THE IMPACT OF THE SPONSORSHIP IN THE SPORT IN PROMOTING BRAND EQUITY OF SPORTSWEAR INDUSTRY

RASOUL AZADI, BAHRAM YOUSEFI, HOSSEIN EYDI

Abstract:

The present study has been done to investigate the role of sponsorship in improving brand equity in the Sportswear industry. The research method is descriptive survey based on structural equation modeling. Statistical community of this study includes physical education students and graduates of Iran that 805 of them were collected as samples using the online questionnaire made by researcher from all provinces of Iran. The results of structural equation model showed that the financial support in Sports with 0.41 affect rate indirectly and through raising awareness and brand association and increased customer satisfaction affects on loyalty and final brand equity. But had no significant effect on perceived quality. The findings also showed, brand equity, respectively is influenced by of brand loyalty, brand awareness and brand association, satisfaction and perceived quality.

Keywords:

Sponsorship, brand equity, Sport Brand, Sportswear

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1. Introduction

Sportswear is an important part of Sporting goods market is defined as the clothing and shoes for Sports participation (Ko et al., 2012). Consumers not only use Sportswear for Sports, but also they wear them at home, school, work and entertainment (Miller & Washington, 2013). Today, consumers purchase the Sports goods from stores supplying all goods (Sportswear, Sports equipment, etc.). Buyers face a variety of products in terms of same quality and shape, regardless of the characteristics of their purchase decision; brand leads consumers (Kapferer, 1992). American Marketing Association (2006) has defined a brand as name, term, sign, symbol, design or trademarks to identify and distinguish a product or service of a producer or group of producers rather than competitors (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). Due to the huge revenues that exist in the Sportswear industry, many manufacturing companies have shifted their capital to this side, that because of factors such as the uncertain boundaries between markets, shorter product life cycle, as well as rapid changes in patterns order, merely innovation in goods and services will not necessarily lead to long-term sustainable competitive advantage, because the operational benefits are often quickly copied, so they are short term and rare. In such markets, products and services are daily updated, they adapt more overlap and a strong brand may be the only characteristic that distinguishes your product or service offering from competitors (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). In such circumstances, obtaining the appropriate place in the mind of the consumer so that the consumer is loyal to the company is very important. To achieve this goal, one of the most popular marketing concepts which it has been studied by academics and marketing in the past decade is brand equity (Simon & Sullivan, 1993). Brand equity due to the brand name given to the product or service and it has more revenue, lower costs and higher profits, and a direct impact on the organization's ability to make appropriate decisions to increase prices, the effectiveness of marketing communications and business development successfully (Keller, 2003).

Brand equity, support the customer's value and indirectly increases the value of company or organization. Brand equity and customer value through increasing: effectiveness and efficiency of brand loyalty, brand development and profit margin, business power and competitive advantage that give value/increase the value to company/ organization (Aaker, 1996).

Marketing strategies often are taken into consideration as the most important means of creating brand value. In fact, brand equity is the result of investment in marketing activities which have been conducted in the past. Companies aware consumers through marketing efforts and create a good image of the brand in their minds. If you know how to influence specific elements of the marketing mix strategies related to product, pricing, promotion, distribution and sales promotions on brand equity, these activities can be used to promote brand equity (Van rail et al., 2005). But, In recent times traditional marketing communication elements such as advertising and sales promotion are faced with challenges of reaching progressively fragmented consumer markets and cutting through an overload of messages aimed at consumers. For this reason, sponsorship as

promotional tool, has become increasingly popular marketing communication vehicle. The expenditures for sponsorship in the past decade have grown at rates faster than expenditures for mass media advertising and sales promotion (Cornwell and Roy, 2003). Linking the brand with an event via sponsorship enables companies to reach consumers' interest and attention by associating with the events that hold great importance to them. Sponsorship bypasses media clutter and provides an environment where a brand can reach and communicate with the right target audience and differentiate itself from the other brands (Areska, 2012). Sponsorship, a communication medium that complements a firm's marketing, promotion and advertising programs has been extensively used for marketing campaigns in recent years (Cornwell, 2008). Of various sponsorship activities, sports sponsorship is one of the media most widely used to reach and communicate with target audiences (Roy & Cornwell, 2004), to enhance positive perception of firms (Roy, 2005) and to strengthen firms' competitive advantages (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006).

 if the relationship between sponsorship and brand equity, and in particular to its dimensions achieved, decision-making can easily be decided on how to use of the sponsorship to maximize brand equity and ultimately achieve sustainable profitability of company (Azadi et al, 2015).

The impact of sponsorship on brand equity is the researcher-made variety, some of which are mentioned below.

Tong (2006) in his study, the impact of brand equity in Chinese clothing the market, studied the effectiveness of marketing activities on different aspects of brand equity and showed that Sponsorship for events had a positive effect on brand equity. the findings research Pauwels (2007) showed of that combining sponsorship and advertising is suitable to increase brand awareness. The results Areska (2012) indicate that Red Bull implemented sponsorship generates several positive outcomes which in turn influence all aspects of company's brand equity (satisfaction, loyalty, perceived quality, awareness and brand association). Findings research Cornwell (2013) showed that "leverage," the use of advertising and promotion to support the sponsorship, and active management involvement are significant predictors of both the perceived differentiation of the brand from its competitors and adding financial value to the brand. The result research Hosseini and Mehrara (2013) showed of the test of this that sponsorship programs have a direct impact on brand equity. The results Chun et al (2013) showed the brand equity of sportswear sponsors, brand awareness positively affect brand image and loyalty, and brand image positively affected brand loyalty. The results Tufail et al (2014) showed that Sponsorship has a positive relationship with Brand Equity. When Publicity and Sponsorship is favorable, there is positive effect on Brand Equity. The result research Haider (2014) reveals that sponsorship has positive impact on Brand Equity. Also The results Dehbini et al (2015) of revealed that both of advertisement and sponsorship have positive effect on brand equity and customer intention to buy, but the effect of advertisement is more than sponsorship.

by studying the impact of Sponsorship on brand equity, elements with more effective in promoting the brand can be identified until managers to be able to use the information obtained from Sponsorship focus on the elements and allocate more resources to it to increase the value of their brand and develop it. With wide researches in this regard, various models have been proposed and tested and implemented, but as cultural differences and differences in various industries may mediate the effect of marketing efforts in creating brand equity, it can not be said that these models are fully compatible with the Sportswear market. Therefore, given the undeniable role of marketing in the creation and development of brand equity, this study intends to offer a new model considering characteristics of Sportswear industry. This model is combination of the Yoo et al. (2000), Tong (2006) and Youl ha (2011).

Pappu and Quester (2006) proposed research argues that there is a positive relationship between consumers' satisfaction with the brand and company's brand equity. Therefore, referring to the study, there are various levels of consumer satisfaction which in turn differently influence three aspects of brand equity: brand awareness, brand associations and perceived quality.

 in this research, had tried to investigate the impact of Sponsorship on Brand Equity. The conceptual framework of this study is presented in figure 1 with the purpose to illustrate the basic relationship between studied variables and in conceptual framework.

based on Youl ha's model (2011) on this basis, it is assumed that the elements of the Sponsorship do not directly impact customer loyalty, but also the satisfaction appears and the satisfaction causes loyalty to the brand. Finally, the changes that took place and the new model was put to the test. According to the model of Figure 1, it is assumed that the elements of the Sponsorship (independent variable) affect on brand equity (the dependent variable) indirectly through the dimensions of brand equity (the mediator).

According to Meenaghan (2001), sponsorship is: 'a financial or material investment in an activity, a person or an event, and having as benefits the access of the investor (sponsor) to a potential 'image lifting' associated to the activity, the people or to the event (Walliser, 2003).

The brand equity is through brand name to the product or service and its dimensions in this model, including perceived quality, brand loyalty, awareness and brand association, customer satisfaction and final brand equity. Perceived quality is a subjective judgment of customer about the performance of a product; brand loyalty is the brand preference among same goods through the emotional sense about the brand name. Brand awareness refers to potential buyer for diagnosis a brand in a product category. Brand reminders include anything that makes a brand remind in the minds (Aaker, 1991). Customer satisfaction is defined as feeling or attitude of a customer to a product or service after its use (Jamal Nasser, 2002); and the final brand equity is defined as the difference between the value of products with the brand and products with the same quality and characteristics but are not known (Kim and Hyum, 2011).

Due to the characteristics of Sportswear, the importance of brand equity in these products is very high and usually based on the product selection in the industry. Now, attracting and retaining customers in the Sportswear industry by manufacturers, considering existing industry giants, including Nike, Adidas, and Puma is very difficult. This could reduce profit even bankruptcy of some Iranian producers. Although the quality of some Iranian Sports brands as their foreign competitors, but the tendency of consumers to foreign brands is due to the lack of reliable and powerful brands in Iran (Azadi, 2014). That is why such research is necessary more than ever. Also reviewing and assessing the Sportswear brand equity from the perspective of students and graduates of physical education as educated people about dealing with most Sports can be helpful and measure activities and Sportswear manufacturers in order to create a stronger brand and assess the guide. According to the statement, in this study, given the undeniable role in establishing the Sponsorship and brand equity development, it is intended to make a comprehensive model according to the characteristics of Sportswear industry, a new model will be offered. Finally it is desired to observe that how marketing efforts affect on brand equity in the Sportswear industry. This study and the model can be a guide for producers of Sportswear.

Figure 1_ Structural Model: The Effect Sponsorship on and Brand Equity
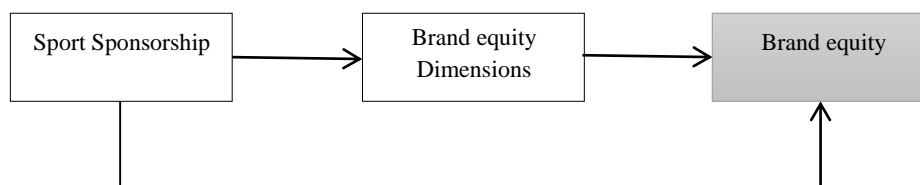
2. Methodology

The research method is descriptive-survey based on structural equation modeling (SEM). The aim of the applied research category and it has been done in field. The population for this study consisted of all students and graduates of Physical Education in all Iranian universities. Since the number of students and graduates of Physical Education in Iran was unknown and scattered, unlimited population size was considered and using table of Krejcie and Morgan 384 were determined. But to extend, the number of 805 people using the questionnaire in person and online via email and social networks (Facebook) devoted to physical education students and graduates from all Iran's provinces and statistical analysis were tested. To collect primary data, researcher's questionnaire was used, which is about demographics, Sponsorship and dimensions of brand equity, some questions were propounded. The questionnaire included 25 questions that were designed for both the general and specific questions and to understand the questionnaire, minor changes were made, but the ways in which the questions in the form of questions were not changed. In the first part,4 questions related to demographic data and then in the brand choice,10 famous foreign Sports brand in the world from the perspective of Iranians were selected (Nike, Adidas, Puma, Asics, Reebok, Kappa, Fila, Lotto, Lega, all Sport and other options) and subjects were asked to select an option in the case of usage and answer specific questions. Brand

equity questions with regard to the factors identified in the Model of Yoo et al (2000) adapted from the Aeker's model, As well as to design a new model, options as financial customer satisfaction (from Sweeney and White questionnaire, 2008) added to the dimensions of brand equity. Sponsorship questions were with regard to the factors identified in the Model Tong (2006) In order to understand questions, minor changes were made in the questionnaire but did not change the form of questions.

In designing the questionnaire, a 5-point ordinal scale of Likert scale was considered (score 5 shows the completely agree, score 4 somewhat agree, score 3, I have not opinion, score 2 Disagree somewhat, score 1, Strongly Disagree). Reliability was confirmed by 11 professors of Sports management. To calculate the validity, Cronbach's alpha was used, the rate for Sponsorship and brand equity questionnaires were 0.91 respectively. Since the obtained coefficient is higher than 0.9, so this can be interpreted that the validity of the structure of the questionnaire is high and in general, high validity of the instrument. The following table shows the final results of Cronbach's alpha of research variables.

Table 1. Cronbach's alpha test for research variables

variable	validity	Total validity
sponsorship	0.87	
Perceived quality	0.88	
Brand awareness	0.87	
Brand association		0.91
satisfaction	0.88	
Brand loyalty	0.79	
Brand equity	0.74	

Also, due to the use of several questionnaires, in this study, exploratory factor analysis was used which all 34 questions had a load factor over 0.5 is that the questionnaire is approved. To do this research, used descriptive statistics (factor analysis, Cronbach's alpha, mean, tables, etc) to help software spss 20. And was used for the analysis of structural equation modeling (SEM) software by LISREL version 8.80.

3. Research Findings

Table 5 shows the demographic characteristics of the subjects. Of 805 subjects, 48% were male and 52% women, who were between 82% single and 18% married. The age

of the sample shows that 80% of study population between 21 and 30 years. The highest level of the education includes bachelor's degree as 49% and Master of Science with 35% .

Table 3. individual characteristics of research statistical subjects

variable	dimensions	frequency	percentage	variable	dimensions	frequency	percentage
gender	Female	419	0.52	Marital status	single	661	0.82
	male	385	0.48		married	135	0.18
age	Under 20	71	0.9	educations	AD	94	0.11
	21-25	450	0.56		BS	394	0.49
	26-30	198	0.24		MA	274	0.35
	Over 30	85	0.11		PhD	27	0.5

Figures 2, including 10 famous foreign Sports brand. For this question, respondents were asked to prefer foreign brands, (choose an option). And the questions to be answered based on choice of the brand. The results showed that all 805 people in the sample had used foreign brands and in Iranian brand of 556 people (69%) specified their choice. As in Figures 2 and 3 is specified in the foreign brands as Adidas and Nike own 72% of foreign brands. The charts below show the popularity of foreign brands from the perspective of students and graduates in physical education.

**Figure 2. The frequency and frequency selective Foreign brand**
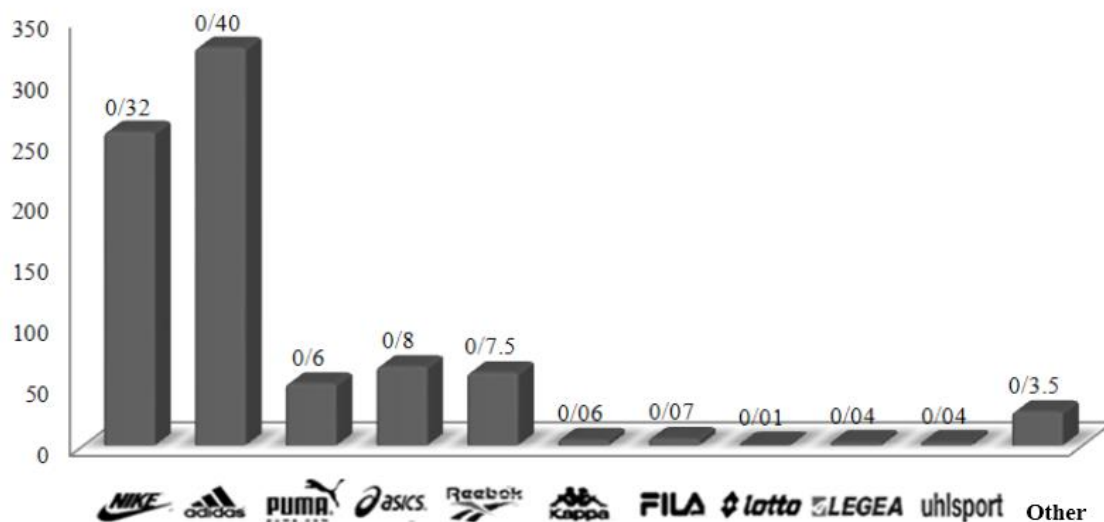
The structural equation analysis was used to test hypotheses. T standard significance level of this test coefficient is determined. If T standard is higher than 1.96, predicted level of 95% will be significant. According to the results, the relationship between sponsorship with brand awareness (0.22) and customer satisfaction (0.21) significantly, and the perceived quality (0.04) was not significant and therefore rejected. Also there was no significant relation between perceived quality and brand equity. Other hypotheses were confirmed with high confidence.

Table 4: results of research hypotheses test

	Research hypotheses	Impact rate	T	result
H1	sponsorship affects on Sports brands awareness	0.22	2.83	confirmed
H2	sponsorship affects on satisfaction about Sports brands	0.20	2.72	confirmed
H3	sponsorship affects on perceived quality of Sports brands	0.05	0.78	rejected
H4	perceived quality affects on satisfaction about Sports brands	0.73	13.22	confirmed
H5	perceived quality affects on the Sports brands equity	0.04	0.73	rejected
H6	awareness affects on satisfaction about Sports brands	0.97	20.63	confirmed
H7	awareness affects on the Sports brands equity	0.12	2.01	confirmed
H8	Satisfaction affects on brand loyalty to Sports brands	0.84	16.73	confirmed
H9	brand Loyalty affects on Sports brands equity	0.83	16.73	confirmed

According to the analysis presented in Figure 3, it can be understood that marketing through sponsorship of Sporting events and teams can not affect on perceived quality by customers, but it also impacts on brand equity indirectly and through creating awareness and customer satisfaction. Standardized regression weights of research model is shown in the following figure 2.

Figure 3. Structural Model Estimates
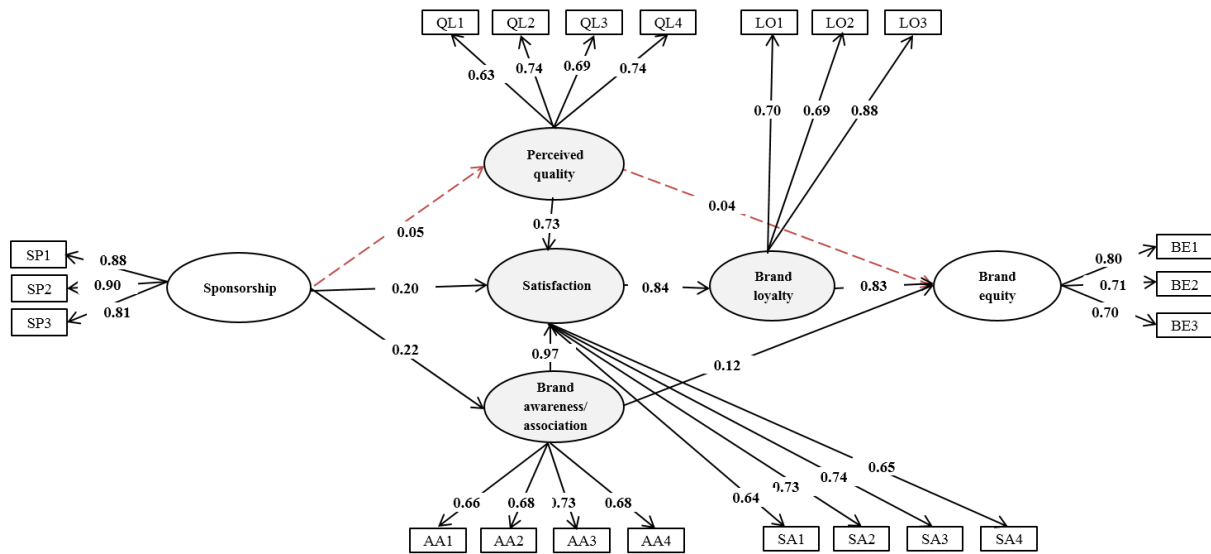
After determining models, acceptable indexes of model with obtained coefficients of research are mentioned in table 5.

Table 5. test for goodness of fit research

fit indices	χ2/df	RMSEA	RMR	AGFI	GFI	CFI	NNFI	NFI
acceptable	5<	0.1<	0.1<	0.9>	0.9>	0.9>	0.9>	0.9>
Value	3.72	0.052	0.082	0.90	0.93	0.96	0.96	0.94

According to the indices presented in Table 5, as it is observed for this model, index X^2 is less than 5 and is confirmed for model. The acceptable indices NFI, NNFI, CFI, IFI and GFI and AGFI are greater than 0.9, RMSEA and RMR are smaller than 0.8 confirmed the validity of this model.

In this study, it was observed that all the different variables can affect the ultimate of the brand equity and the affect impact of each variable is different. According to the coefficients obtained from the model, then the method for all paths is separated, the direct and indirect effects of each independent variable on the dependent variables were calculated.

Table 6: ranking effective variables on brand equity based in influence

rank	variable	Direct effect	Indirect effect	total effect
1	Brand loyalty	0.83		0.83
2	Brand awareness and association	0.12	0.68	0.80
3	satisfaction		0.70	0.70
4	Perceived quality	0.04	0.41	0.45
5	sponsorship		0.41	0.41

As it is observed, loyalty to other variables, the most impact on brand equity that for one unit change in the standard deviation of customer loyalty, in line with standard deviation of its brand equity changes 0.83. This is the direct effect. Then brand awareness with effect rate as 0.80 which affects on brand equity directly and indirectly. Satisfaction by an impact factor 0.70 effects on brand equity through customer loyalty indirectly. Perceived quality, which is in fourth place with the impact factor 0.45, affects on brand equity directly and indirectly. Then the Sponsorship that affect on brand equity indirectly with impact factor 0.41.

Interestingly, place of the dimensions of brand equity in the first category and according to the model, the elements of the marketing mix affect on ultimate brand equity and this shows the importance of these dimensions in creating brand equity.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study has been conducted aiming to examines the basic role Sponsorship on the development and enhancement of the brand equity. The results of structural equations analysis on suggestive model indicated that the model is good and acceptable and it can be used in future researches.

The results of structural equation model showed that the financial support in Sports with 0.41 affect rate indirectly and through raising awareness and brand association and increased customer satisfaction affects on loyalty and final brand equity. But had no significant effect on perceived quality. The result of the study is in line with Research Tong (2006), Areska (2012), Chun et al (2013), Hosseini and Mehrara (2013), Tufail et al (2014), Haider (2014) and Dehbini et al (2015). Today, supporting by large companies is considered as increasingly visible corporate marketing mix elements. Financial supports of athletes, teams and events are the most effective communication tools to build or enhance brand awareness and stimulate purchase of goods and cause customers become loyal customers (Tong and Hawley, 2009). Sport sponsorship

increases the possibility which a brand is set and consumer's choice about brand will be easier. So that they will opt out of habit. Therefore, the propaganda and advertising boost the brand awareness and attitudes and create satisfaction, and ultimately enhance brand equity. As well as financial support of the team or popular athlete makes the fans to be satisfied.

The important thing in this research is the placement of dimensions of brand equity in the first ranks of influence on brand equity and according to research model, sponsorship affect on brand equity so these dimensions in creating brand are considered important.

also, In this study it was found that the dimensions of brand equity are directly effective on brand equity, but at the same time brand loyalty is known as the most effective factor on brand equity. Brand loyalty leads the consumer to use a brand against unfamiliar brand and at time of buying, chooses a familiar brand which this increases value of branded product.

The results showed that after brand loyalty, brand awareness, both directly and indirectly through the creation of satisfaction leads to loyalty and, ultimately, brand equity is created, affects on brand equity respectively.

Promotional programs and sponsorship of teams and events, will increase the existence of a brand, which in turn, it will simplify choice by brand consumer. Distributive activities and the availability of brand goods, as well as shopping discounts and prizes which are given, cause to strengthen the brand awareness.

The third factor affecting on equity of the Sport brands is satisfaction of the customers from the perspective of students and graduates in physical education. The influence is completed indirectly through the creation of customer loyalty to the brand equity. The effect of satisfaction on loyalty is one of the most important studies in recent years. Some studies have shown that there is a direct relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty. This means that customers will remain loyal and satisfied customers who are unhappy select other vendors.

Perceived quality along other dimensions is the effective value of Sports brands and one of the major ways in which a Sport brand can be distinguished from its competitors. After delivery of goods to customers, they compare the value with expected product mentally, if the mentality of the goods equal or exceed customers' expectations, is the possibility of referring to the presentation of a brand in the future. This influence is conducted both directly and indirectly through the creation of customer satisfaction and loyalty and brand equity. In order to increase the perceived quality of the brand, the store image and Distribution intensity increase the perceived quality statistically. Product distribution in stores with favorable image, due to the positive attitude of customers to the stores and offered products, perceived quality of the brand is increased.

it is suggested to sportswear manufacturers, to design an attractive logo with titles and positive concepts and special attention to the improvement of the quality in their

competitive markets. Also, due to financial and human resource constraints, it is recommended that the allocation of resources and the development of branding strategies, Fear Do not have, for of costs supporting teams and Sporting events , which in turn increase brand equity and consequently increase the number buying of customers.

Finally it can be concluded that all elements in the model proposed in this study have the ability to influence brand equity. So, with studying the effectiveness of Sponsorship on brand equity, element that could be more effective in promoting brand can be recognized and in marketing strategies, these elements are emphasized and more resources allocated to them. On the other hand, recognizing the factors affecting on brand equity has increased the power of the company in the market and a result, financial performance of company will be increased.

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