2015. The numbers of viewers, around the world for the season 2018-2019 was over 1.3bn as well as 280m viewers on video content and 58m likes, shares and comments on social media (Bee and Dalakas, 2015). Thus, the number of sponsors, broadcasting media rights and advertisements grew and the EB has become the perfect means to reach the desirable target market for sponsors. The study is going to bring new insights on the EB's on-site spectator's satisfaction in regard to sponsorship effectiveness.

Sponsorship developed into the perfect marketing tool for the EB creating partnerships that commercialize their brand as well as to get financing sources. The EB takes a tailored and flexible approach to sponsorship engaging the correct part of the league's fanbase, converting them into customers; spectators are able to see that each partner is an essential part of the EB ecosystem, helping them become brands of choice with the audience (SportBusiness, 2018). Nonetheless, it is important to recall that spectator's satisfaction play a crucial role in the success of the EB where their experience has to be positive. Spectator's satisfaction will be assessed under the social identity theory since past research in the field has provided a useful framework for understanding spectators' self-identity towards their involvement into social groups and their behaviour towards sponsorship brand awareness, brand recognition and purchasing intentions (Bee and Dalakas, 2015).

Despite the huge sponsorships deals in sports entities, there is lack of literature attempted to draw linkages among spectator satisfaction and sports

sponsorships under the social identity theory. The research assesses this gap in the field creating a conceptual framework using a mix of qualitative and quantitative data to explore the link between sponsors and spectator's satisfaction as well as to explore the association between positive spectator's satisfaction and sponsorship effectiveness.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will benefit the EB staff members with adding new perceptions on sports sponsorship in light of spectator's satisfaction. The greater number of followers in sports, basketball and the growth of the EB, as well as academic attention for the last decade (Caemmerer and Descotes, 2011; Farrelly and Quester, 2015) justifies the need for up-to-date strategic approaches to spectator satisfaction management.

Assessing sponsorship activities at professional sporting events has indeed become crucial in order to determine the effectiveness of sponsorship and maximizing partnerships between sporting entities and their sponsors (Windy Dees *et al.*, 2008). However, limited academic literature has addressed the link between spectator's satisfaction and sponsorship effectiveness. Meenaghan and O'Sullivan (2001) came to regret that sponsorship research has focused primarily either on management practices or on recall and recognition; moreover Smith *et al.*, (2008) added that awareness and association testing provides only superficial data about the nature of consumer reaction to, and engagement with, sponsorship. Madrigal, (2000) suggest to specifically use the social identity theory to assess the relation between spectator's satisfaction and sponsorship effectiveness since it has been found that a higher spectator's social

identity (team identification) towards a certain entity/team results into higher sponsorship effectiveness.

Therefore, this exploratory research will deliver the recommendations from the results of spectator's satisfaction and sponsorship effectiveness of the EB under the social identity theory. The results are intended to be used to gain insights on the EB's spectator's satisfaction towards their sponsors so the EB can benefit from such. For the researcher, the study will help her discover critical areas in the sports management essentially in the marketing area and spectator satisfaction management that many researchers were not able to explore in this field.

1.4 Aim and Objectives

The exploratory research objective of this study is to assess the impact of spectator's satisfaction and social identity theory on sponsorship effectiveness in the EB. The research will explore if positive spectator's satisfaction will enhance sponsorship effectiveness and if high levels of team identification (social identity theory) will result in higher sponsorship effectiveness. The research will be measuring if the factors of positive game satisfaction and service satisfaction influence positively on spectator's satisfaction. Also, the research will be measuring if positive levels of satisfaction and team identification will influence brand awareness and recognition as well as revisit and purchasing intentions. The aim of the study will be explored and evaluated by testing hypotheses listed under the relevant literature review sections.

1.5 Structure of the Study

The study is going to be divided into five parts, each relating to the purpose of study. The first chapter aims to present the analysis, state the intent of the exploratory study and highlight the study's importance for the influence of sponsorships in the EB's venues on spectator's satisfaction attending live games as well as assessing the link between spectator's satisfaction and sponsorship effectiveness.

The second chapter presents the literature review on sports sponsorship, social identity theory, spectator's satisfaction and the linkage between spectator's satisfaction and identity towards sponsorship effectiveness. The analysis on this chapter is important in order to the study being fully understood. By the end of the chapter, the conceptual framework will associate and link the most important aspects of the dissertation with the hypotheses.

The third chapter of this study will illustrate the research methodology and approach that are going to be used to data gathering. Primary qualitative and quantitative data are going to be collected using a mixed-research method approach and deductive approach where a social phenomenon is observed, data is gathered and thus, a theory develops by testing if hypotheses are true in any circumstance. Qualitative content analysis, interview and questionnaire approaches are going to be used to enhance the quality and richness of this exploration.

The fourth chapter will illustrate the findings on qualitative and quantitative data results which are going to be intended to examine the rationality and credibility

of the study results. A survey questionnaire is going to be used for quantitative analysis and testing of the hypotheses and qualitative data from the social media content analysis and the interview are going to be explored.

Lastly, the fifth chapter will emphasize the findings, implications, and suggestions for possible future research as well as the limitations of the study.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Overview

The aim of the literature review is to identify and evaluate past studies relevant to the research purpose in order to develop a conceptual framework on the impact between positive spectator's satisfaction and social identity theory on sponsorship effectiveness. Past research in the field of sports sponsorship have arisen the interest to fill the gaps in existing literature to understand the link between spectator's satisfaction, social identity theory and sponsorship effectiveness. In order to undertake this study, thorough research will be conducted to expand the knowledge of this literature review and explore all the aspects of the hypotheses based on past studies to address the gaps on this field that, as previously mentioned, require further review.

The literature review will cover six sections that intend to associate the purpose of the research with past research studies. First, explaining how commercial sponsors are a fundamental marketing tool, especially for sports. Then, an introduction on social identity theory and why this theory is chosen over others will be addressed followed by spectator's satisfaction and how satisfaction influences spectator's behaviour. Next, research studies are going to cover how social identity theory shape sponsorship effectiveness. Each developed hypothesis is stated at the end of the relevant section of the literature review. A conceptual framework is built based on the literature review along with the hypotheses linked to the research aim and objectives. Lastly, a conclusion is developed to summarize chapter two.

2.2 Sports sponsorship as a fundamental marketing tool

Due to the fact that commercial sponsorship has become a widely utilized form of marketing communication, it is necessary to continually study this phenomenon in an effort to determine its impact on consumers and their perceptions of commercial sponsors and their products and services (Dees *et al.*, 2008). Sport sponsorship is defined as an investment in cash or in kind in a sport related activity, person, or event in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with the sport (Hickman *et al.*, 2005 ; Farrelly and Quester, 2015). Commercial sponsorship has risen as companies have discovered that they can attain new publicity rates at lower cost than conventional advertisement strategies by sponsorship (Lyberger and McCarthy, 2001). Additional reasons for the growth in sponsorship of leisure activities is the greater media coverage of these events combined with the rising cost of media advertising and increasing public indifference to conventional forms of communications (Jagre *et al.*, 2001).

Sponsoring mega-sport events has become a promotional tool of choice for businesses pursuing recognition and affecting goods at international, national and local levels as well as it has provided crucial revenue that benefits sporting participants at all stages, sport and the wider community which in fact, it has caught the attention of many researchers (Macintosh *et al.*, 2012 ; Kelly *et al.*, 2016). For instance, the value of the European sports sponsorship reached a record €20.07 billion in 2018, according to a report produced by the European Sponsorship Association (ESA), an 8.7 per cent increase from the previous year (Dixon, 2019). Brands are eager to connect with the passion of sports, their media coverage, and their audiences through sponsorship (Woisetschläger *et al.*, 2017).

Many sport organizations rely on sponsorship as an increasingly important means for survival, 70% of all sponsorship expenditures by brand marketers are allocated towards sport organizations (Jensen and Turner, 2017).

Some work in this area, moving away from solely financial analyses, centred on understanding sponsorship effectiveness by analysing perceived fan-to-sponsor linkages (Aiken *et al.*, 2015). By leveraging spectators' links with sponsored entities (e.g., teams), sponsorship generates brand awareness through brand exposure, establishes a brand–team connection, and facilitates the transfer of attitudes and associations (e.g., image) from the team to the brand with little cognitive mediation (Cornwell *et al.*, 2005 ; Mazodier *et al.*, 2018).

Spectator's satisfaction attitudes towards commercial sponsors happen at the psychological level. Sponsorship works by association rather than persuasion; Dr Marsden, (2014) explained that a sponsored property and a good positive emotional response from the public, would have a "halo effect" on the related sponsor. For instance, positive comments related to the sponsored product (e.g. NBA's Miami Heat) "spillover" and become identified with the sponsor (e.g. Kia cars) indicating an emotional connection. In addition to emotional association, an emerging line of research have addressed this gap between spectator's and commercial sponsors in the context of sports using attribution theory's principle (Crompton, 2014), associative learning theory (Javalgi *et al.*, 1994), values-based approach (Aiken *et al.*, 2015), fan identification and social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979 ; Ashforth and Mael, 1989) which all have in common that, individuals of the target market will psychologically infer a sponsor 's investment intent in an effort to understand the reasoning behind it. Said otherwise, spectator's satisfaction is stimulated in the cognitive level which affects the

intentions of supporting commercial sponsors of sports leagues, entities, clubs, teams or players.

Objectively, while past sponsorship research has analysed sponsorship effectiveness in relation to spectator's satisfaction using cognitive theories, little is known on how social identity theory shapes sponsorship effectiveness. Social identity in sports is a powerful association that sports entities can leverage on in their marketing strategy (Glen, 2016). For instance, in sponsorship and endorsement contexts, social identity theory is useful for its examination of the process by which individuals self-identify with a group and, once the identity has been established, "share some emotional involvement in this common definition of themselves, and achieve some degree of social consensus about the evaluation of their group and of their membership in it" (Pokrywczynski and Brinker, 2012). In sport sponsorship, unlike common commercial activities where consumers and commercial activities are communicated directly, communication is realized through the vehicle of sport, "evoking high levels of emotional attachment and identification" (Sutton *et al.*, 1997 ; Zhang *et al.*, 2005). The definition of the theory of social identity is further discussed in the following section to clarify the term relative to the purpose of the study and the hypotheses.

2.3 Social identity theory

As the creator of the theory, Tajfel and Turner, (1979) defines social identity theory as "the individual's knowledge that he or she belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him or her of the group membership". Social identity theory, unlike other theories to date, focuses on the

ways in which individuals perceive and categorize themselves, based on their social and personal identities emphasizing group processes and inter-group relations (Jacobson, 1979). The basic premise of social identity theory is that part of a person's definition or self-identity involves his or her affiliation to social groups (Bee and Dalakas, 2015).

In the context of sport, social identity theory has been used by several researchers to study the relation between spectators towards sports teams, clubs and/or organization's purchasing intentions and sponsorship effectiveness arguing that higher identified spectators exhibit greater psychological arousal with a team or sport organization and are more likely to support the source of that identification (i.e., the property) directly, as well as they will also be more willing to offer indirect support (i.e., commercial sponsors) (Madrigal, 2000 ; Hickman *et al.*, 2005 ; Bee and Dalakas, 2015). For example, Alexandris *et al.*, (2007) conducted a study that explored spectator's behaviour about the odds of supporting sponsoring organizations, check spectator sentiments on sponsorship as well as if the sponsorship activity produced the desired outcomes in an all-star basketball game. The results showed that spectators were more willing to support sponsors when they can clearly show that their involvement helps athletes/clubs and therefore, they would be more willing to support sponsors.

In addition, great levels of social identification within a given team and a positive attitude towards commercial sponsors contributes to higher purchase intentions for sponsored products and/or services (Zhang *et al.*, 2005). For instance, a recent study also added that individuals with higher levels of identification or

vested interest in a specific team have been found to be more likely to attend sport events and purchase sports products than fans with low levels of identification (Brownlee *et al.*, 2018). Highly identified spectators were found to become more prone than casual spectators to buy sponsors' goods (Cornwell and Coote, 2005). Herrmann *et al.*, (2016) found that sponsorship practices, specifically connecting the sponsor to the property, were successful in shaping spectator support behaviours but not amongst non-fans.

The concept of spectator's satisfaction is further explored in the following section in order to understand the notion relative to the research objective and the spectator's satisfaction hypotheses.

2.4 Spectator's satisfaction

The increasing interest showed in sport, for both participation and spectatorship, as well as the intensification and the internationalization of the competition between brands and organizations have reinforced sports managers' interest in spectator's loyalty (Bodet and Bernache-Assollant, 2011). Despite the extensive body of research on this field to date, sports entities find challenging on how to assess spectator's satisfaction. The increased emotional connection with a sport entity could result in individuals experiencing a heightened degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction based on the quality of interactions they have with the sport team or athlete (T. Christopher *et al.*, 2008).

A study on spectator's satisfaction by Kennett *et al.*, (2001) defined satisfaction as spectators' evaluations of their experiences at a sporting event. Furthermore,

the study suggested to use controllable factors that assessed satisfaction in a sporting event which were comprised of tickets, sound, general facility and parking, ushers/ticket takers, concessions and souvenirs. Phonthanukitithaworn and Sellitto (2018) highlighted the importance of service quality being one of the critical factors that can be used to measure spectator's satisfaction and predict future consumption behaviour. While researchers have contributed to an understanding of spectator satisfaction at sporting events using controllable factors, many such studies, however, lack the emotional connection factors of spectators. Previous studies have suggested that spectator satisfaction from consumption experience is closely related to the development of spectators' identification (Lee and Kang 2015 ; Hur and Lee, 2004).

A more recent study by Yim and Byon (2018) examined the "emotion-satisfaction-behaviour" model that assessed factors comprised of game satisfaction, team identification, and service satisfaction with the purpose to measure spectator's purchasing intentions and revisit intentions. The results showed that uncontrollable factors such as game outcome, significantly influenced sport consumption emotions; sport fans were likely to be more generous towards service satisfaction when their team won; the interaction between game satisfaction and identification was significant only if their team won. However, it was found that in all scenarios, the highly identified fans showed a consistent level of merchandise purchase intentions and revisit intentions regardless of game satisfaction or service satisfaction levels. Therefore, the "emotion-satisfaction-behaviour" model shows a good model fit and both types fully mediated the link between emotions and consumption intention which uncovered the different levels of spectator's satisfaction.

Research results generally suggest that successful team performance (game satisfaction) in a particular instance, result in positive levels of spectator's satisfaction, which also leads to stimulating spectators' intention to attend future games (Gray and Wert-Gray, 2012). Additionally, a report from Deloitte, (2018) in the context of spectator's satisfaction, suggest that game satisfaction and service satisfaction, ultimately can lead to more satisfied spectators, who are more emotionally connected to the team.

Research indicates that spectators who have been positively stimulated by the experience from service and game satisfaction, lead to a higher awareness and recognition from sponsored brands. In the context of sports sponsorship, brand awareness can be defined as an impact on the cognitive domain, where a consumer is able to recall or recognize a brand from memory because of the exposure of the brand as a sponsor of the event (Cianfrone, 2018).

Based on the literature above, the following hypotheses were developed:

H1: Spectators that attend live games that experience positive satisfaction will have higher intentions of purchasing sponsored goods and higher revisit intentions than spectators who do not experience positive satisfaction

H2: Spectators that attend live games that experience positive satisfaction will recognize and be aware of more sponsored brands than spectators who do not experience positive satisfaction

In the following section, the efficacy of sponsorship is further discussed in order to explain the meaning of the research goal and the hypotheses developed in light of the theory of social identity.

2.5 How Social Identity shapes sponsorship effectiveness

Brands increasingly try to connect with consumers by becoming a part of their everyday lives and experiences, and watching live sporting events has become an essential part of many people's routines (Kwon *et al.*, 2016). However little attention has been paid on the sponsorship effectiveness on the level of social identity and satisfaction amongst spectators attending live games. Increasing brand awareness, establishing or changing brand image, and building brand equity have been reported as the most frequent reasons for a company to enter into a sponsorship deal (Tsiotsou *et al.*, 2014).

The emotional attachment that spectators have with a favourite sports organization and/or team is one such subjective sense that sponsors try to target. Sponsoring a sporting event is an approach in which companies and other organizations have associated their product or service to a recreational activity. Spectators are more susceptible to an advertisement from a sponsor throughout a form of entertainment because they are comfortable and involved in an activity they love. For instance, a study by University of Miami *et al.*, (2019) explored that the audience experiences a positive sense of emotion and excitement around the sporting event and thus, they are less likely to feel the intrusiveness of sponsor-related messaging and more likely to have higher purchase intentions towards sponsors.

The way how the spectator perceives the message, can be calculated by testing the spectator's capability to recognise a particular company as a sponsor of a particular sporting event. Spectator awareness of sponsorship status has been measured by the ability to both recognize and recall sponsors of an event

(Jagre *et al.*, 2001). Also, Biscaia *et al.*, (2013) found that attachment to a sport organization is related to higher sponsor awareness, stronger brand equity, and ultimately more effective sponsorship. Spectators involved in a certain sports event tend to consume brands that sponsor the event, especially if they see a correlation with the sport as well as the engagement by players and/or clubs participating. Brand attachment plays an significant role in the efficacy of sponsorship by building brand value and a positive word of mouth (Tsiotsou *et al.*, 2014). In addition, Kwon *et al.*, (2016) confirmed a hypothesis based on past research by Gwinner and Eaton, (1999) which found that brand sponsorship increases image similarity between sponsoring brands and sponsored sporting events. The higher the picture congruence to the sporting activities, thus, the higher the brand use of those participating in a sporting event.

Nonetheless, it is uncertain that the emotional attachment to a desired sports organization and/or team is the only factor affecting purchase intentions of products and/or services from a sponsor, but several factors come to play an important role for sponsorship effectiveness. A study by Lough *et al.*, (2014) found that no significant differences based on demographic characteristics, but a number of key differences have been found in relation to the reported level of identification of the respondent. For example, those with higher levels of identification with the event were able to correctly identify more sponsors and indicated a greater intent to purchase from the event's sponsors. While different aspects of spectator identification become important in evaluating the sponsorship effectiveness, it seems there is an illiteracy about spectator's identity and the measurement of the effectiveness of sport sponsorship. Many spectators also identify more strongly within a given team

than others; this distinction is expressed by the degree or intensity of identity, which refers to the persistent sense of connection one feels with a particular social group (Dalton and Huang, 2014).

Notably, Mazodier *et al.*, (2018) acknowledged that identification is not binary (fan vs. nonfan) but instead falls along a continuum (nonfan vs. fan identification levels). Mazodier *et al.*, (2018) examined the differences in the level of identification among people who indicate they are fans of a given team using strong and weak fans as shorthand to differentiate between fans with more and less intense levels of identification, respectively.

The research literature previously examined, engrossed corporation sponsors, team clubs and the team's spectators rather than sports leagues holding several teams. Furthermore, past researchers focused on sponsorship performance, brand awareness, brand recognition, revisit intention and purchase intentions within a certain sports team (Madrigal, 2000 ; Cornwell and Coote, 2005 ; Hickman *et al.*, 2005 ; Lings and Owen, 2007 ; Smith *et al.*, 2008 ; Glen, 2016 ; Mazodier *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, principal to the research aim and hypotheses, it is important to understand how social identity theory shapes sponsorship effectiveness by assessing the levels of spectator identification.

Based on the literature above, the following hypotheses were developed:

H3: Spectators that feel highly identified with their team will have higher intentions of purchasing sponsored goods and higher revisit intentions than spectators who do not feel identified with their team

H4: Spectators that feel highly identified with their team will recognize and be aware of more sponsored brands than spectators who do not feel identified with their team

Hence, the researcher is going to develop a modified conceptual framework to explain the role of spectator's satisfaction and social identity theory in spectators attending the EB's games determining their level of satisfaction on the EB's events and how their satisfaction and identification levels shape the sponsorship effectiveness of the EB. Also, the researcher aims to further explore the relation between brand awareness and brand recognition as well as purchase and revisit intentions and find if these aspects shape the sponsorship effectiveness of the EB.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

Since the study developed an advanced comprehension on the various facets of the research objective and the hypotheses, the aim of this exploratory research is to integrate the analysis of the literature by establishing a conceptual framework. Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory and Yim and Byon's emotion-satisfaction-behaviour model are the elements of the literature used to further examine and test the hypotheses of this exploratory research.

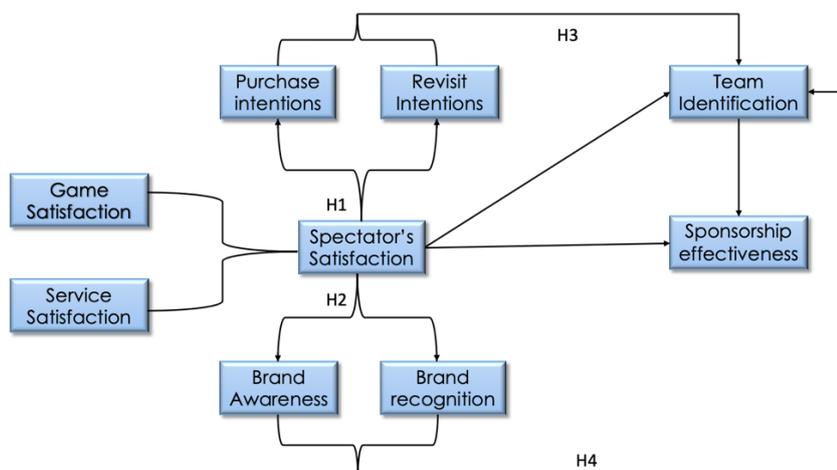
With regard to make the literature review relevant to the aim and objectives of this research, the researcher chose to relate Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory with the team identification factor of Yim and Byon's emotion-satisfaction-behaviour model to assess the impact of spectator's satisfaction and social identity theory on sponsorship effectiveness. The conceptual framework measures if positive spectator's satisfaction will result in higher levels of purchase

and revisit intentions (H1) and if positive spectator's satisfaction will enhance brand recognition and awareness (H2). Also, the conceptual framework measures if spectators with high levels of team identification will have higher intentions of purchasing sponsored goods and higher revisit intentions (H3) and if spectators with high levels of team identification will enhance brand recognition and awareness (H4).

To further evaluate the objectives of this research, game satisfaction and service satisfaction are going to be chosen to assess if both factors influence the levels of spectator's satisfaction. Lastly, the researcher is going to evaluate the willingness of spectator's supporting sponsors based on their level of satisfaction and levels of team identification by linking all the hypotheses to sponsorship effectiveness.

Figure 1 gives a graphic explanation of the conceptual framework to depict the relation for each subject area of the research objective along with the hypotheses. The framework is the core for the further research that is going to be explored and tested under both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Figure 1 – Conceptual Framework



2.7 Conclusion

This chapter comprised a thorough description of the purpose of the study focused on the literature that was reviewed and examined. The elements from the literature review were graphically depicted in the conceptual framework and linked to the aims and objectives in order to further guide and test the following study. The elements included Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory and Yim and Byon's emotion-satisfaction-behaviour model, spectator's satisfaction and sponsorship effectiveness. The next chapter will be focused on the research design and methods used to generate primary data for the purpose of the exploratory research.

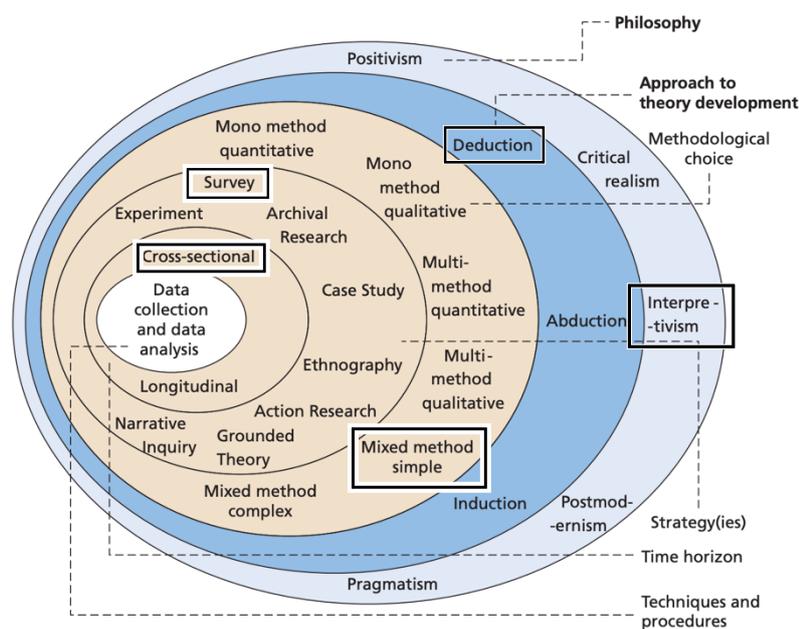
3 Methodology and Research Design

3.1 Overview

This chapter encompasses the research philosophy and approach, the research strategy and the collection of primary data as well as the approach to data analysis. This chapter will contribute to the research by evaluating the conceptual framework proposed in the previous chapter. The objective of the research is to explore the link between spectator's satisfaction, social identity theory and sponsorship effectiveness in the EB.

The following figure displays a framework by Saunders *et al.*, (2019) that proposed a guideline to develop the methodology and research design. The points featured are related to the subject and will be examined along the sections below.

Figure 2 - The Research Onion



The research will explore and test the research objective and if the conceptual framework is meant as true and accurate based on the research methods that are going to be used in this chapter. The research design used is Triangulation since it assures the validity of the research using both qualitative and quantitative methods for the data collection. The design encompassed two qualitative methods being a Content Analysis of the EB's social media platforms and an In-Depth Individual (IDI) interview with a certified EB Coach. One quantitative method was used for a survey questionnaire sent online to further test and measure the link of spectator's satisfaction and level of team identification with sponsorship effectiveness.

3.2 Research Philosophy and Approach

The nature of this exploratory research is qualitative and one of the research goals is to look into the effects of spectator's satisfaction on commercial sponsors in the EB. The research emphasizes challenges and opportunities which are expressed as subjective. The purpose is to gain an understanding of the factors, opinions, and motivations underlying the concept leading to the creation of ideas and/or theories for future quantitative research.

Given the bias of the research purpose, the research paradigm is interpretivist. The interpretive research paradigm is characterized by a need to understand the world as it is from a subjective point of view and seeks an explanation within the frame of reference of the participant rather than the objective observer of the action (Thanh and Thanh, 2015). Everyone involved in this research paper may have their own self-interpretation of reality based on their expectations and experiences. This exploratory work is deductive in its overall approach which concerns the development of hypotheses based on current literature. As

Hackley, (2003) cites, "deductive means reasoning from the particular to the general. If a causal relationship or link seems to be implied by a particular theory or case example, it might be true in many cases. A deductive design might test to see if this relationship or link did obtain on more general circumstances" (Hackley, 2003). Therefore, the deductive approach for this research is concerned with the deduction of drawing conclusions from the hypotheses developed in the literature review.

In the case of this exploratory research, a social media content analysis and an unstructured IDI interview are going to be used as well as a questionnaire is going to be provided to spectators that have attended EB's games in order to explore the spectator's satisfaction and the levels of identification with the EB and sponsors which will lead to post conclusion drawing.

3.3 Research Strategy

The research aims to assess whether the level of satisfaction produced by spectators attending live games and the levels of spectator's identification will impact sponsorship effectiveness of the EB. Also, the research aims at identifying if purchase intentions and revisit intentions, brand awareness and recognition that are derived from spectator's satisfaction and team identification will impact sponsorship effectiveness. Primary data is going to be collected by conducting a Content Analysis of social media on the EB's follower interaction to further explore what is their relationship with the sport organization and identify their levels of satisfaction and identification with the EB. Followed by the Content Analysis, the researcher gathered more data through an unstructured IDI

interview in order to enhance the richness of the data. Subsequently, a closed-ended questionnaire is distributed to measure the levels of satisfaction and identification in the EB as well as to measure sponsored brand recognition, awareness and effectiveness.

Mixed-methods research has been described as a key aspect in improving social science with research supported through the use of a number of methods and hereby, if the research is to be completely successful both qualitative and quantitative approaches need to be applied. (Schoonenboom and Johnson, 2017). The organization of the following research strategy will be based on conducting qualitative data collection, analysis and interpretation based on Content Analysis and an IDI interview, followed by the quantitative analysis of a survey which will lead to the final analysis and interpretation.

The research's qualitative data dimension is an explorative and subjective strategy. Qualitative data is conducted using a social media Content Analysis from the EB's platforms to explore the interaction of users with the EB and an IDI interview with a certified EB Coach to explore his perceptions based on the literature review and the conceptual framework. The social media Content Analysis is used to analyse perceptions, thoughts and ideas from social media posts relevant to the research objective. This qualitative method seeks to analyse data within a specific context in view of the meanings of someone- a group or a culture- attributes to them (Krippendorff, 2004). The Content Analysis was explored using a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) to further understand spectator's interactions through social media analysing the posts, messages, and hashtags in relation to the research question.

The interview is beneficial for the further qualitative analysis enhancing the validity and reliability of the methods. These qualitative methods will help the researcher in the making of the survey's questions for the EB's spectators and to further test the hypotheses in the quantitative analysis.

The research's quantitative data dimension is a technique that is in essence interpretative as this analysis is primarily qualitative. Quantitative data is conducted using an online survey questionnaire that is provided to spectator's that have attended the EB's games which is also directly linked to the literature review and conceptual framework. Quantitative data may be utilized in a way, which supports or expands upon qualitative data and effectively deepens the description (Brown and Baker, 2007).

The qualitative analysis strengthens quantitative data by offering a better interpretation of the emotional link between spectator's satisfaction and social identity theory in light of sponsorship effectiveness. Subsequently, it also improves the rationality and trustworthiness of the hypotheses by using mixed approaches. Given the nature of the research following a mixed-methods research, the research design that is going to be used is triangulation. Triangulation has been viewed as a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources; the intent in using this design is to bring together the different strengths and nonoverlapping weaknesses of quantitative methods with those of qualitative methods (Creswell, 2006 ; Carter *et al.*, 2014).

The conceptual framework generated from the literature review engages in all areas of the proposal focusing on the levels of identification and satisfaction of spectators towards sponsors of the EB. During the creation of each particular

question for the survey, the concepts of the literature review and hypotheses are regarded and undertaken within the conceptual framework by gleaning elements from the literature review.

3.4 Collection Primary Data

3.4.1 Sources

The sources for the data collected are interpretivist and qualitative in nature, however quantitative measures are going to be taken to better understand the phenomena, further test the hypotheses and results of the research. The researcher is going to collect qualitative data via a Content Analysis of social media, an unstructured IDI interview and quantitative data from a structured multiple-choice questionnaire provided to spectators of the EB.

The collection of qualitative data from the social media Content Analysis is analysed by using a CAQDAS called NVivo. The approach to data collection is deductive so the data will be transcribed and developed by the coding system. Data collection through NVivo is captured using an NVivo Plug-in in Google Chrome that allows to collect data from users in social media platforms. For example, by searching "Euroleague", NVivo is able to capture all the tweets and Facebook posts that include that word or hashtag. The categories used for the coding performed with NVivo are directly related to the review of literature and the conceptual framework, the categories that are further explained in detail in the next chapter, are explicitly chosen because data was predominantly in light of those codes. For example, data related to basketball games was more

frequent whereas brand awareness and recognition were barely existent within the data collected.

The collection of qualitative data from the unstructured IDI interview is going to be gathered during a one-on-one meeting in the form of videocall and transcribed directly NVivo. The interview conducted is with an EB certified coach who attained different perspectives in the EB regarding spectators and their levels of satisfaction and identification as well as the sponsorship effectiveness aspects of the conceptual framework.

The collection of quantitative data is accomplished by building a survey through SurveyMonkey and issued online via Facebook through three private groups. The private groups are comprised of the (1) Official Turkish Airlines Euroleague SUPERFANS, (2) Euroleague FANS UNITED, and (3) Euroleague Basketball group. Through communicating explicitly to these private EB Facebook groups, the researcher is able to access the EB's spectators easily and efficiently, which is fundamental considering the short timeline for recalling participants.

With the intention of enhancing the reliability between participants and the researcher, the survey is made anonymous and conducted on a voluntary basis with the choice to withdraw from the survey at any given time. Since the survey is issued online and due to current circumstances of COVID-19, the researcher was not able to be in contact with any participants as well as no guarantee was granted that all participants completing the survey have attended the EB games. Therefore, there were limitations in regard to recruiting individuals and

making sure each individual met the criteria to prove the validity and credibility of the research purpose.

3.4.2 *Access and Ethical Issues*

Content Analysis in social media platforms are regarded as a data source for monitoring and analysis purposes in research and it also raises ethical issues. Particularly, the degree to which posts are deemed public or private and the right to privacy of those shared on social media. Researchers have trouble justifying their acts as ethical simply because the data is available, and it is public. Nonetheless, access to the data is made through NVivo which keeps the anonymity and confidentiality of users and the privacy of data collected. Only the content of the tweet and Facebook post were analysed, and usernames and locations were disregarded throughout the process of data collection and analysis.

To get access to the data needed, the researcher got in touch with a certified EB coach who also has attended a number of EB games for recruiting purposes and liaised a good relationship with the EB. Maintaining confidentiality and ensuring privacy present significant difficulties when delivering IDI interviews since interviews reveal some of the company's information that were previously undisclosed. There is also concerns about audiotape recording during the interview since all the information described remains vulnerable for possible theft or hacking. However, the researcher has engaged in continued reflectivity while sensitively listening to the needs of the interviewee and has kept tape recordings safely in an encrypted device with double password settings to enhance the safety of the information collected.

Quantitative data holds no ethical concerns because the survey is performed anonymously and only demographic data concerning the age and country of residence was asked.

3.5 Approach to Data Analysis

Once the Content Analysis, the IDI interview, and the survey are completed, the compiled information was carefully analysed by the author. The research used a mixed-methods approach, nonetheless, this exploration is predominantly qualitative therefore, the analysed primary data that was collected was interpretivist and guided through deductive research since it concerns the making and the testing of hypotheses emerged from the data. Deductive qualitative research takes as its departure point, the theoretical propositions that are derived from a review of the literature and applies these to the collection and analysis of data (Pearse, 2019)

The approach to analysis of data is to gather qualitative information about spectator's satisfaction and their levels of identification and then, link them with EB's commercial sponsors. This is done by the use of Content Analysis and the IDI interview to collect raw data from users and participants' perspectives on team identification, satisfaction and sponsorship effectiveness. The quantitative analysis from the survey allowed the researcher to interpret, validate and test the hypotheses, that the data gathered from qualitative analysis as it balances and enhances the results by reducing the bias which gives a full analysis of the proposal under review.

3.6 Conclusion

So as to achieve access to both qualitative and quantitative data, the researcher conducted a Content Analysis using NVivo to capture social media content in regard to the EB and the interaction of the users. This is used to collect primary raw data, then it is analysed using the conceptual framework aspects of team identification (social theory), game satisfaction, service satisfaction, and sponsorship effectiveness. The researcher got in touch with a certified EB coach to conduct the IDI interview to further collect more data and insights in regard to the link between spectator's satisfaction, identification and commercial sponsors from the organization's viewpoint as well as from his perspective as a recruiting coach. The survey questionnaire is designed using the conceptual framework to quantify the overall spectator's satisfaction, revisit and purchase intentions, as well as sponsor brand recognition and awareness to assess the overall sponsorship effectiveness.

The research design is triangulation which allows the research to explore both qualitative and quantitative methods. The research paradigm is interpretivist and subjective and the overall approach to research methods is deductive concerning the research objective and hypotheses.

4 Presentation and Discussion of the Findings

4.1 Overview

This chapter illustrates the presentation and discussion of the findings from the social media Content Analysis and the IDI interview using NVivo and the online survey built on the research goal. The data collection and analysis in qualitative and quantitative context is used following the triangulation research design. Findings are organized starting from the NVivo social media Content Analysis, followed by the IDI interview and finalizing with the survey. The finding results are structured in that order for a more detailed review of the data, the outcomes of the objective of the research and to further test the hypotheses developed based on the literature review.

4.2 Findings

The findings of this exploration are illustrated through a Content Analysis of Facebook and Twitter using the qualitative data analysis software, the IDI interview is conducted with a key person holding a EB Coach certification and a survey sent to the Official Turkish Airlines Euroleague SUPERFANS, Euroleague FANS UNITED, and Euroleague Basketball Facebook groups. The Official Turkish Airlines Euroleague SUPERFANS group holds 5,6k members, the Euroleague Basketball group holds 2.3k members and the Euroleague Fans United Group holds 3k members. As previously mentioned, the findings are explored and interpreted following the interpretivist paradigm and deductive approach. The results are summarized by first, analysing the qualitative findings starting with the NVivo Social Media Content, the IDI Interview followed by the quantitative

findings from the survey. A discussion about the results is examined followed by the final conclusion for this chapter.

4.2.1 *NVivo Social Media Content Analysis Findings*

The researcher conducted a Content Analysis of social media platforms of Twitter and Facebook to explore what users were saying about the EB and to capture qualitative data relevant to the research objective. To accomplish that, the researcher used NVivo, a software tool used to analyse mainly non-numerical and qualitative research data with the purpose to understand conversations, ideas and/or thoughts from the users talking about the EB. The NVivo software was chosen amongst other qualitative data software's because of its ease to import data from several sources, its tools to query data and the facility of charting and reporting qualitative data analyses.

The objective of using NVivo on social media platforms is to gather rich information relevant to the research objective and guide the research towards users' tweets and posts of the EB in regard to the conceptual framework built in this research. In order to do that, the researcher organized in NVivo the relevant themes of the conceptual framework created as "codes" and imported data using the NCapture tool which allows to gather material from social media platforms and import it into NVivo. Data imported is regarded as "files" and are manually analysed by the researcher to organize relevant information into codes. Codes are created using the conceptual framework covering "Sponsors" as a parent code, "Spectator's Satisfaction" as a parent code containing "game satisfaction", "service satisfaction" and "team identification" as child codes. Then, files were thoroughly examined to pick information and coding it into the relevant codes. Each piece of information coded is regarded as "references".

The researcher gathered the data for 3 days using the following words in Twitter and Facebook to collect tweets and posts: "Euroleague", "#euroleague", "Euroleague sponsors", "Euroleague spectators", "Euroleague games", "Euroleague Service" and "Euroleague team win". Tweets and Facebook posts ranged from January 1, 2018 until April 22, 2020. The reason to import data from those dates is to collect tweets from 2018-2019 season since due to COVID-19, 2019-2020 season has been indefinitely postponed with uncertainty on whether the league is going to be cancelled or resumed when the pandemic is over.

The researcher imported all the data to NVivo and first analysed all the data from the files running a query of the 20 most used words in order to understand what users are talking about in the context of the EB. Shown in Figure 2 there is a picture exported in Word Cloud format meaning that the bigger the word is the more it is used throughout the data imported.

Figure 3 – Word Cloud from Content Analysis

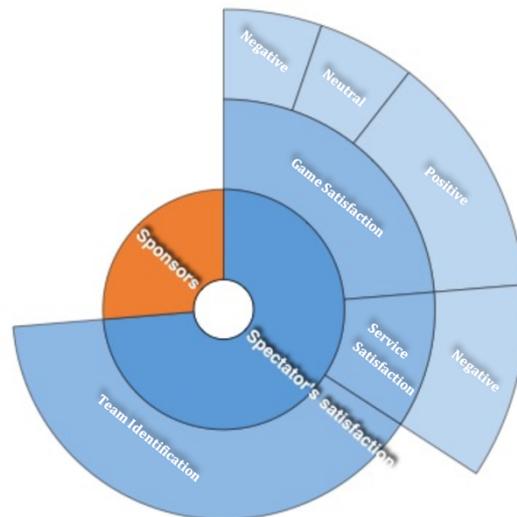


After running the first query and exporting the Word Cloud (Figure 2), the results allowed the researcher to understand the meanings, feelings and comments of

those words and started to organize them into assigned codes. These codes were organized in relation to the conceptual framework. Users were more inclined when using the hashtags #euroleague, and #basketball to identify that the tweet or Facebook post is related to the league. Given these current times of uncertainty, users also used the hashtag #euroleagueunited in order to support the EB's fans during COVID-19 pandemic, #GameOn to recall games of any season in the past or present, and #7daysmagicmoment where it was created as a contest to recall the best play of the Turkish Airlines EuroLeague Season. The words "game" and "Final Four" were also prominently used as they referred to that game of basketball in the EB as well as the most popular championship basketball competition of Europe. #Panathinaicos and #Fener are two of the basketball clubs competing in the EB and Bertomeu is the CEO of the EB.

Out of all the files imported, the researcher manually coded all the relevant data which is shown in a Sunburst format in Figure 3. In the following figure, the codes are compared by the number of items coded, in other words, some codes have more coding references than others given the prominent use of those themes. In order to interpret Figure 3, the researcher extracted a table shown in Appendix A of all the numerical coded items that are reflected in Figure 3 in the form of Sunburst as well as the organization of the codes.

Figure 4 – Sunburst from Content Analysis



The Sunburst is guided using the conceptual framework and literature review. Spectator's satisfaction emphasized team identification, service satisfaction and game satisfaction. Team identification was coded from items containing stemmed words for "win", "team" # of any team or team phrase, @ of teams, #ifeeldevotion, and #euroleagueunited. Service satisfaction is composed of negative and positive satisfaction where tweets and posts contained the stemmed word "service". Game satisfaction is composed of positive, negative and neutral satisfaction where tweets and posts contained the stemmed words "game", "Final Four", "basketball", "atmosphere", "#GameON". In order to code sponsors, the researcher coded information of tagged sponsors (i.e. @DenizBank), a hashtag sponsor (i.e. #DenizBank) and within the context of the post/tweet (i.e. DenizBank).

Given the preconception of automatic coding, the researcher coded the references manually to enhance the validity and reliability of the Content

Analysis. Results show that references from spectator's satisfaction accounted for 78.8% of all the sources coded whereas 21.2% was accounted to sponsors. The researcher analysed the results from a deductive viewpoint. Most of users tended to post/tweet about certain experiences, games, certain plays or players rather than sponsors which are indirectly related to the organization and the game of basketball itself. However, the main sponsor Turkish Airlines was the most mentioned since the league is called Turkish Airlines Euroleague Basketball. Very few tweets/posts were found where users talked about their experiences with a certain sponsor.

When analysing the aggregated child codes from Spectator's satisfaction code, team identification accounted for 55.2%, game satisfaction accounted for 37.3% and only 7.4% accounted for service satisfaction. Most of users that commented on games they used the hashtag #ifeeldevotion where users identify themselves to the emotional satisfaction and engagement of the EB and thus, it is a really good indicator for team identification within the EB. Game satisfaction had three child codes from positive, neutral and negative given the wide range of tweets/posts about EB games. Game satisfaction was mainly positive with 21 references and negative and neutral with only 2 each. Service satisfaction had two child codes, negative and positive since there wasn't a lot of sources about the service. However, all the sources with "service" in it were all negative.

Using NVivo it is not only a complicated process to learn, it is also time consuming if we understand the difficulty the researcher has to go through in order to master the software. However, NVivo worked well with the research design and objective of this exploration when analysing qualitative data in social media platforms. The content analysis was helpful in order to discover themes that users

were talking about and exploring how the users tweeting/posting about the EB in social media platforms engage with the organization.

For instance, when researching in the query for the word "game" the researcher was able to code the phrases into the aggregate child codes of spectator's satisfaction. However, when going through the transcripts manually and reading them in detail, there were some phrases and words such as "indescribable Final Four" which also indicated game satisfaction but were neglected by the query.

4.2.2 IDI Interview Findings

The IDI interview findings were executed through a Skype call with a certified EB Coach that has attended a number of EB games for recruiting purposes.

The IDI interview followed a process plan in order to design the interview, develop an interview protocol, collect and analyse the data, and interpret findings. The researcher identified key personnel that are involved in the EB. The selection of interviewees for IDI's is guided by the principle of credibility: the sources that will maximize the reliability and validity of the results (Rubin and Rubin, 2005).

Approaching interviewees was not a difficult task since the researcher has a broad network in the basketball world. However, some of the EB key personnel were not able to conduct an IDI within the time frame of the researcher. The potential sources of information relevant to the research objective are extensive due to the different perspective that the interviewee can complement to the research study.

The researcher followed the ethical research standards where a notification for low-risk project has been approved to the Griffith College Dublin Research Ethics Committee. A Plain Language Statement (PLS) and an informed consent form were provided to the interviewee where a clarification and purpose of the research study was given; the researcher ensured confidentiality of all the information provided by collecting and storing data in an encryption-controlled device; the participant is going to benefit the involvement in the research study as results will be offered.

In order to increase the reliability and validity of the findings, the researcher developed an interview protocol to make sure the process of the interview is consistent. Firstly, the researcher followed an interview guide from Carolyn Boyce and Palena Neale (2006) that included an informed consent and the confidentiality of the interviewee (see Appendix B). This guide intended to introduce the purpose of the study, how long the interview is approximately going to take and how the collection and storage of confidential information is going to be done at the beginning of the interview. A copy of the PLS and the informed consent (see Appendix C) was sent beforehand and at the start of the interview the interview guide was first presented. After the consent was accepted, the researcher proceeded to conduct the interview questions.

The collection of data was recorded and transcribed directly to NVivo. This approach is safer since all the data is documented into one device instead of having multiple devices for recording, transcribing and analysing data. In addition, data is stored in an encrypted-device as well as a double log-in is required to access to the device and NVivo. Given the nature of this qualitative method, NVivo is a great tool to analyse the richness of the nature of unstructured

In the Coach's point of view, the feel of belongingness (social identity theory) originated in the sense of community, the entertainment of basketball as well as spectators seeing the teams benefit from the support of sponsors which leads to a higher purchase and revisit intentions as well as positive levels of spectator satisfaction.

A sense of community refers to a perception of belongingness, interdependence, and mutual commitment that link individuals in a collective unity (Mastromartino *et al.*, 2019). According to the interviewee, the EB, as oppose to other sports leagues, "it's a lot more intimate, it's a smaller atmosphere, it's very intense and the atmosphere and the communities really get behind their teams". Social identity mainly includes the emotion of belonging to a community which is an important part of identification of the individuals since it can be reflected in their belonging to a social group (Burnasheva *et al.*, 2019). Given the sense of community, higher identified fans "go above and beyond to support their teams it becomes a family type of thing that you see the same people at games and buy their season tickets or they travel away" which in turn leads to a higher purchase and revisit intentions. Also, the sense of community between the EB teams becomes more of a "who's more of a family when they are taken on the road to support their team which is a great reflection of the EB".

The game of basketball and the entertainment (game satisfaction) play a crucial role in spectator's satisfaction of the EB. According to the Coach's experience, "the level of basketball and the entertainment value has increased massively and it's probably second to none in the world at the level of basketball" which,

consequently, raises the levels of spectator's satisfaction. Spectators that have a sense of community within the EB and higher levels of satisfaction from the game of basketball and the overall experience, imply a higher level of revisit and purchasing intentions as well as higher levels of brand awareness and recognition from the EB's sponsors. Also, players play an important role to engage with the spectator's and each player in the EB have to do a certain amount of Public Relations (PR) work in the locality in order to increase brand awareness.

According to Coach's perspective, "EB's sports sponsorship it's a two-way deal", it is crucial to build a relationship between the sponsor and the team as well as it is important that spectators see how their team benefit from such sponsorship. Therefore, it is imperative that the support from spectators for each club gets behind their team sponsors. In other words, the EB has to work on making sure that spectators realize that it is beneficial for their teams to support their sponsors.

The findings of the IDI interview showed significant perspectives on the objective analysis and the conceptual framework of this exploration. As described in the review of the literature, by leveraging spectators' links with sponsored entities (e.g., teams), sponsorship generates brand awareness through brand exposure, establishes a brand-team connection (Cornwell *et al.*, 2005 ; Mazodier *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, according to the IDI findings, as the team feels more connected to the sponsor, highly identified spectators are more prone to support the sponsors as oppose to only spectators that experience satisfaction from game and service satisfaction. Spectator's feeling positive satisfaction from game performance and the overall experience are more willing to revisit games in the future, higher purchasing intentions, and higher brand awareness and recognition.

4.2.3 *Survey Findings*

The research findings of the survey were sent to the three major EB Facebook groups: Official Turkish Airlines Euroleague SUPERFANS, Euroleague FANS UNITED, and Euroleague Basketball. The outcomes resulted in 66 participants over the course of one week. Study details including survey design and graphs are discussed and shown in Appendix F. The demographics consisted of predominantly males with 89.39% as oppose to females with only 10.61%, participants resided in 19 different countries ranging from 18 to 54 years of age with 40.91% between 18 to 24 years old, 28.79% 25 to 34 years old, 25.76% 35 to 44 years old and only a 4.55% were 45 to 54 years old.

The questions were designed carefully covering all the aspects from the conceptual framework and made to test the hypotheses only for those participants who have attended the EB games. Therefore, to increase the validity of the survey, the participants were asked how regularly they have attended the EB events. The researcher has extracted by default those who have never attended to the EB games which were a total of 3.03% (2 participants). The majority of the respondents always and usually attend the EB games with, 29.69% and 12.50% respectively, and 23.44% attend sometimes along with 34.38% that rarely attend. Participants were asked what the main reason for attending was the EB games. 57.81% of participants selected the game of basketball (game satisfaction) followed by "that my team wins" (team identification) with 21.31%, 18.75% for the overall experience regardless of who wins or loses and only 3.13% for the players.

To test Yim and Byon's, (2018) model along with the linked hypotheses, participants were asked about game satisfaction, team identification and service satisfaction as well as purchasing intentions and revisit intentions. The first question in regard to spectator's satisfaction (Q6) was to ask participants to rate their experience in an EB game measured in a five-point Likert scale type from 1 - - Very dissatisfied to 5 - - very satisfied. 54.69% felt very satisfied and 42.19% felt satisfied with their experience in an EB game whereas only 3.13% felt very dissatisfied. For the service satisfaction dimension (Q9), participants were asked to rate the service using an eight-point Likert scale type from 1 - - extremely dissatisfied to 8 - - Extremely satisfied. The majority of the respondents (89.07%) had a positive satisfaction towards the service quality of the EB whereas only 10.93% had a negative satisfaction. For the revisit intent (Q10), participants were asked about the likeliness of attending future games using a seven-point Likert scale type from 1 - - Extremely not likely to 7 - - Extremely. 62.5% are extremely likely to attend future games, 23.44% are somewhat likely and very likely whereas 14.06% were not sure about it. There were no participants that responded that were between extremely not likely and somewhat not likely to attend future games. Purchase intentions (Q11) was asked involving the use of sponsored products/services, participants responded that 31.25% are using a sponsored product/service from the EB, 37.5% do not use any product/service from the EB sponsors and 31.25% are not aware if they are using products/services of the EB's sponsors.

The team identification dimension of Yim and Byon's, (2018) is regarded under social identity theory and was tested under the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) from Wann and Branscombe (1993) questions measuring the level of

identification of the participants. Out of the seven items two items were used in the survey questionnaire design regarding team identification. The scale follows an eight-point Likert scale type. Higher ratings for each item and the higher the overall total score for the seven items, indicates a higher level of identification with the indicated team and league (Clippert, 2010). The first question was the importance of their team winning the EB measured in an eight-point Likert scale type ranging from 1 - - Not important to 8 - - Very important. The majority of respondents answered that it is important that their team wins with 48.44% being extremely important, 10.94% being very important, 17.19% being somewhat important and 12.5% being fairly important whereas only 10.93% answered that it was between extremely not likely to slightly important. The second important question (Q8) was to ask how closely participants follow the EB from any of the different channels listed. Individuals follow the EB preferably via social media (82.81%), television (81.25%), online sports sites (70.31%), in person (48.44%) and radio (15.63%).

To further test EB's spectator's satisfaction and identification, and the link with EB's sponsors, participants were asked their opinion on the EB sponsors which measures the level of identification with their team and sponsors (Q12). 21.88% responded that they feel identified with the sponsors of their team/league, 65.63% said that it is beneficial for the team/league but irrelevant for them, and 12.5% were not aware of sponsors. As previously mentioned in the literature review, spectator awareness of sponsorship status has been measured by the ability to both recognize and recall sponsors of an event which is related to higher sponsor awareness, stronger brand equity, and ultimately more effective sponsorship (Jagre *et al.*, 2001 ; Biscaia *et al.*, 2013). Next, spectators were asked

to identify any of the Official EB Sponsors (Q13) where the majority of respondents recognized 6 out of 7 official sponsors with 98.44% most respondents identifying Turkish Airlines followed by Spalding (78.13%), Adidas (68.75%), EA7 Emporio Armani (65.63%), Efes (56.25%) BWIN (54.69%), and Deniz Bank (15.63%).

To test H1, the researcher compared the levels of satisfaction with the EB (Q6) with the likelihood of attending future games (Q10). Results found that 77.14% (27 respondents) that were "Very Satisfied", are extremely likely to attend future games. However, the 3.12% of respondents (2 participants) that were "Very Dissatisfied", 50% said that they were extremely likely to attend future games and 50% were not sure of revisit intentions (Graph 2). To further test H1, the researcher compared the levels of satisfaction with the EB (Q6) with the intention of purchasing sponsored goods (Q11). Results found that 31.43% (11 respondents) that were "Very Satisfied", use products/services from the EB sponsors. However, 42.86% that were "Very Satisfied" do not use any products/services from the EB sponsors. The 3.12% of respondents that were "Very Dissatisfied", 100% said that they do not use products/services from the EB sponsors (Graph 3).

To test H2, the researcher compared the levels of satisfaction with the EB (Q6) with brand recognition and awareness (Q13). No significant difference was showed since regardless of positive or negative levels of satisfaction all participants were able to recognize the Official Sponsors of the EB. (Graph 4).

To test H3, the researcher compared the levels of identification with the EB sponsors (Q12) with the intention of purchasing sponsored goods (Q11). Results found that 57.14% (14 participants) that feel identified with sponsors of their team

or the league, used products and/or services from the EB sponsors and 35.71% said no along with 7.14% that did not know. Compared to less identified fans, 28.57% that said it is beneficial for the team but irrelevant for me used products/services from the EB sponsors whereas 33.33% did not use any and 38.10% did not know. Participants who were not aware of sponsors, 62.50% did not use products/services from the EB sponsors and 37.50% were not aware (Graph 5). This shows that spectators that feel highly identified have higher purchasing intentions than those who feel less identified. To further test H3, the researcher compared the levels of identification with the EB sponsors (Q12) with the likelihood of attending future games (Q10). Participants who feel highly identified, 71.43% (14 participants) were extremely likely to reattend future games and those who feel less identified also had a significant percentage of extreme likeness to reattend future games but as oppose to highly identified fans, 19.08% that answered that is beneficial to have sponsors for their team but irrelevant for themselves and 12.50% that were not aware of sponsors were not sure about reattending future games (Graph 6). Individuals with higher levels of identification or vested interest in a specific team have been found to be more likely to attend sport events and purchase sports products than fans with low levels of identification (Brownlee *et al.*, 2018).

To test H4, the researcher compared the levels of identification with the EB sponsors (Q12) with brand recognition and awareness and (Q13). Results showed that highly identified individuals were able to identify more sponsors (7/7) than those who did not feel identified (6/7). Additionally, only 7.14% of participants that were highly identified with sponsors don't know if they use products/services from the EB sponsors as oppose to 38.10% that think sponsors are beneficial for

the teams/league but irrelevant for themselves and 37.50% that are not aware of sponsors and do not know if they use any products/services from the EB sponsors which proves that highly identified fans are more aware of sponsors than those with less levels of identification (Graph 7). As previously mentioned in the literature review, it has been found that, related to the respondent's reported level of identification, those with higher levels of identification with the event were able to correctly identify more sponsors and indicated a greater intent to purchase from the event's sponsors (Lough *et al.*, 2014).

4.3 Discussion

This research study intended to explore and measure the impact of spectator's satisfaction and spectator's levels of identification with the EB sponsors. When analysing the Content Analysis, the IDI interview and the survey, a significant common factor was highlighted when exploring and assessing spectator's satisfaction which was the performance and atmosphere of the basketball game per se. This common factor diverges into different levels of satisfaction and identification which determines the ultimate sponsorship effectiveness of the EB.

In regard to the Content Analysis, the themes that had more references were team identification and game satisfaction and the researcher interprets that these qualitative themes are factors that can lead into sponsorship effectiveness in the EB. By continuing to build positive spectator's satisfaction the more likeliness is to develop a strong team identification. In the literature above-stated, spectator satisfaction from consumption experience is closely related to the development of spectators' identification (Lee and Kang 2015 ; Hur and Lee, 2004). Findings on this research method contributed to a direct insight about the

EB's followers' interactions with their thoughts, feelings and experiences towards the EB which was key in order to understand what kind of factors trigger spectator's satisfaction and team identification towards the effectiveness of the EB's sponsors. The researcher analysed the data from her own perspective following a certain guideline for each code in order to reduce the bias already existent when using this method. Results contributed to the research objective of this exploration by adding insights on spectator's satisfaction and spectator's levels of identification within the EB. Users tweeting and posting about the EB were more inclined in expressing the high level of basketball, the experience and the atmosphere rather than expressing their feelings concerning the EB's involvement with certain sponsors. The insights analysed, determined that spectator's satisfaction in the EB is triggered by the game performance and atmosphere that the EB events bring and team identification is determined by ongoing consistent levels of satisfaction that results in ultimate sponsorship effectiveness which was analysed by the consistent tweets and posts from a certain user ID.

Throughout the exploration of the Content Analysis, the information that was coded was significantly positive except for some games (bad team performance) and service where all the tweets and posts that contained "Euroleague" and "service" were negative. This could be because they think they are not being listened or observed as oppose to express themselves in person directly or simply is a warning for their follower network. The followers' tweets and comments about sponsors were notably just hashtags and "@'s" added in a tweet and post regarding the game performance and the overall experience of the EB. These tweets and posts linked into a positive content, can lead to a higher brand awareness and recognition as well as to a positive word

of mouth within the followers' network which can lead to sponsorship effectiveness by feeling more identified with a certain sponsor.

The Content Analysis was biased since there can be followers that have never attended the EB and therefore, the results are not concerning just spectators that have attended the EB games. However, it was impossible to explore only the followers that attended an EB game since there is a broad range of users following the EB from diverse channels.

The researcher interpreted that followers tweeting and posting about the EB, experience a higher sense of community because they create a network of interactions between a certain comment about a given game within the EB where users can interact and share feelings, thoughts and experiences with each other. The sense of community is related to the Tajfel and Turner's, (1979) social identity theory since followers feel an association and the need for affiliation towards a social group. Hence, followers that have higher interactions in social media platforms feel more identified towards the EB and their team playing in it which results to higher sponsorship effectiveness.

In regard to the IDI interview, common themes matched those of the Content Analysis regarding the high level of basketball game and performance along with the atmosphere and experience of the basketball events. Since the interview was only concerned with spectators that attended live games there was significantly less bias compared to the Content Analysis. However, the IDI interview can be subject to interviewer bias. Additionally, the interpretation of the results from the interview are purely subjective where the researcher is influenced by its own values and viewpoints. The findings resulted in new insights regarding the EB spectators and their relationship with the league, their teams

and towards the EB's commercial sponsors. Adding onto the Content Analysis, the sense of community plays a crucial role for spectator's satisfaction and team identification for ultimate sponsorship effectiveness. As previously mentioned, a sense of community, the game of basketball and the overall experience, imply a higher level of willingness of revisit and purchasing intentions as well as higher levels of brand awareness and recognition from the EB's sponsors which also translates to a higher sponsorship effectiveness. When further analysing the results of the IDI interview, it has been interpreted that in order to build relationships with the spectators, players have to do certain work on PR to engage the public to form long lasting relationships with their favourite team. Players engaging with spectators via social media platforms and even after games can make spectators more willing to support sponsors since spectators are able to make a connection between the team and the brand (Alexandris *et al.*, 2007). Consequently, spectators that feel a positive satisfaction from game and service satisfaction will be more prone to revisit and purchase sponsored brands as well as having higher brand awareness and recognition. Nevertheless, spectators that are more identified with their team will be willing to do all of the above and support sponsors which results in sponsorship effectiveness.

The aim for the survey was to test the hypotheses to measure if spectator's satisfaction and team identification have an impact on sponsorship effectiveness of the EB. The survey was sent online through three private Facebook Groups containing EB fans. The majority of respondents highlighted that their number one reason for attending the EB games was the game of basketball which illustrates the high potential the league has and also it is an indicator that the game of basketball produces positive spectator's satisfaction. Also, the majority of the participants indicated that they had a positive service

quality in the EB games. Game satisfaction and service satisfaction are two key factors that determine spectator's satisfaction. In relation to positive spectator's satisfaction, all participants were mostly aware, and they were able to recognize all of the sponsors supporting their team and the league. Spectator's that felt negative satisfaction from game and service quality did not show a significant difference in the ability of recognizing sponsors since they were able to do so. However, spectators that experienced negative satisfaction showed a reduced intention of purchasing sponsored brands. Moreover, half of spectators that felt dissatisfied from both their experience in an EB game and service quality, were likely to reattend the EB games and the other half were not sure (neutral response). This proves that H1 is true since more satisfied spectators from game and service quality are prone to have higher intentions of purchasing and revisit intentions than those who are more dissatisfied (H1). H2 is disproved since there is no significant difference from spectators feeling positive satisfaction from those feeling negative satisfaction when recognizing sponsors.

A significant quantity of participants identified that sponsors were beneficial for their team but irrelevant for them which showed that they were not highly identified spectators. The purchasing intentions aspect was pretty even between the number of participants that used sponsored products, the number of participants that did not use sponsored products and the number of participants that were not aware if they were using sponsored products. This determines that some of the participants felt more identified with their teams and towards the league sponsors than others regardless of positive satisfaction. Higher identified spectators that also experienced a positive satisfaction were more willing to purchase sponsored products/services than those who felt less identified. This proves and shows that hypotheses developed for the team identification

dimension tested positive. As previously stated in the literature, the highly identified fans showed a consistent level of merchandise purchase intentions and revisit intentions regardless of game satisfaction or service satisfaction levels (Yim and Byon, 2018). These findings prove true H3 and H4, where team identification levels are key elements for being able to recognize and be aware of sponsored brands and for purchase intentions and revisit intentions. As oppose to spectator's satisfaction, results show that participants with higher levels of identification are more willing to purchase sponsored products than those who feel less identified.

Table 1 - Hypothesis Test of Survey Variables

Hs	Hypothesis	Result
H1:	Spectators that attend live games that experience positive satisfaction will have higher intentions of purchasing sponsored goods and higher revisit intentions than spectators who do not experience positive satisfaction	Accepted
H2:	Spectators that attend live games that experience positive satisfaction will recognize and be aware of more sponsored brands than spectators who do not experience positive satisfaction	Rejected
H3:	Spectators that feel highly identified with their team will have higher intentions of purchasing sponsored goods and higher revisit intentions than spectators who do not feel identified with their team	Accepted
H4:	Spectators that feel highly identified with their team will recognize and be aware of more sponsored brands than spectators who do not feel identified with their team	Accepted

The overall impact of spectator's satisfaction and team identification has a positive link towards sponsorship effectiveness of the EB. There is an overall positive inclination towards revisit intentions and purchasing intentions as well as brand awareness and brand recognition. However, there is a significant difference between spectators that feel more identified towards their team and positive spectator's satisfaction. Both are good for sponsorship effectiveness but

according to the results of the survey, spectators that are more identified with their team will have a higher inclination towards supporting sponsors.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter addressed and looked at the results derived from the primary qualitative and quantitative data. The overall purpose of the research of exploring the impact of commercial sponsors on spectator's satisfaction and spectator's team identification was interpreted as positive towards sponsorship effectiveness of the EB.

Whilst comprehending the findings, it is worth noting that spectators attending the EB games go for the game of basketball and a significant percentage value the overall experience regardless of having their team winning or losing rather than just going to see their team win. This is crucial because sponsored brands may need to focus on increasing the overall experience of the event engaging the public by creating a sense of community and family.

Throughout the research, it was found that positive spectator's satisfaction involves the high level of basketball and service quality mixed with the sense of community. Also, it was found that positive satisfaction leads to higher brand awareness and recognition, and revisit and purchase intentions than those who experienced negative satisfaction. Furthermore, those who are identified with their team resulted in higher purchasing intentions regardless of positive satisfaction. Therefore, positive spectator's satisfaction results in positive sponsorship effectiveness and those with higher levels of team identification also results in positive sponsorship effectiveness regardless of the outcomes of the game or service quality in a given game.

The qualitative findings of the Content Analysis were explored with the inability to sort spectators that have attended the EB games. Furthermore, the Content Analysis contained data during the suspension of the league which reduces the reliability of exploring spectator's feelings after games and hence, the research's reliability is not entirely achieved. The IDI interview also was influenced by the threat of validity and reliability because of interviewer bias. Quantitative findings were tested using non-probability sampling and therefore, the research's reliability is not entirely achieved. Reliability is the extent to which a study instrument yields consistent results when applied to different individuals at one time (Kendall, 2008). Further work is required in regard to the EB so as to increase the reliability of both qualitative and quantitative data. Further qualitative data such as more IDI interviews were considered to further explore the objective. Quantitative methods would have included more measures to increase the validity and reliability of the SSIS and Yim and Byon's, (2018) model. Also, spectators would have been approached by personally going to the games to recruit voluntary people willing to do the survey after the game but given the current situation of COVID-19 along with the temporary suspension of the league, it was impossible to accomplish.

The validity of the research was taken into consideration in both qualitative and quantitative methods. However, when conducting IDI interviews, not only is there always some information that is not communicated, but every interpretation of data was influenced by the researcher's pre-constructed theories and values (Kuzmanić, 2009). Moreover, the IDI interview was transcribed using NVivo which enhances the validity of the transcribing process. The Content Analysis when using NVivo increased the validation of the methods since carrying out such a search electronically yielded more reliable results than doing it manually and

also improved the rigor of the analysis process by validating some of the researcher's own impressions of the data (Welsh, 2002). The data collected in quantitative methods, shows that it does not include precise and consistent conclusions because of the survey's exploratory nature and the limited number of participants. In relation to the study objective, the survey intended to increase the validity and reliability as it was developed from previous literature review studies. Quantitative data is founded on the belief that all respondents in the anonymous surveys were honest when answering the questions and in regard to attendance and experience in past EB games.

The study was performed via the researcher's perception and does not pose any concrete conclusions on the study assessed but offers a significant amount of insight into spectator's satisfaction and team identification in the EB as well as the impact it has towards sponsorship effectiveness of the EB. A triangulation method design was made to improve the validity and reliability of the conclusions drawn from the findings. Triangulation also has been viewed as a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources (Carter *et al.*, 2014). It is also a method that helps increase the validity, reliability, and legitimation, which encompasses credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, of research findings (Moon, 2019). This provides a method of validity and reliability with the whole exploration since qualitative (Content Analysis and IDI interview) and quantitative methods (surveys) have been used to identify the links with commercial sponsors and spectator's satisfaction of the EB.

In the following chapter, study implications and limitations as well as guidelines for future work are reviewed.

5 Concluding Thoughts on the Contribution of this Research, its Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

In the previous chapter, the findings were discussed on the impact of commercial sponsors on spectator's satisfaction and team identification of the EB. These results were studied and discussed with the conclusion of the overall research objective of this dissertation.

In this last chapter, the implications of the findings for the research purpose and the study limitations and future recommendations are discussed. Chapter five objects to highlight the areas that could be improved in the study and making contributions and recommendations for future assessments.

5.1 Implications of Findings for the Research Questions

The results discussed in the findings from the previous chapter, implied that qualitative and quantitative data impacted significantly on the research purpose bringing new insights on where spectator's satisfaction of the EB come from and how the overall satisfaction shape the sponsorship effectiveness of the EB.

Wins and losses are an unavoidable part of sports, and emotions of sport consumption are greatly affected by the outcomes of the game. The results found that spectators attending the EB games have an overall positive satisfaction from game performance and service quality. Spectators were more inclined for the level of basketball than the outcome of the game. The overall positive satisfaction leads to sponsorship effectiveness since spectators are able to recognize sponsored brands and are more likely to reattend future games and

purchase sponsored brands than those who experienced negative satisfaction. Also, it was found that spectators feeling identified with their team produce sponsorship effectiveness regardless of the game outcome and service quality. To produce an increased number of positive outcomes, teams and sponsors should be more involved between each other and towards the public to create a sense of community, family and togetherness. The findings imply that Tajfel and Turner's, (1979) social identity theory fits extremely well when assessing spectator's satisfaction of the EB given the findings in regard to being part of a community and/or social group.

5.2 Contributions and Limitations of the Research

The collection of data from both qualitative and quantitative methods was made when there were no games played in the EB due to COVID-19. The collection of data from the Content Analysis was based on comments regarded in last seasons and this year's season despite the temporary closure of the EB. Though, this lag time could have made the research possible to catch the feelings of spectator's satisfaction.

The theoretical contribution of this research is to suggest a set of basic principles for explaining the development of the current theory. In the context of sports, the findings showed that one factor that influences positive spectator's satisfaction is the game which confirms that positive satisfaction from a sports event, results in higher revisit intentions. This approves literature from Gray and Wert-Gray, (2012) that successful team performance in a particular instance, results in positive levels of spectator's satisfaction leading to spectators' intentions to attend future games. Furthermore, findings showed that positive spectator's

satisfaction is influenced by the service quality during the sports event where combining both game satisfaction and service quality leads to higher purchasing intentions, brand awareness and brand recognition which also proves past research from Cianfrone (2018) and Biscaia *et al.*, (2013).

Findings regarding team identification confirms and expands the theoretical contribution of this research. Results showed that high team identification levels result in higher revisit intentions, brand awareness and recognition as well as higher purchasing intentions than less identified spectators and supports research by Lough *et al.*, (2014), Madrigal, (2000), Hickman *et al.*, (2005), and Bee and Dalakas, (2015). Additionally, it was found that those spectators that felt more identified were more willing to support sponsors than spectators experiencing positive satisfaction from just game satisfaction and service quality. This shows that spectators with high levels of team identification will support sponsors and reattend future games regardless of game outcomes which supports research by Yim and Byon (2018). The overall findings of this research suggest that factors contributing to spectator's satisfaction of the EB are the game of basketball, the quality of service, the sense of community and the overall experience. These factors influence spectator's behaviour of purchasing intentions, revisit intentions, and brand awareness and recognition. According to the literature, a continued positive satisfaction lead to sponsorship effectiveness as well as a higher team identification which also translates into unconditional support for the club and for the sponsors regardless of game outcome and service quality. These findings lead to the conclusion that past research support the findings of this current study and therefore, the theoretical contribution is evidenced and extended for the case of spectators in the EB.

The research study was limited in various aspects. Regarding the sample size in the survey, a small number of participants took part in the survey and as a result, smaller figures were obtained with respect to the purpose of the research. For example, spectators that were very satisfied were only two participants. This limitation can be biased since results cannot determine the whole spectators of the EB and spectators were aware of the survey only through Facebook. Limitations regarding the survey questions were also present as only two items were used to measure team identification of the EB spectators using the SSIS and based on Yim and Byon's (2018) model, questions were designed by the researcher's own perspectives based on the literature review and conceptual framework. The sponsors were limited as only there were exposed 7 out of the 28 official marketing partners that the EB currently hold and different outcomes might have been present if the number of sponsors were higher. In addition, many drawbacks involve the researcher's own bias of misinterpreting the questions due to language differences, as well as the overall conclusions made based on the author's own research goals.

Moreover, bias and misinterpretation might have been present in the qualitative data analysis. When performing the Content Analysis, despite of being guided by the literature review and conceptual framework, the researcher made its own interpretation of the data transcribed and organized the codes based on the self-perception. A limitation on social media platforms was also present as only Twitter and Facebook were used to gather information from spectators. The IDI interview also presented limitations with respect to the researcher's potential for biasing the data gathered and the interview design which caused misconception for the interviewee in some questions. Additional limitations include the lack of time for the gathering of data.

5.3 Recommendations for Practice

The current study can add significant insights for marketing experts. Although game outcome and service quality influence significantly spectator's satisfaction, in this study it was found that a sense of community, the overall experience along with the high level of basketball regardless of the game outcomes, results in sponsorship effectiveness. The EB should focus in controllable outcomes such as improving the experience of the events and manage the sense of community as a whole as well as for every local team and finding ways to engage spectators to ultimately make them feel identified towards the league and their team. The service quality should be consistently positive in the venues as well as online services for streaming platforms.

Findings also indicated that highly identified fans showed a higher sponsorship awareness and recognition, revisit intentions as well as a significant inclination towards supporting sponsors regardless of game outcomes and service quality. The EB should focus on spectators that are less identified because a consistent consumption is needed for sponsorship effectiveness and the overall success of the league and their teams. Since spectators of the EB value the sense of community there should be engaging activities during the event, social media engagement during the game as well as off the court in order to increase that feeling of being part of a social group and a community.

Sponsors should get more involved with spectators and the team. For example, players and coaching staff should be able to show spectators the benefits of their sponsors by using their products/services. Sponsors should engage with spectators during the game and off the court to increment their experience. For example, by purchasing tickets they could get discounts on sponsored brands.

This way spectators would be more aware of sponsors and more willing to support them. Additionally, the EB should be able to provide a raffle where spectators could participate in a contest for a free travel to another country while supporting their team to improve the overall experience of the EB.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

The current research study focused in spectators that have attended the EB in a given time in the past. Future research should focus to explore spectator's satisfaction levels right after games in multiple occasions. Also, further research needs to be addressed to measure in a bigger extent, the impact of commercial sponsors on spectator's satisfaction and team identification. Also, research regarding the EB sponsors should seek to add value during the events to increase the overall experience and the sense of community. Different methods should be utilized to further increase the reliability and the validity of the findings. Therefore, future research involving the EB could add more insights to improve spectator's satisfaction and levels of identification during games. More quantitative methods should be considered to measure with exactitude the levels of satisfaction and team identification as well as sponsorship effectiveness.

Additionally, given the current times during COVID-19, there is a high uncertainty on the future of the league and how future games are going to be played out. Future research also should focus on online and TV engagement, since they are two of the most followed channels, during EB games and post-game experiences. This could be in the form of winning contests/prizes, a player to spectator questions and answers, a form of app or platform exclusively for the EB followers to keep them engaged at all times.

5.5 Final Conclusion and Reflections

This last chapter addressed how the findings of this research analysis were useful in achieving the study objective and in providing valuable insights into what should be done in the future. A significant theoretical contribution to this research was thoroughly ascertained. Limitations are also described, and future recommendations are suggested to improve and extent the research within the sports literature. It has been recommended that this research may be broadened into involving sponsored brands with players and spectators on and off the court in order to increase sponsorship effectiveness. Also, it has been recommended to increase spectator's experience in the form of social media, contests, and/or player-to-spectator experience.

The investigation of spectators in different events of the EB and different localities is also recommended. In future studies, the conceptual framework can be used to further extend research on the EB's sponsors and spectator's satisfaction.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Content Analysis Codes

Table 2 – Content Analysis Codes

Codes compared by number of coding references				
Codes	Number of coding references	Aggregate number of coding references	Number of items coded	Aggregate number of items coded
Codes\Spectator's satisfaction	0	67	0	19
Codes\Spectator's satisfaction\Game satisfaction	0	25	0	5
Codes\Spectator's satisfaction\Game satisfaction\Negative satisfaction	2	2	2	2
Codes\Spectator's satisfaction\Game satisfaction\Neutral satisfaction	2	2	2	2
Codes\Spectator's satisfaction\Game satisfaction\Positive satisfaction	21	21	5	5
Codes\Spectator's satisfaction\Service Satisfaction	0	5	0	4
Codes\Spectator's satisfaction\Service Satisfaction\Negative satisfaction	5	5	4	4
Codes\Spectator's satisfaction\Service Satisfaction\Positive satisfaction	0	0	0	0
Codes\Spectator's satisfaction\Team identification	37	37	15	15
Codes\Sponsors	18	18	10	10

Appendix B – Interview Guide Introduction

Introduction	<p>I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. My name is Elisabet and I would like to talk to you about your experiences and your perspectives of the EB. Specifically, the research objective of my research study is to explore the impact of commercial sponsors on spectator's satisfaction. The interview is going to be comprised of the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spectator's satisfaction• Sponsors• Team identification <p>The interview should take less than 30 minutes. I will be taping the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. Because we're on tape, please be sure to speak up so that I don't miss your comments.</p> <p>All responses will be kept confidential. This means that your interview responses will not going to be shared and I will ensure that any information we include in our report does not identify you as the respondent. Remember, you don't have to talk about anything if you don't want to, and you may end the interview at any time</p> <p>Are there any questions about what I have just explained?</p> <p>Are you willing to participate in this interview?</p>
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Plain Language Statement

I. Introduction to the Research Study

Research Study Title: Exploring the impact of commercial sponsors on spectator's satisfaction of the Euroleague Basketball

University: Griffith College Dublin (GCD), Graduate Business School

Principal Investigator: Dr. Garrett Ryan. Telephone: +35314163324 or email garrett.ryan@griffith.ie

II. Details of what involvement in the Research Study will require

This research will take part in interviews processes. The interviews addressed to the Euroleague key personnel will be audio taped and directly transcribed to NVivo, a software tool and questions regarding the spectator's satisfaction and sponsorship effectiveness of the Euroleague's organization will be asked based on your experience and perspective.

Interviews are supposed to be completed in no more than 30 minutes. Participants will be offered for reference purposes a replica of their interview

III. Potential risks to participants from involvement in the Research Study (if greater than that encountered in everyday life)

As a result of your involvement in this Research Study, I do not foresee any risk to the participants

IV. Benefits (direct or indirect) to participants from involvement in the Research Study

The purpose of this Research Study is to obtain new insights that will enable the Euroleague's Basketball management to improve their marketing strategy on how to increase spectator's satisfaction and thus, increase sponsorship effectiveness. By contributing in this research study, you may benefit from improved commercial strategies and sports fan management.

V. Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations

Participant's confidentiality will be attempted to be protected. The recorded interviews will be transferred to an encryption-controlled device and they will be safely kept. In the final report, the biographical information as well as Euroleague Basketball data will be omitted.

VI. Advice as to whether or not data is to be destroyed after a minimum period

In the finalization of the MSc in International Business, audio records will be eliminated

VII. Statement that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary

Participation in this Research Study is optional. At any stage, individuals who decide to participate may withdraw from the Research Study. There will be no penalty for discontinuation on participating in the Research Study before the completion of all phases.

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person

Please contact:

Dr Garrett Ryan, Griffith College Research Ethics Committee, South Circular Road, Dublin 8, Ireland

Mail: garrett.ryan@griffith.ie

Tel: +353 1 4163324

Informed Consent Form

I. Research Study Title

Research Study Title: Exploring the impact of commercial sponsors on spectator's satisfaction of the Euroleague Basketball

University: Griffith College Dublin (GCD), Graduate Business School

Principal Investigator: Dr. Garrett Ryan. Telephone: +35314163324 or email garrett.ryan@griffith.ie

II. Clarification of the purpose of the research

The purpose of the research is to explore the link between sponsorship and spectator's satisfaction assessed under social identity theory. By the end of the research, it should provide further information to the Euroleague's staff.

III. Confirmation of particular requirements as highlighted in the Plain Language Statement

This research will take part in interviews processes. The interviews addressed to the Euroleague managers will be audio taped and questions regarding spectator's satisfaction and sponsorship will be asked based on your experience and perspective.

These interviews are supposed to be completed in no more than 30 minutes. Participants will be offered for reference purposes a replica of their interview.

Participant – please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)

I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me)

Yes/No

I understand the information provided

Yes/No

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study

Yes/No

I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions

Yes/No

I am aware that my interview will be audiotaped

Yes/No

IV. Confirmation that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary

I may withdraw from the Research Study at any point.

V. Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations

Participation in this Research Study is optional. At any stage, individuals who decide to participate may withdraw from the Research Study. There will be no penalty for discontinuation on participating in the Research Study before the completion of all phases.

VII. Signature:

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project

Participants Signature: David Baker
Name in Block Capitals: David Baker
Witness: _____
Date: 10/5/20

Elisabet According to SportsBusiness, the Euroleague Basketball is the second fastest growing sports property on the market, which proves the potential that the league has. What makes the Euroleague different from other sports leagues?

Coach In my experience, let's say the Euroleague stands out compared to other sports leagues because it's very personal. It's each community based, it's each team from each country, and the whole country gets behind their team to support against, which is the same as opposing as football and other brands. But in the last number of years, it's become more intimate. There are not 80,000 people jobs in that stadium like a football game or another sports. It's a lot more intimate. It's a smaller atmosphere. It's very intense. The atmosphere and the communities get really behind their teams that go forward.

Elisabet In your opinion and experience how do spectators reach positive levels of satisfaction?

Coach I feel like within the last number of years, especially with the Euroleague, the game satisfaction has increased massively, the entertainment value has increased massively. So, supporters are coming to see very high-level basketball and probably second to none in the world at the level of basketball. And the whole entertainment, the day or the evening, the game is on, there's an entertainment value to it now as well. It's not just a basketball game. I'm going back to my original answer. It also combines with the

passion they have for supporting their teams and seeing them progress to the Euroleague, which has moved on so much over the last number of years.

Elisabet What do you think is the aim of having sponsors in the Euroleague?

Coach From my perspective, we think sponsors are crucial for the Euroleague and for any professional sports leagues. I think that the combination and the cohesion between the sponsors and the teams and players now has grown massively over the years. That's anything from energy drinks to items the players may use or they may ascertain to give them an edge to use, to give them an edge during games or during the season. It's crucial. That's all aside from the financial aspects of sponsorships.

Elisabet What are your thoughts on spectator supporting the Euroleague Basketball's sponsors?

Coach I would say it's a two-way thing, it's very it's crucial to the relationship to build between the sponsor and the team themselves. As in they're buying into the whole family side of things. That if they support the sponsors in turn, then the team will be rewarded, and the team will get better and have more finances in the future to be able to benefit the club. So, I think it's a it's a two-way thing and it's crucial, and imperative that the support for each club gets behind the team sponsors.

Elisabet What are your thoughts on spectators wanting to purchase merchandise and wanting to re attend future games?

Coach I think I'll start with the second part first. I think they want to come back is a very positive sign for the Euroleague and for the teams that people will want to come back because obviously they're enjoying the show, they're enjoying the basketball at a high level and the whole entertainment value in regards to the sponsors or them buying sponsorship items. I think it's crucial. As I said before, for the relationship to build there's nothing better from a Euroleague coaching perspective to look into the stands and see your team wearing all your uniforms or wearing your team units that have been provided by the sponsors.

Elisabet In your opinion, what do you think about spectators that have higher levels of identification towards a team in the Euroleague?

Coach I think those spectators are crucial to every team. I mean, as far as I'm aware, every team in the Euroleague has a lot of passionate fans. But there's obviously those fans that go above and beyond to support their teams. And so, it's I think it's a reflection on the teams and the Euroleague themselves and what a great job they've been doing to get these reoccurring fans to come back and spend more money and to follow their teams throughout Europe. And people buy into it. It becomes a family type of thing that you see the same people at games, and they buy their season tickets, or they travel away. And it becomes more of a who's more of a family where they're taken on the road to support their team on it. I think it's a great reflection of the Euroleague.

Elisabet From a coaching perspective, do you think engaging the players with spectators would raise their levels of satisfaction?

Coach That's a tough question because from a coaching perspective, you want to protect your players at all times and give them as little to do, to be very honest, off-court as possible so they can keep their 100 percent concentration on the game and that goes ahead. But in saying that going back to the sponsorship levels and going back to the revenue that's created for each team in the Euroleague, yes of course, if players can engage. The Euroleague, has certain process, every Euroleague team that they have to do a certain amount of PR work in the locality and in the area to build up that brand awareness of each player, because of players people buy off people. If fans come in and they don't identify with certain players on the team, they're not going to go and buy their jerseys, which in turn doesn't lead to revenue at the end of the day for the club. So, it's important that they stay focused on that. They make sure that they feel attached to each player on the team. And each player has to have a certain amount of PR savvy about themselves to be able to communicate with the public in general.

Elisabet The PR you referred to Public Relations?

Coach Yes

Elisabet Ok, so what do you think about the biggest challenges moving forward in regard to aligning sponsors and satisfying spectators?

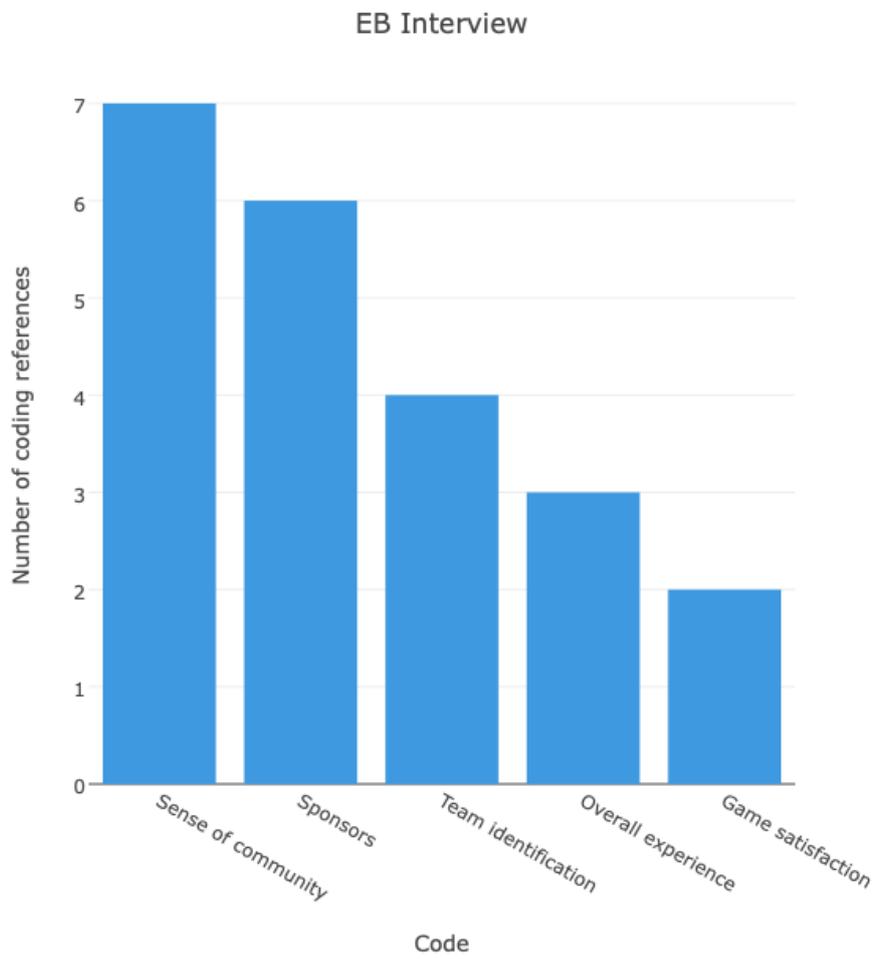
Coach I think there's two major challenges ahead. I see one being COVID-19 and how that's going to affect the revenue, within sponsorships,

how it's going to affect the revenue within clubs. That's how it's going to affect the interaction between players and personnel of each club and the public, the spectators, the fans who basically pay the salaries to keep the whole machine running. And that will be the first massive challenge ahead. Second of all, I think comes down once again back to actual revenue. I mean, at the end of the day, each player and each supporter that comes to every Euroleague game, wants to see, touch, spend time, talk with every player in the Euroleague, especially their team. But unfortunately, there's a certain amount of security issues with it of a certain amount of, as I said previously, to have the players identifying the players be focused on what their challenges are ahead. I think COVID-19 is going to change a lot of that. So, it's up to the Euroleague, which I'm sure they will they are very dynamic of what they do and have plans put in place for the safety of the public and the players. So, I'm sure those challenges will be beaten in the end.

Elisabet Ok great, is there anything you want to add?

Coach No

Appendix E - Graph 1 from NVivo IDI results



Appendix F – Survey Questionnaire Design

Demographics (1-3)

1. What is your gender?

- a) Female
- b) Male

2. What is your age?

- a) 18-24
- b) 25-34
- c) 35-44
- d) 45-54
- e) 55-64
- f) 65+

3. In what country do you live?

drop down

4. Do you attend regularly the Euroleague events?

- a) Always
- b) Usually
- c) Sometimes
- d) Rarely
- e) Never

Yim and Byon's, (2018) Model & SSIS

5. What would you say is your main reason for choosing to go to the Euroleague games? (Game satisfaction/Team identification)

- a) The game of basketball
- b) That my team wins
- c) The players
- d) The overall experience regardless of who wins or loses

6. What would you rate your experience in a Euroleague's game? (Spectator satisfaction)

Likert scale type from 1 - - Very dissatisfied to 5 - - Very Satisfied

7. How important to you is it that your team wins the Euroleague? (SSIS)

Likert scale type from 1 - - Not important to 8 - - Very Important

8. During the season how closely do you follow the Euroleague via ANY of the following (SSIS)

- a) In person
- b) Television
- c) Social Media
- d) Radio
- e) Online sports sites

9. How satisfied are you with the service quality of the Euroleague games? (i.e., stadium staff/employees, security, physical environment) (*Service satisfaction*)

Likert scale type from 1 - - Very dissatisfied to 8 - - Very satisfied

10. How likely are you to attend future games? (Revisit Intent)

Likert scale type from 1 - - Not at all likely to 8 - - Extremely likely

11. Do you use any type of product/service from the Euroleague sponsors? (Purchase intention)

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) I don't know

12. What is your opinion with the Euroleague sports sponsors? (Sponsorship effectiveness)

- a) I feel Identified with sponsors of my team/league
- b) It's beneficial for the teams/league, but irrelevant for me
- c) I'm not aware of sponsors

13. Can you identify ANY of the following official sponsors of the Euroleague? (Brand recognition)

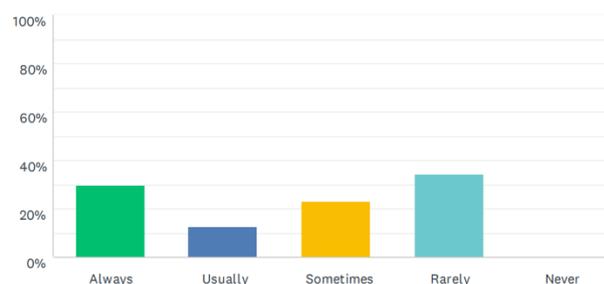
- a) Deniz Bank
- b) BWIN
- c) Spalding
- d) Turkish Airlines
- e) EA7 Emporio Armani
- f) Adidas
- g) Efes

Appendix G – Charts and Graphs from Survey Results

Countries: Azerbaijan, Belgium, Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovenia, Turkey, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Q4 Do you attend regularly the Euroleague events?

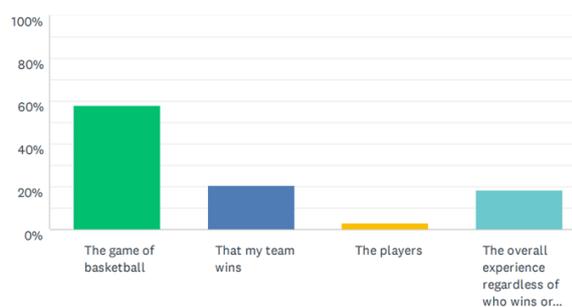
Answered: 64 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Always	29.69%	19
Usually	12.50%	8
Sometimes	23.44%	15
Rarely	34.38%	22
Never	0.00%	0
TOTAL		64

Q5 What would you say is your main reason for choosing to go to the Euroleague games?

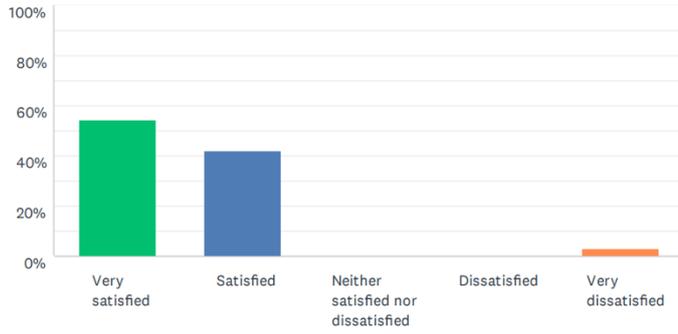
Answered: 64 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
The game of basketball	57.81%	37
That my team wins	20.31%	13
The players	3.13%	2
The overall experience regardless of who wins or loses	18.75%	12
TOTAL		64

Q6 What would you rate your experience in a Euroleague's game?

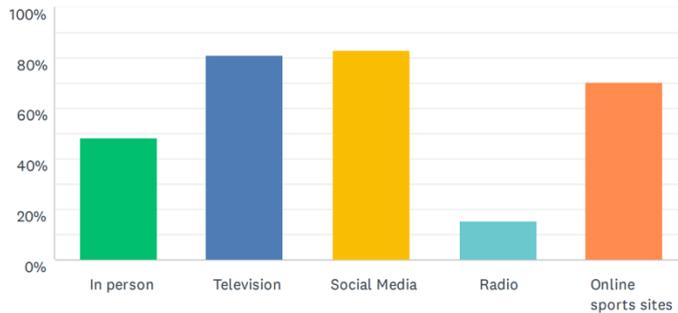
Answered: 64 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very satisfied	54.69%	35
Satisfied	42.19%	27
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	0.00%	0
Dissatisfied	0.00%	0
Very dissatisfied	3.13%	2
TOTAL		64

Q8 During the season how closely do you follow the Euroleague via ANY of the following

Answered: 64 Skipped: 0

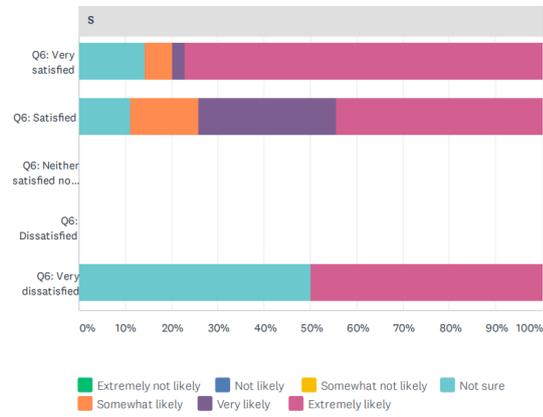


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
In person	48.44%	31
Television	81.25%	52
Social Media	82.81%	53
Radio	15.63%	10
Online sports sites	70.31%	45
Total Respondents: 64		

Appendix G – Graph 2 & 3: Hypothesis 1

Q10 How likely are you to attend future games?

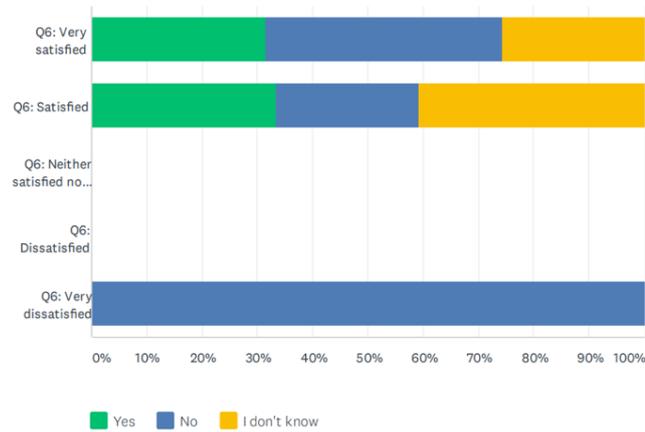
Answered: 64 Skipped: 0



	EXTREMELY NOT LIKELY	NOT LIKELY	SOMEWHAT NOT LIKELY	NOT SURE	SOMEWHAT LIKELY	VERY LIKELY	EXTREMELY LIKELY	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Q6: Very satisfied	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	14.29% 5	5.71% 2	2.86% 1	77.14% 27	54.69% 35	6.43
Q6: Satisfied	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	11.11% 3	14.81% 4	29.63% 8	44.44% 12	42.19% 27	6.07
Q6: Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00
Q6: Dissatisfied	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00
Q6: Very dissatisfied	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	50.00% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	50.00% 1	3.13% 2	5.50

Q11 Do you use any type of product/service from the Euroleague sponsors?

Answered: 64 Skipped: 0

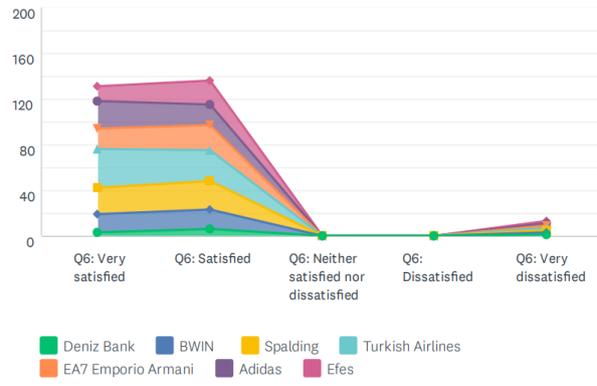


	YES	NO	I DON'T KNOW	TOTAL
Q6: Very satisfied	31.43% 11	42.86% 15	25.71% 9	54.69% 35
Q6: Satisfied	33.33% 9	25.93% 7	40.74% 11	42.19% 27
Q6: Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0
Q6: Dissatisfied	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0
Q6: Very dissatisfied	0.00% 0	100.00% 2	0.00% 0	3.13% 2
Total Respondents	20	24	20	64

Appendix G –Graph 3: Hypothesis 2

Q13 Can you identify ANY of the following official sponsors of the Euroleague?

Answered: 64 Skipped: 0

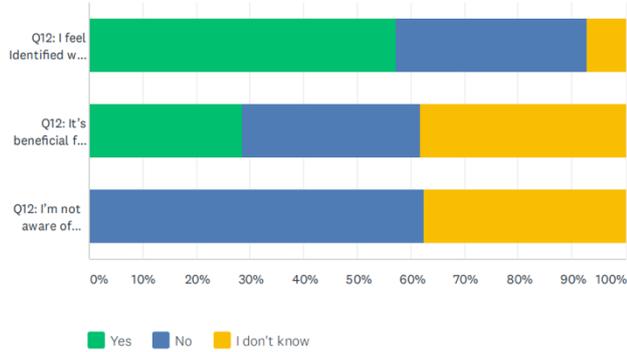


	DENIZ BANK	BWIN	SPALDING	TURKISH AIRLINES	EA7 EMPORIO ARMANI	ADIDAS	EFES	TOTAL
Q6: Very satisfied	8.57% 3	45.71% 16	65.71% 23	97.14% 34	51.43% 18	68.57% 24	37.14% 13	204.69% 131
Q6: Satisfied	22.22% 6	62.96% 17	92.59% 25	100.00% 27	81.48% 22	66.67% 18	77.78% 21	212.50% 136
Q6: Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0
Q6: Dissatisfied	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0
Q6: Very dissatisfied	50.00% 1	100.00% 2	100.00% 2	100.00% 2	100.00% 2	100.00% 2	100.00% 2	20.31% 13
Total Respondents	10	35	50	63	42	44	36	64

Appendix G –Graph 4 & 5: Hypothesis 3

Q11 Do you use any type of product/service from the Euroleague sponsors?

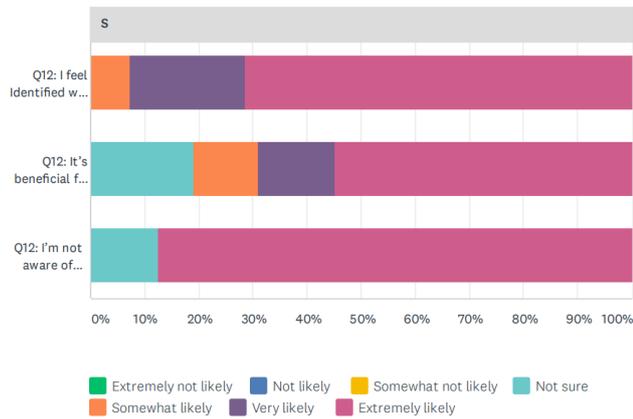
Answered: 64 Skipped: 0



	YES	NO	I DON'T KNOW	TOTAL
Q12: I feel Identified with sponsors of my team/league	57.14% 8	35.71% 5	7.14% 1	21.88% 14
Q12: It's beneficial for the teams/league, but irrelevant for me	28.57% 12	33.33% 14	38.10% 16	65.63% 42
Q12: I'm not aware of sponsors	0.00% 0	62.50% 5	37.50% 3	12.50% 8
Total Respondents	20	24	20	64

Q10 How likely are you to attend future games?

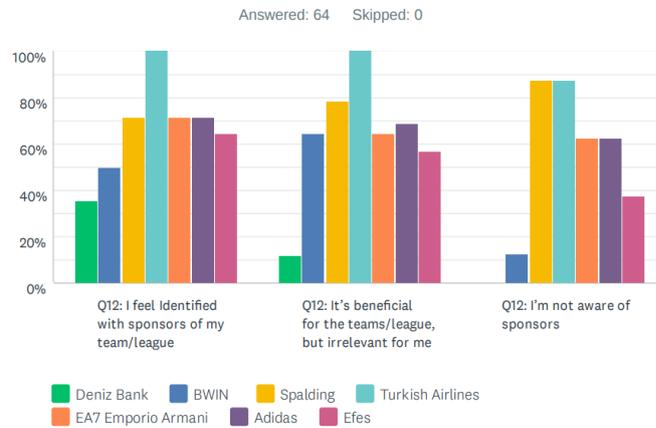
Answered: 64 Skipped: 0



	EXTREMELY NOT LIKELY	NOT LIKELY	SOMEWHAT NOT LIKELY	NOT SURE	SOMEWHAT LIKELY	VERY LIKELY	EXTREMELY LIKELY	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Q12: I feel Identified with sponsors of my team/league	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	7.14% 1	21.43% 3	71.43% 10	21.88% 14	6.64
Q12: It's beneficial for the teams/league, but irrelevant for me	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	19.05% 8	11.90% 5	14.29% 6	54.76% 23	65.63% 42	6.05
Q12: I'm not aware of sponsors	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	12.50% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	87.50% 7	12.50% 8	6.63

Appendix G – Graph 6: Hypothesis 4

Q13 Can you identify ANY of the following official sponsors of the Euroleague?



	DENIZ BANK	BWIN	SPALDING	TURKISH AIRLINES	EA7 EMPORIO ARMANI	ADIDAS	EFES	TOTAL
Q12: I feel Identified with sponsors of my team/league	35.71% 5	50.00% 7	71.43% 10	100.00% 14	71.43% 10	71.43% 10	64.29% 9	101.56% 65
Q12: It's beneficial for the teams/league, but irrelevant for me	11.90% 5	64.29% 27	78.57% 33	100.00% 42	64.29% 27	69.05% 29	57.14% 24	292.19% 187
Q12: I'm not aware of sponsors	0.00% 0	12.50% 1	87.50% 7	87.50% 7	62.50% 5	62.50% 5	37.50% 3	43.75% 28
Total Respondents	10	35	50	63	42	44	36	64