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Received: 8/02/2023

Accepted 2023/06/15

Printed ISSN: 2352-989X

Online ISSN: 2602-6856

Sports sponsorship and the transcription of the brand's values

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ABSTRACT

Sponsorship is considered a crucial means of communication. It is a mutually beneficial partnership between a sponsored entity and the sponsor, it is considered as a means of communication that allows linking a brand, product or service with an event or an activity attractive to a given public, in order to achieve communication objectives.

The objective of our research is to understand the integration of sports sponsorship in the communication strategy of the IFRI company in order to improve its brand image. We choose the qualitative method in order to describe and analyze the impact of sports sponsorship on the brand image of the IFRI company. The results of the research showed that the choice of sports sponsorship is in line with the positioning of IFRI as a suitable brand design.

Keywords: Sports sponsorship; Targeting; The brand; Promotional actions; Sports event.

INTRODUCTION

Companies are tending to develop and diversify their means of communication and take advantage of changes in the environment. In fact, in addition to traditional media, the company relies on other means of communication, namely sponsorship. The practice of sponsorship by companies in various fields has become indispensable. In general, companies have understood that sponsoring is an effective means of achieving their objectives.

Sponsorship is a means of communication intimately linked to an event, in fact the message sought by sponsorship is the association with the event because the events are more and more numerous whether they are sporting, political, cultural, scientific, social or humanitarian, their mediation takes more and more a world extension by the number of written or audiovisual media. And companies have understood that sponsorship is an effective way to communicate their brands.

Sponsorship is one of the branches of marketing, which aims to associate a company, on the basis of a contract, with an event, a sports organization or an athlete. It is totally integrated into the communication of the company which, by this means, will try to associate its image with that conveyed by sport in order to increase its notoriety and visibility with the aim of developing its sales.

The world is evolving in a consumer economy where the consumer is faced with similar and identical products fulfilling the same functions, finding a competitive advantage in this situation is very difficult. This is why companies are trying to strengthen their brand relationship with consumers and therefore the creation of brand-consumer relationships have become very necessary to have an advantageous power.

Good branding highlights and conveys the uniqueness of a brand or company so that it is perceived favorably by the public. When properly applied, it ensures the consistency of the product and the company while allowing the latter to stand out in its market. And for this to happen, companies must create and master their brand image in order to favorably influence the perception of their privileged public. This requires a company to seek to differentiate itself from other brands by using different means and among these means the most used by the company is sports sponsorship.

The IFRI Company to be studied is an industrial and commercial company specializing in the production and marketing of a range of soft drinks, fruit drinks, milk drinks, etc., both on the national and international markets.

This company lives in a competitive environment because of new products on the market that try to influence the attitudes and behavior of its different audiences, in this situation IFRI must seek to communicate on its brand and its brand image in order to develop the perception among consumers and to differentiate itself from competitors by trying to find more appropriate ways to attract the attention of the public.

Sponsoring is a means of communication that consists of a company contributing to a social, cultural or sporting action. The latter is made up of three main approaches: the passionate approach, the opportunistic approach and the strategic approach. The latter allows for the real integration of sports sponsorship into the communication strategy, the marketing strategy and the general strategy of the company; the strategic communication approach considers sports sponsorship as a strategic element to talk about its brand and improve its image. We chose to adopt this approach because the nature of our topic requires this adoption, and we wanted to know if sports sponsorship develops a communicative approach in its sponsorship actions. In order to apply this approach, we focused on two strategies, communication and marketing, extracting concepts from the previous strategies such as positioning, promotional actions, advertising, press relations, budget and competition, and adapting them to our theme.

Our main concern in writing this paper is to answer the following main question:

Does the strategic approach allow the real integration of sports sponsorship in the communication strategy of the IFRI Company in order to improve its brand image?

From the main question derive three sub-questions which are the following:

- Does the choice of sports sponsorship fit in with IFRI's positioning for a proper brand design?
- Does the sports sponsorship operation go hand in hand with promotional actions, advertising and media relations for a correct development of the IFRI brand?
- Does the budget and target selection in sports sponsorship reflect a new field of competition?

The hypothesis is a provisional answer to the research problem, it predicts the relationship between two or more phenomena. It is an assumed answer to the original question. It is defined as "a provisional explanation of the nature of the relationship between two or more phenomena. The scientific hypothesis must be confirmed or invalidated by the facts". (GRAWITZ,2000, p. 211).

Our research aims to address the following hypotheses:

- The choice of sports sponsorship is in line with IFRI's corporate positioning for an appropriate brand design.

- The sports sponsorship operation is combined with promotional actions, advertising and media relations for a proper development of the IFRI brand.

- The budget and target selection in sports sponsorship reflect a new field of competition.

According to GRAWITZ Madeleine, "*the starting point of a science lies in man's willingness to use his reason to understand*" (GAWITZ, 1990, p. 17).

First of all, our main objective is to answer the main research question which aims to demonstrate the value of the strategic approach in integrating sports sponsorship into the communication strategy of the IFRI Company in order to improve its brand image. Better still, the central interest of this work is to :

- Whether sports sponsorship plays a role in the market positioning of the IFRI Company;

- Understand whether combining sports sponsorship with promotional activities can improve its brand image;

- Conceive the action of sports sponsorship as an effective way to compete.

We opted for the qualitative method. According to ANGERS Maurice "the qualitative method aims first of all to understand the phenomenon under study, it is a question of establishing the meaning of collected remarks or observed behavior" (FREYSSINET- DOMINJON, 1997, p. 64). Qualitative research is part of a comprehensive approach that favors intimate knowledge of a phenomenon, the explanation of cases and the wealth of data.

Our objective is to analyze and understand the basis of a phenomenon under study, the method we used is therefore the qualitative method, after

collecting the information necessary for our study, we proceeded to analyze it in relation to our research problem, this operation allowed us to describe and analyse the impact of sports sponsorship on the brand image of the IFRI company

According to GRAWITZ: "*Technique is a means to an end situated at the level of facts, of practical steps*". (Grawitz, 1996, p. 351).

Once the qualitative method proved to be the most appropriate for our topic, we used the semi-structured interview in our case study for an in-depth analysis. "The interview is used in social science with the aim of collecting verbal information from a face-to-face relationship between the interviewer and the respondent. (BOUDON, 2005, p. 86)

In order to carry out our study, we produced a semi-structured interview guide, which allows the managers interviewed to express their ideas and facilitates the use of the information collected in the analysis.

In the semi-directive interview the respondent will have to answer as directly as possible to precise questions (which are still quite broad); he/she must not deviate from the framework of each question nor associate freely according to this type of interview is, as its name indicates, halfway between the non-directive and the directive. In practice, a combination of these two forms is often used. The aim is to obtain information, but at the same time to verify, by means of questions, particular points related to certain pre-established assumptions. (AKTOUF, 1987, p. 89).

To this end, our interview guide has four main points:

- The first is dedicated to personal data;
- The second axis: the choice of sports sponsorship is in line with the positioning of the IFRI company for an appropriate design of the brand image;
- The third axis: the operation of sports sponsorship is associated with promotional actions, advertising and media relations for a correct development of the IFRI brand image;
- The fourth axis, dedicated to the budget and the selection of targets in the sports sponsorship action.

Sampling is "a statistical method that allows the construction of a reduced group of people in order to obtain a close knowledge (or estimate) of the characteristics of the population to be studied". (CAUMONT, 2007, p. 35). In

our study, we opted for typical sampling, i.e. "in the typical sample, the elements chosen to be part of the sample appear to be models of the population under study, we are looking for one or more elements that would be typical portraits of the population from which they come". (MAURICE, 1997, p. 237). This typical sampling choice in our research can be explained by the limited number of people specialized in sponsorship in the marketing and sales department of the IFRI Company.

CAUMONT defines sampling as "a technique that consists in selecting from a reference population a subset of elements-individuals or objects or even situations-that are supposed to present it" (CAUMONT, 2007, p. 237). (CAUMONT, 2007, p. 237) .

In the framework of our research work, which is focused on "Sponsorship and the transcription of brand values", the sample is of a typical type, we have distributed interviews to employees of the marketing and sales department, and which consists of eight (8) people. Knowing that in the language of the human sciences, the population is "a set of objects possessing the information desired to meet the objectives of a study". (MAURICE, 1997, p. 226).

In any scientific research, the researcher must first of all carry out a very important methodological step that of previous studies, as our case requires in order to have more knowledge and to know how our research topic has been interpreted before by other researchers. For our case, we found three studies, where each study shares a variable in common with our research theme. These studies helped us in the elaboration of our choice of methods, technique and theory.

Study N°1: Impact of branded sports sponsorship on the value of Tunisian companies (ZOUAOUI, 2013).

The main question of the study focuses on "the effect of sports brand sponsorship on the value of Tunisian companies". The objective of this earlier study is to find out whether the brand equity of a sponsoring brand positively influences the attitude of the Tunisian consumer towards a sports event. In addition to the Tunisian consumer's attitude towards the brand, and the brand equity factors that create value for the sponsor brand in Tunisia, and to highlight the action of sports sponsorship and its influence on increasing purchase intention in Tunisia. With the positive association (congruence) of the sports event and the sponsor brand trying to influence the behavior of the Tunisian consumer. Finally, the brand's sports sponsorship action influences the value of Tunisian companies.

Study N° 2: The impact of social networks on the brand image of a company. (ALLAL & NACERI, 2016).

The main question of the study focuses on "the influence of social networks on Djezzy's corporate image". The aim of the previous study is to find out whether social networks improve Djezzy's corporate image, and also to find out whether negative reactions from Internet users on the page damage Djezzy's corporate image.

Study N°3: The impact of brand image on consumer behavior in the wilaya of Bejaia (DJERROUD & Soumia, 2016).

The main question of the study focuses on "what is the influence of Activa's brand image on the behavior of consumers in the wilaya of Bejaia". From this central question, the following sub-questions arise:

- Do consumers in the wilaya of Bejaia perceive the Activia product brand?
- On which consumer behaviour variables does the Activia brand have an influence?
- Does Activa's brand image have an impact on the purchasing decision of consumers in the wilaya of Bejaia?

The aim of this research is to highlight the importance of brand image and its impact on consumer behavior and to determine the factors that play a favorable or unfavorable role in the purchase decision. This research: was not the result of chance but is justified by our strong motivation to deepen our theoretical knowledge on "the brand" acquired during our university course. This subject requires clarification in this area as it goes deep into consumer behavior.

2. Typology of sports sponsorship

2.1 The foundations of sports sponsorship

Sponsorship is a crucial means of communication. It is a mutually beneficial partnership between a sponsored entity and the sponsor. Sponsored entities can include groups or teams, events, etc. For the company, sponsorship has an objective to shape the company's image and raise its profile in the market; sponsorship is just one form of commercial stimulation.

The competition on the market is developed from year to year with new actors and innovations always more consequent. To stand out, a company must stand out from the crowd, either by proposing quality, innovative products on which it is the only one to position itself, or by communicating effectively about the brand and its products. To summarize this, we have defined corporate communication as "communication which designates all the actions of a company with a view to giving the best image of this company or this organization to access a certain notoriety, to know the products and activities of the organization in order to possibly develop it". (LAMIZET, 1997, p. 131).

Sponsorship is a communication technique with deep roots in Anglo-Saxon culture. This gave it its name and explains the cultural difficulties of a satisfactory translation into the French language. Contrary to popular belief, the technique is not a recent development, especially if we compare it to classic communication techniques such as public relations (AUVRAY & AGHATH, 2008, p. 7).

Sponsorship was born and developed in England, a country where the love of sport and the fascination of the general public with horses are essential elements of the tradition. This historical connection also explains why the definition of its activity is sometimes limited to sport. Once it is understood that sport is one of the manifestations of culture, of a people, a nation or a continent, it is necessary to admit that sponsoring and financing sports events or artistic activities such as painting exhibitions or theatrical tours. If the practice is not recent, we have observed however, from the thirties in the United States, the beginning of an extensive use of the term of sponsor; in a strictly commercial sense the American firms first financed the realization of radio missions in exchange for advertising on the air. They continued this activity with the television event, agreeing to finance most television programs. In Europe, a spectacular development of sponsorship was observed at the end of the seventies. In England, the average growth rate in recent years is estimated at 19%, with more than 300 firms engaged in this activity. The total

amount of expenditure associated with the development of sport is estimated at more than 500 million francs (AUVRAY & AGHATH, 2008, p. 7).

In Italy, the trend is even more favorable. In 1982, for the first time, commercial companies were allowed to finance the activities of football, which is, as we know, the most popular sport in this country. Faced with this situation, the Italian union of advertising agencies decided to create a commission with the aim of analyzing the spectacular development of sponsorship at national level (WESTPHALEN, 2011, p. 90). In France, the same general and favorable trend can be observed. The sponsorship expenditure was estimated at 200 million francs for 600 advertisers, present in sports events alone.

Sponsorship and patronage are two very different non-media communication tools. Patronage is non-profit and aims to strengthen the company's image, whereas sponsorship is for profit and aims to make money.

The company provides financial or material assistance to a cultural, humanitarian, social or scientific operation or to an activity of general interest, but in a discreet manner, without direct compensation. A sponsorship operation has no direct influence on the company's sales but gives a positive image of the company (MAHE, 1998, p. 265).

There are nine possible sponsorship objectives:

- creates experiences and stimulates emotions that are transferred from the sponsored event to the brand. Sponsorship creates a strong emotional connection between the brand and the audience. Advertising or the internet can then be used to recall the event and the emotions felt.

- Create or reinforce the perception of the attributes or benefits offered by the brand. The sponsored project generates mental associations that are reflected in the brand. For example, sailing is now a sport that is popular with companies because it evokes elegance, technological innovation, respect for the environment and teamwork;

- Associating the brand with a particular target market or lifestyle. It can target customers identified according to geographical, demographic, psycho-graphical or behavioral criteria depending on the projects chosen; (KOTLER, KELLER, & MANCEAU, 2012, p. 596).

- Expressing the company's commitment to causes of general interest. Organizing a party or event where the proceeds are donated to an association is socially responsible marketing.

- Strengthen the image of the company. Sponsorship is often institutional; it then focuses on the whole company and gives the feeling that it is prestigious, but also a responsible citizen.

- Increased awareness of the company or product sponsorship often gives language exposure to the product name, e.g. when advertising

visuals are present on a stadium visible on television, or when the event bears the company's name.

- Entertain important customers and reward employees. Event sponsorship allows you to invite customers or employees. They are delighted to attend a sports match, a cultural event, etc. It is often an opportunity for a privileged and friendly contract with key accounts, in a rational marketing perspective.

- Offer promotional opportunities to merchandisers. Promotions are often associated with sponsorship operations.

- Generated strong media coverage by giving journalists the opportunity to talk about the company or brand (KOTLER, KELLER, & MANCEAU, 2012, p. 599).

2.2 Sports sponsorship action

Sports sponsorship offers opportunities to support athletes, teams or sporting events. Gary Tribou considers sports sponsorship as: "a communication technique that aims to persuade the public attending a sports event of a link between this event (and/or a team or an individual involved in the event) and the communicating company, in order to get to know the company, its products and its brands and to reap the benefits in terms of image. (TRIBOU, 2000, p. 10).

According to TRIBOU, three types of sports sponsorship exist:

- ❖ Visibility or power sponsorship: to increase awareness and sales;
- ❖ Image sponsorship: aimed at affirming a brand identity;
- ❖ Relational sponsoring: sports hospitality, which is based on public relations and which is part of a commercial (trade sponsoring) or institutional (corporate, citizen sponsoring) logic (TRIBOU, 2000, p. 16).

Sports sponsorship can take different forms. Indeed, a brand can choose to position itself on a sportsperson, a team, an infrastructure or an event.

When an organization decides to become a sponsor, it needs to identify the appropriate areas in which to carry out sponsorship activities according to its desired objectives. In this sense, it is important to identify the categories of sports sponsorship.

Support from Sports Individuals: To be a source of sponsorship, sports individuals must possess certain characteristics. For example; attracting the attention of the target group, providing easy adoption of a product or brand and having a friendly, convincing and honest character. The supported athletes should not have bad habits such as alcohol, drugs and doping (DESBORDES, 2004, p. 71) . As a good example, we can cite Nike's sponsorship of Michael Jordan when marketing new shoes, Nike wanted a strong image in a competitive market. Nike supported the young sportsman who was not yet a professional. At the time, Nike had no idea how Mr. Jordan's career would develop, but the sponsorship was successful. In 1993, Nike was among the top three sellers of sports shoes in the United States (BASAT, 2015, p. 18).

-Support of a Sports Event: A sponsored institution can organize an event under the name of its sponsor (Heineken Cup, Sony Erickson Cup, Ambre Solaire Cup, IBM PC Cup, etc.). Supporting a sports event allows the sponsor to participate in national and international activities.

-Support for Sports Broadcasting: With the beginning of widespread television use in the 1950s, sports broadcasting emerged as an ideal medium for organizations seeking advertising revenue.

-Team sponsorship: Football is the most supported sport in team sponsorship. It is less risky to sponsor a team than a personality. There must be a consonance between the target group of the sponsors and the target group of the sponsored sports teams. The football matches that take place every week and their live transmission on television are effective in the recognition of sponsors. A team may have more than one sponsor from different areas. It is also possible for a sponsor to support several teams (DE PELSMACKER & GEUENS, 2001, p. 289).

3. The brand between evolution, signage and functions

3.1 Evolution and signage of the brand

A brand is distinguished by the fact that it is: a product is something that is manufactured usually in a factory; a brand is something that is purchased by the consumer, alongside that product. A product can be copied in every detail by a competitor, a brand is unique. A product can go out of date very quickly; a

brand is made to last forever. It is the product of salespeople and differentiates it from competitors" (LEHN, 2004, p. 3). (LEHN, 2004, p. 33).

The brand is likely to evolve according to four periods: (MICHON, 2003, p.91).

- The founding period: This is strongly associated with the product.

- The decoupling period: where the brand image is embedded in the consumer's memory.

- The period of entrenchment: where the brand becomes part of history and allows a passage from generation to generation.

- The spin-off (extension) period: when the brand is strong enough to spin off into other product categories and consumer universes compatible with the source identity

However, in order for the brand to move into the extension period, it needs to be separated from the product, as some components such as physicality, relationship or reflection are evolutionary and can change in the short term, while others such as culture, personality or mentality are enduring and can only be changed in the long term.

Brand signage is the set of signs that allow the brand to be recognised. The different senses of customers are used to attract their attention to the brand, to facilitate its identification and to signify its promises (SEMPRINI, 1992, p. 27).

3.2 The functions of the brand

Branding plays several roles with customers and companies. It is an essential tool for differentiation. It is an intangible asset that must be managed carefully. Brand functions for the company: These brand functions provide market power to the brand and enable it to adopt a long-term strategy (LAI, 2009, p. 51).

- Protective functions: Companies are only protected against counterfeiting and possible imitations if their trademarks are registered. For example, a product trademark that is not regularly registered does not confer any rights, even if it has been in use for a long time. This protective function of manufacturers' trademarks is becoming more important today because of the systematic strategy of imitation of trademarks adopted by some large retailers.

- Positioning function: the brand allows the company to position itself in

relation to its competitors and to make known to the market the distinctive qualities it claims for its product.

-Capitalization function: The brand constitutes an asset for the company, a capital that should be managed and which results from a set of perceptions felt by the customers and the signs emitted by the brand.

-The functions of the brand for the consumer: In addition to these three functions, which are useful for the seller, there are five others which are useful for the consumer (LAMBIN & MOERLOOSE, 2008, p. 398) .

-Guarantee function: the trademark is a signature which identifies and makes the manufacturer responsible in a lasting way; its function is to "reassure" the customer by guaranteeing or at least giving him the hope of a certain constancy of the characteristics and quality of the product sold.

- Locating function: the brand is a landmark that allows consumers to easily recognize the brand they are looking for, to use the information to guide their choices according to their needs.

- Practicality function: The brand is a practical way for the customer to memorize the characteristics of a product and to associate a name with it, it allows, in front of the shelf or in a catalogue, to instantly recognize a product and to reduce the time spent on the purchasing activity.

- Personalization function: The brand purchased can give an idea of the person's profile, both psychologically and socially. Brands therefore allow customers to express their difference, to make their originality, their value system and their personality known through the choices they make.

-Fun function: the fun function corresponds to the pleasure that a consumer can derive from his or her purchases: the variety, the profusion of choices offer a hedonic satisfaction that would perhaps disappear in a shop where the brands were absent. This satisfaction is linked to the aesthetics of the brand, its design and its communications. It is born of the familiarity and intimacy of the links to a brand that has been consumed for a time and that lasts (LAMBIN & MOERLOOSE, 2008, p. 399).

We have understood that the brand image influences the consumer's conception of the Company, and this is a key element that allows the Company to build its differentiation from the competition and the brand as we have understood, the brand generates benefits for any kind of company.

Table 1. Gender of respondents

Gender	workforce	Percentage
Female	3	37.5
Mal	5	62.5
Total	8	100

Source: Respondents of studies

The statistical data in the table above show that 62.5% of the respondents in our study population are male and 37.5% of the remaining respondents are female. This result can be interpreted by the nature of the work (commercial marketing) which is covered by men much more than women.

Table 2. University education

Training	workforce	Percentage
Marketing	4	50
TSS	1	12.50
Commercial	3	37.50
Total	8	100

Source: Respondents of studies

According to the data in this table, the most dominant university education is marketing education, which represents 50% of the study population, followed by commercial science education with a percentage of 37.50% and finally the lowest percentage of 12.50% which represents TSS education.

We could see that the majority of the respondents have a marketing background with a percentage of 50%, and this result seems logical to us, because the department of our study is that of marketing/commercial and for this reason the percentage is higher than other university courses.

Table 3. Responsibility in the IFRI Company

Responsibility held	Workforce	Percentage
Commercial assistant	1	12.50
Sponsorship and Events manager	1	12.50
Officer executive	2	25
Assistant in charge of Management and communication	1	12.50
Commercial and marketing manager	1	12.50
Operational marketing manager	1	12.50
Brand Manager	1	12.50
Total	8	100

Source: Respondents of studies

From this table we could notice that the most dominant responsibility in the marketing department is the officer executive position which represents 25%, followed by a similar percentage 12.50% which goes to the commercial assistant, sponsoring and events manager, assistant in charge of management and communication, commercial and marketing manager, operational marketing manager and we ended with the responsibility of brand manager of the responsibilities occupied within the marketing department. This can be explained by the nature of the work within the marketing department which requires collaboration between the different responsibilities involved in order to have a good functioning and a good counterpart.

Table 4. Length of service in the IFRI Company

Seniority	Workforce	Percentage
[7 Months- 3 years[3	37.50
[3 years – 4 years [1	12.50
[4 years- 7 years[1	12.50
[7 years – 16 years]	3	37.50
Total	8	100

Source: Respondents of studies

The table above shows the different categories of seniority of our respondents, from which we found that the two categories between 7 months -3 years and 7 years -16 years represent the categories that have more seniority in the marketing department mentioned by the percentage of 37.50%, followed by the two categories of 3 years - 4 years and 4 years -7 years, which have the same percentage of 12.50%.

We can mention that the IFRI Company attaches great importance to sports sponsorship, because of its role and positive impact on the constitution of the brand image and values that the company wishes to transmit to a large public. It also allows the company to make its brand and its products attractive to consumers, to improve its reputation and to affirm the positioning of the brand in the event.

In the light of question number seven: "How can sports sponsorship actions enable the IFRI Company to achieve a good positioning of the company in the Algerian market? One of our respondents answered with: *"Absolutely! Especially for the Mineral Water and AZRO ranges. Sport has been a real platform for these brands. If your favorite club or your favorite player drinks IFRI products, then you're definitely a convert to our brand. The composition of our mineral water and the AZRO formula are perfectly suited to the needs of the sportsman and the athlete.* In this respect, the first hypothesis entitled: "The choice of sports sponsorship is in line with the positioning of the IFRI Company for a suitable design of the brand image" is confirmed.

Sports sponsorship is considered to be a perfect tool for establishing a close relationship between the brand and the consumer. Indeed, it is a major element in the communication strategies of companies as it allows them to increase their notoriety and possibly improve their image. In the light of question number eight "Does the sports sponsorship action require promotional actions to improve the IFRI brand image? Why? The answer is that *"being a sponsor is not enough to win consumers. It turns out that we are not alone in this field, even if we are omnipresent, so the sponsorship activity must sometimes be combined with promotional actions such as product tastings, capable of convincing the consumer to opt for our products because of the organoleptic benefits and advantages"*, and the question: "How does advertising stimulate your company's sports sponsorship operations in order to improve IFRI's image? All the respondents answered: *"Sponsorship is the 5^{eme} vector of communication after Advertising, Promotions, Public Relations, Press and Sales Force. Its major advantage lies in its more direct, warm and invigorating language, which can be used by all the communication tools it uses. The more active these tools are, the greater the impact on the sporting public. The crowds are prepared, and the brand is remembered, so sponsorship capitalises and consolidates the brand image and awareness.* And question ten: What are the most coveted means of communication for the IFRI Company in sports sponsorship actions? Why? The majority of respondents answered: *"In sports sponsorship, IFRI has always favoured event-based communication. There are many examples, the most striking being competitions such as the Algerian Cup where IFRI sponsored the % and C and final of the Algerian Football Cup for three consecutive years. This allows us to mobilise attention on our existence, to humanise our image, to create an emotion and affinity with the public, and to gather a support. However, sponsoring sports clubs is also an important lever and means of communication in our sports sponsorship policy. The objective here is no longer to transfer the image to the products but to the company as an institution, it is clearly institutional communication.*

To this end, the second hypothesis entitled: "The sports sponsorship operation is combined with promotional actions, advertising and media relations for a correct development of the IFRI brand image" is confirmed.

We can state that sports sponsorship is a means of communication among others, and companies cannot neglect its important role in increasing their notoriety and their turnover.

In the light of axis number four (4), which encompasses a range of issues, the third hypothesis entitled: "Budget and target selection in sports sponsorship action reflect a new field of competition" is not confirmed.

4. CONCLUSION

In today's competitive environment, companies must make continuous efforts to retain their customers or at least their best customers. In order to succeed, companies can use loyalty strategies that allow them to develop closer ties with their customers in order to win them over and then retain them.

Nowadays, the consumer is becoming the focus and the resource to be preserved and retained within the company. Companies stand out when they sponsor a sporting event by associating values with it. This appears to be a successful strategy as it enhances the company's brand image.

The Algerian market has experienced saturation in the field of water and various beverages, as such companies must find the best way to distinguish themselves from competitors and improve their brand image in the public eye. The IFRI Company occupies a leading position in the water market, the customer relationship is an opportunity for it to keep its customers in the long term, and draw maximum profit.

The aim of this research was to provide a better understanding of the influence of sports sponsorship in improving the brand image of the IFRI Company, and to understand how the latter integrates it into its communication strategy, and to evaluate the effectiveness of sports sponsorship in improving the company's brand image. Then to be able to measure the validity of our hypotheses at the beginning, in order to confirm them operationally in the field and to know if the strategic approach allows the real integration of sports sponsorship in the communication strategy of the IFRI company in order to improve its brand image.

Following the responses of the respondents, we found that the first hypothesis, which stipulates that sports sponsorship, occupies an important place within the IFRI Company, given its importance in improving its brand image. For the second hypothesis, sports sponsorship has a capital role in the positioning of the company, but given the fierce competition installed in the Algerian market, the IFRI Company has resorted to other promotional actions

to better position itself. And for the last hypothesis, although sports sponsorship has an impact on the improvement of IFRI's brand image, it remains a means among other non-media communication processes.

After analyzing the results we were able to identify answers to the questions posed in the problematic and to examine the proposed hypotheses as follows:

- In view of the answer to the 7^{me} question of the first Axis, our first hypothesis concerning the choice of sports sponsorship in line with the positioning of the IFRI company for a suitable design of the brand image can be confirmed;

- For the second hypothesis we confirmed that the sports sponsorship operation is associated with promotional actions, advertising and media relations for a correct development of the IFRI brand, according to questions 8, 9 and 10 of the second Axis;

- On the other hand, we have invalidated the third hypothesis, which concerns the budget and the selection of targets in the sports sponsorship action, which reflect a new field of competition and according to the following questions 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21.

Through the confirmation of the first hypothesis and the invalidation

Of the third hypothesis of our research, we have come to the end of answering our main question: "*Does the strategic approach allow for the real integration of sports sponsorship in the communication strategy of the company SARL Ibrahim IFRI in order to improve its brand image?*" The answer we gave was to confirm the integration of sports sponsorship in the communication strategy of the company SARL Ibrahim IFRI, which was underlined by the respondents of our research in question number 14 of axis N II, and we explained and interpreted the data that reflect this integration.

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6. Appendices

AXIS I: Identification sheet :

1. Gender of respondents;
2. University education;
3. Position or responsibilities held in the company IFRI ;
4. Seniority in the company IFRI

AXIS II: The choice of sports sponsorship is in line with the positioning of the IFRI Company for an appropriate design of the brand image.

5. What is sports sponsorship for you?
6. Why do you choose sports sponsorship?
7. Can you describe the evolution of the sponsorship activities, indicating when IFRI started to sponsor sports events?
8. Does IFRI sponsor other events? Which ones?
9. How do you identify the objectives of the sports sponsorship adopted by IFRI?
10. Does IFRI sponsor other sectors besides sports?
11. How can sports sponsorship actions allow IFRI to position itself on the Algerian market?

AXIS III: The sports sponsorship operation is associated with promotional actions, advertising and media relations for a correct development of the IFRI brand.

12. Does the sports sponsorship action require promotional actions to improve the IFRI brand image?
13. How does advertising stimulate your company's sports sponsorship operations to improve IFRI's image?
14. Name the means of communication most coveted by the IFRI company in its sports sponsorship actions and why?
15. How does sports sponsorship positively influence the affective dimension of attitudes towards the IFRI brand?
16. How would you describe sports sponsorship as a means of improving your company's brand image?
17. How does sports sponsorship enhance your company's brand image?
18. How do you integrate sports sponsorship into your company's communication approach?

AXIS IV: Budget and target selection in sports sponsorship reflect a new field of competition.

19. Is there a tangible return on your company's investment in sports sponsorship?
20. Could you identify the budgetary estimates allocated to sports sponsorship actions?
21. Tell us about the change you have detected after the sports events your company has sponsored?
22. How do you go about identifying the target audience for your sponsorship activities?
23. How can sports sponsorship be a competitive advantage for your company?
24. How do sports sponsors accelerate the visibility of the IFRI brand?
25. How do you measure the impact of sports sponsorship?