What Drives Sponsorship Effectiveness? An Examination of the Roles of Brand Community Identification, Brand Authenticity and Sponsor-Club Congruence

Abstract

This research examines the influence of brand community identification on three measures of sponsorship effectiveness — brand advocacy, purchase intention, and sponsor-brand choice. Additionally, we investigate the psychological mechanism and the moderators between brand community identification and sponsorship outcomes. We collected data from members of two brand communities, across four experiments (2×2 between-subject designs), during soccer league events. Our findings demonstrate that brand community identification increased brand advocacy and purchase intention. It shows a novel psychological mechanism (brand community engagement) between brand community identification and brand advocacy; both brand authenticity and sponsor-club congruence serve as boundary conditions. Counter-intuitively, our study revealed that both high-congruent and low-congruent sponsor brands could be effective, depending on consumers' identification with the brand community. Our research makes several meaningful theoretical and practical contributions. Sports clubs and sponsors must cultivate consumers' identification with the club's brand community, which offers two-fold benefits; it leads to greater effectiveness, measured in terms of club brand engagement and sponsor-brand advocacy. Moreover, our research demonstrates that consumers, regardless of their identification with the brand community, will stop supporting a sponsor-brand if they perceive it as less authentic.

Introduction

Sponsorship has emerged as a better marketing communication tool than advertising (Cornwell, 2008), particularly in the case of events, owing to the increased globalization and reach of sporting activities. The sports sponsorship market size was valued at USD 54.20 Billion in 2018 and is projected to reach USD 88.66 Billion by 2026 (Verifiedmarketresearch.com, 2021). Companies employ sponsorships to increase brand awareness (Herrmann et al., 2016), improve brand image (Carrillat, Solomon & d'Astous, 2015), enhance brand loyalty (Mazodier & Merunka, 2012), and foster customer engagement (Buser et al., 2020). Wakefield et al. (2020) defines *sponsorship* as "a series of exchanges between brands, sponsored properties, and consumers for contracted periods, driven by brands' use of sponsored properties' communication assets, to influence consumer thoughts, feelings, and actions toward multiple, dynamic marketing objectives for brands and properties" (p.323). These authors argue that the role of "consumers" has been downplayed in ascertaining sponsorship effectiveness and thus must be examined. We respond to this call and examine how brand communities influence sponsorship effectiveness. Prior research asserts that brand communities are crucial stakeholders in value creation process for the brands (e.g., Roy Bhattacharjee et al., 2021). Brands employ sponsorship to connect with brand communities so that they can capitalize on their passion (Buser et al., 2020).

A brand community of a club comprises a group of consumers with a typical fervor for a club brand and who indulge in collective actions to demonstrate their affinity for the club (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006). Recent research by mycustomer.com suggests that 86% of the Fortune 500 companies surveyed report that brand communities provide insight into customer needs. Such brand communities provide innovative solutions (Schau et al., 2009) and aid value cocreation (Grohs et al., 2020). Particularly during pandemic, brands attempted to leverage the power of

brand communities in their marketing communications (Mills et al., 2022). Moreover, consumers often consider themselves a part of a brand community due to a feeling of oneness with the community, a condition referred to as brand community identification. This brand community identification propels consumers to engage with the brand community (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Yoshida et al., 2015), develop commitment and loyalty to the community (Woisetschläger et al., 2008; Zhou et al., 2012; Hung, 2014; Demiray & Burnaz, 2019). It also results in the development of emotional brand attachment (Chang et al., 2019) and attitudinal and behavioral brand loyalty (Marzocchi et al., 2011; Nørskov et al., 2016; Confente & Kucharska, 2020). However, whether such identification with a brand community and engagement practices benefit the focal brand's sponsors remain underexplored in extant literature (See Table 1). In one such study, Alonso Dos Santos et al. (2016) attempted to understand the impact of brand community identification on consumers' attitudes towards the club's sponsors and found a positive relationship between the same. However, that study is limited to understanding the development of a consumer's attitude towards the club's sponsors. In this study, we focus on understanding how brand community members' identification with a club brand community influences their sponsor support decisions in the form of sponsor-brand advocacy, purchase intention, and actual purchase behavior through the mechanism of engagement. Our research outcomes, we argue, will offer key insights to brand managers on conceptualizing, designing and managing sponsorship programs effectively.

[Insert Table 1 here]

Wakefield et al. (2020) emphasized the need to explore factors interconnecting consumer, brand, and sponsorship properties such as sports clubs that can impact sponsorship effectiveness. This study addresses these concerns by investigating two factors, such as sponsor-brand authenticity (consumer–brand factor) and sponsor–club brand congruence (consumer–property

factor), which play central roles in sponsorship effectiveness. Faced with ever increasing sponsorship clutter (Boeuf et al., 2018), sometimes with real claims and often with exaggerated promises, consumers look for genuine and trustworthy brands (Morhart et al., 2015). This need for authenticity is not only real and practical, it also resonates with Cornwell's (2019) recent claim that sponsor-brand authenticity is the cornerstone of sponsorship engagement. That is, consumers care about the real motives of a sponsoring brand (Cornwell, 2019). A brand that deploys sponsorship to fulfill its own business objectives and financial goals without any consideration for the property appears self-centered; consequently, consumers evaluate such sponsor brands negatively (Woisetschläger, Backhaus, & Cornwell 2017; Cornwell & Kwon, 2020). Moreover, recent studies (Cornwell, 2019; Cornwell & Kwon, 2020) have called for a deeper understanding of how consumers perceive and evaluate the authenticity of sponsor brands. Our research seeks to uncover this by examining whether sponsor-brand authenticity serves as a boundary condition to the relationship between brand community identification and sponsorship effectiveness.

Furthermore, most studies primarily deal with the congruence between a sponsor-brand and a sporting event (Carrillat & Grohs, 2019). In contrast, very few studies have examined the moderating effect of sponsor brand–club brand congruence on the relationship between brand community identification and sponsorship effectiveness. Perceived congruence is the consumer's perception of similarity between the sponsor and the sponsored entity, such as a sports club or an event, based on functional attributes, image, or a natural connection (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). One stream of research demonstrates that congruence between the sponsor and the sponsored entity positively influences sponsorship outcomes (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). Another stream argues that even low congruence can lead to desirable sponsorship outcomes

(Madrigal & King, 2017). As there is no unanimity over the impact of congruence on outcomes, it is a worthwhile study, especially in the context of the sports club brand and its sponsor.

In sum, we contribute to the sponsorship literature in multiple ways. First, we respond to recent calls by Wakefield et al. (2020) for more research in sponsorship. Specifically, we uncover consumer-level drivers, such as brand community identification of sponsorship effectiveness, in a sports club brand context. In doing so, this research endeavors to marry the field of brand communities with sponsorship literature. Second, this research demonstrates that brand community identification influences advocacy, purchase intention and sponsor-brand choice. Additionally, we show a novel psychological mechanism (club brand community engagement) that underlies the impact of brand community identification on sponsorship outcomes. Third, we show two boundary conditions for the above main effect; sponsor-brand authenticity and sponsor–club brand congruence serve as the two boundary conditions for the relationship between brand community identification and brand advocacy, purchase intention, and sponsor-brand choice. Fourth, we offer several key insights for managers. Brand managers must focus on developing brand authenticity because this can enhance sponsorship effectiveness, while they can survive a low sponsor-club brand congruence. Fifth, we conduct four experiments to understand drivers of sponsorship outcomes and effectiveness. We designed the experiments in a natural setting (unlike a lab experiment) by exposing consumers to both fictitious and real sponsors, thus enhancing internal and external validity. In study 4, we have moved beyond measuring only intentions; we have captured real behavior of consumers. Furthermore, we conduct multiple studies to corroborate our findings and increase the generalizability of our implications.

Theoretical Background

Understanding the dynamics of a brand community

A *brand community* is defined as "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 412). Members of a brand community are fully committed to the brand's success because they love and care about it (Algesheimer et al., 2005). Moreover, they share a social identity, a sense of collective interest and passion for a specific brand (Algesheimer et al., 2005), and exhibit a shared consciousness of kind, rituals, traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). They help the brand with new product adoption (Gruner et al., 2014), value creation (Schau et al., 2009), providing innovative solutions (Füller et al., 2008), spreading positive word-of-mouth (WOM) (Demiray & Burnaz, 2019), and increasing the brand's customer base (Wirtz et al., 2013). They oppose any negative information about the brand and instead, stick with it in times of crisis (Yuan et al., 2020). Moreover, because of the ever-increasing commercial clutter, marketers focus on brand communities to foster customer relationship management and enhance effectiveness of marketing programs (Roy Bhattacharjee et al., 2021).

Social identity entails feelings of belongingness to a social group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), one of the essential characteristics of brand community members, namely the consciousness of kind (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). The shared consciousness of kind is the deliberate acknowledgement of brand community members that they are a part of a larger community based on their affection for a specific brand. While members of a brand community have a sense of social connectedness among them, they differ from "out-group members", which represents the rival brand communities (Thompson & Sinha, 2008). The social connectedness of the members is based on shared values

and beliefs that are explicitly distinguishable from that of non-members and are displayed using rituals and traditions (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). The rituals and traditions uphold the community's norms and beliefs. Members of the community endeavor to keep the traditions alive as part of their moral obligations to the community. They take on the responsibility of defending the community and its members while actively promoting their community (McAlexander et al., 2002). Due to the social disposition of the brand community, this research utilizes social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) as its theoretical foundation. We draw on this theory to understand how brand community members identify and engage with a brand community, that in turn, drives sponsorship effectiveness.

Social Identity Theory

According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), an individual's self-concept is divided into two distinct categories: personal identity (how an individual perceives oneself) and social identity (the perceived group memberships that the individual shares). In other words, individuals uphold and cultivate both a personal and collective identity, referred to as social identity. Social identity is anchored on social categorization, which entails that people are represented not only as individuals but also as members of specific social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social identity embodies how an individual collectively defines himself as a member of a social aggregate (Zheng et al., 2021). Based on the tenets of social identity theory, Mael and Ashforth (1992) define *social identification* as "the perception of oneness with or belongingness to some human aggregate" (p.21). An individual's sense of identification with a group is defined by his or her shared identity with other group members (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). It is the individual's cognition and affect that influence their identification with the social group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), such that they

recognize themselves as members of a group and thus develop a strong emotional bond with it (Dutot, 2020).

Individuals categorize themselves into different social strata in order to define themselves within a social setting. Such individuals believe that they have similarities with other members of the same social group but differ considerably from those outside the group (Turner, 1975). This sense of belongingness to a group is attributed to certain emotional values meaningful to the individual (Katz et al., 2020). Such individuals who identify as members of a social group hold more favorable opinions of the group's characteristics when compared to other groups, culminating in in-group bias (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Lin & Bruning, 2020). Extant research indicates that social identity influences people's preferences and behavior considerably (Zheng et al., 2021), because of which they think and act in ways that are consistent with the group's values. For example, individuals are more likely to form favorable attitudes towards individuals within their group (i.e., in-group members) than those outside their group (i.e., outgroup members; Thompson & Sinha, 2008; Demirel et al., 2018). A brand community comprises members who have a social identification with a community and who additionally share a passion for a specific brand (Algesheimer et al., 2005). Social identity involves belongingness to a social group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which captures one of the critical aspects of a brand community, namely the consciousness of kind. Thus, we employ social identity theory in this research to understand how consumers who identify with a brand community engage with the brand community and respond to the brand's sponsors.

Hypothesis Development

Club brand community identification and sponsor support decisions

Drawing on social identity theory, club *brand community identification* is defined as a condition whereby a "person sees himself or herself as a member of or feels a 'sense of belongingness' to a community" (Algesheimer et al., 2005, p.20). Club brand community identification results from the shared values and collective experiences that one derives from the club brand's community (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006) and one's close relationship with the club (Algesheimer et al., 2005). Identification is one of the vital routes to social influence. Consumers who identify with a social group are more likely to be influenced by the group (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006). By social identification, the club brand becomes an essential element for an individual's self-concept, and the sponsor-brand that supports the club brand can be perceived as an in-group member (Demirel et al., 2018). Thus, club brand community members could consider sponsors an integral part of the club brand or "in-group" members (Na, Su, & Kunkel, 2019). Due to this in-group bias, they support the sponsor brands besides augmenting their membership in the group (Dreisbach et al., 2021). Therefore, we argue that brand community members who identify with a club brand community would advocate for the sponsor-brand of the club and exhibit purchase intention and choose the sponsor-brands amongst all other brands. We reason that they devote considerable time and resources to club-related products and services, and buy season tickets irrespective of their performance (Katz et al., 2020) and therefore, tend to favor the sponsor brands. Therefore, when consumers are exposed many brands in a real-life purchase situation, their club brand community identification propel them to choose the sponsor-brands amongst all other brands.

Consumers co-create value through their communion with brands (Schau et al., 2009), exhibited in various forms, such as brand advocacy. Consumers become "brand advocates" when they are committed to, emotionally intertwined, and psychologically unified with the brand (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). This is because consumers who identify with a club brand community become psychologically connected with the brand and its community, and such a strong identification stimulates behaviors that support the group's norms and interests (Brodie et al., 2013). We argue that club brand community members will develop positive attitude towards sponsors as they increasingly identify with a club brand community. Moreover, club brand community members are likely to indicate their purchase intention and choose to buy the sponsor-brand that can offer them similar brand experience recognized by the entire club brand community (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006). The purchase of the sponsor-brand could signify club brand community members' identification, commitment, and affection for the club brand. Therefore, by purchasing the sponsored products, consumers maintain their social identities with the club brand community, foster a sense of communion with the club brand community, and portray their commitment toward the club brand. Thus, we posit the following hypotheses:

H1: *Club brand community identification increases (a) sponsor-brand advocacy (b) purchase intention, and (c) sponsor-brand choice.*

Club brand community identification and club brand community engagement

Brand community identification manifests when members of a brand community perceive that their own goals align with those of other community members and when they can define their self-identities in relation to those of other community members (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012;

Confente & Kucharska, 2020). Social identity is predominantly characterized by a feeling of belongingness to a group (Bhattacharya et al.,1995) and is therefore inextricably linked to one of the most crucial aspects of brand communities, namely consciousness of kind (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Thus, members maintain a cohesion and exhibit solidarity with the community; at the same time, they exhibit a collective sense of disagreement from others who are not members of the community (Zhou et al., 2012). Such categorization and alignment of self-orientation with that of the group identity results in consumers' engagement with the brand community (Bhattacharya & Sen 2003; Mandl & Hogreve, 2018; Demiray & Burnaz, 2019). Moreover, when members identify with the brand community, they are in harmony with the community's goals, norms, customs, and rituals, fostering kinship among members, thereby leading to community engagement (Algesheimer et al., 2005).

According to Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), membership in a brand community instils a sense of responsibility towards the group and its members, which can result in the occurrence of helpful behaviors among brand community members. *Brand community engagement* (BCE) is defined as "the consumer's intrinsic motivation to interact and cooperate with community members" (Algesheimer et al., 2005, p.21). Members who identify with the brand community are more likely to engage in activities that benefit the entire community rather than get involved in self-interested pursuits (McAlexander et al, 2002; Hung, 2014). Owing to a sense of oneness with the community, members tend to maintain a relationship with the community (Hung, 2014). Such maintenance of relationships involves collective participation and involvement, which could enhance engagement. Therefore, we posit the following hypothesis:

H2: *Club brand community identification increases club brand community engagement.*

Mediation of club brand community engagement

Brand community identification drives the engagement of community members within the community and with the brand (Algesheimer et al., 2005); it involves voluntary customer-to-customer helping, intrinsic motivation to interact, and cooperation among members (Yuan et al., 2020). When community members identify with a brand community, they share values and collective experiences (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006) that push them to engage with the community. These engaged brand community members, in turn, are more likely to support the club brand to share their meaningful personal experiences (Algesheimer et al., 2005). Besides supporting the club brand, engaged brand community members might advocate for and develop purchase intentions for the sponsors of the club brand. Highly engaged brand community members positively reciprocate to the sponsor brand's support to their club; they exhibit it through patronage behavior, such as choice of sponsor-brands in a real-life purchase situation. Indeed, when they are exposed to several alternative brands to purchase, highly engaged community members choose the sponsor-brand to showcase their solidarity with the club brand (Pradhan et al., 2020). Brand community members consider sponsor brands as "in-group" members because they sponsor the club brand's merchandise, energy drinks, and fitness equipment (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Demirel et al., 2018). According to social identity theory, individuals are more likely to have favorable opinions of the entity, when they consider that entity an "in-group" member (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). They will likely support the "in-group" sponsors to show their kinship to the entire brand community (Pradhan et al., 2020). Furthermore, such sponsorship activities can elicit a sense of gratitude toward the sponsor-brand among members of the brand

community, motivating them reciprocate (Kim et al., 2020; Palmatier et al., 2009). That is, brand community members feel valued and obligated to repay the benefit in a certain way, when they perceive that their club brand has benefited from sponsorship activities (Bock et al., 2021). Thus, we argue that they would reciprocate through their sponsor support decisions, including advocating for and developing purchase intentions for the sponsor brand that finally translates to the choice of sponsor-brand in an actual purchase situation. Hence, we advance the following hypotheses.

H3: *Club brand community engagement mediates the impact of club brand community identification on (a) sponsor-brand advocacy (b) purchase intention, and (c) sponsor-brand choice.*

Moderation by brand authenticity

In an era of increasing commercialization in sports sponsorship, consumers' perceptions of the authenticity of sponsor brands have become paramount (Cornwell & Kwon, 2020). Consumers' perceived brand authenticity is "the extent to which consumers perceive a brand to be faithful towards itself (continuity), true to its consumers (credibility), motivated by caring and responsibility (integrity), and able to support consumers in being true to themselves (symbolism)" (Morhart et al., 2015, p.203). An authentic brand is characterized by a strong heritage, credibility, integrity, and symbolism (Morhart et al., 2015). Drawing on Morhart et al. (2015), we assert that sponsor-brand authenticity is the degree to which members of a brand community perceive the sponsor-brand to be faithful, symbolic, and honest, rather than motivated solely by financial considerations. That is, the brand community members will consider a sponsor-brand authentic if it has a long history of honesty and integrity, demonstrates character and has a reputation for

sticking to its responsibilities, or embodies values with which they can identify. Typically, brand community members engage in sharing and recollecting brand memories and nurturing brand meanings and real identities (Leigh et al., 2006). Therefore, when brand community members who identify with the brand community perceive the sponsor brands to be authentic, their positive response towards the sponsor-brand would be stronger. Some past studies have examined moderating role of brand authenticity; they note that when consumers perceive a brand to be authentic, it positively influences their relationship with the brand, increasing their purchase intentions, willingness to pay premium prices, and forgive even in the presence of a scandal (Guèvremont & Grohmann, 2018; Schonberner & Woratschek, 2022). Consumers prefer a brand that is timeless, intends to be credible in its offerings, is committed to strong values, and embodies customer identity creation (Nunes et al., 2021). Therefore, consumers who identify with the brand community would advocate more and exhibit stronger purchase intention (Morhart et al., 2015). Moreover, consumers' community identification drives them to choose sponsor-brand out of several other alternatives if they are ensured of brand authenticity. This is because authentic brands are timeless, symbolize their community belief, and considered as an "in-group" member (Wallace et al., 2012). Hence, they increasingly deem it a part of their self-identities.

On the other hand, even in a high club brand identification condition, brand community members will become skeptical and thus negatively evaluate the sponsor-brand if they perceive that the brand has self-serving motives. A sponsor-brand may be sincerely motivated to support a club brand in order to help it achieve its goals along with pursuing its own commercial objectives; or it may be motivated by purely sponsor brand-specific commercial goals with no genuine intentions to support the club (Demirel et al., 2018). Previous research indicates that consumers evaluate non

- commercial interests more favorably than commercially oriented exchanges because the former convey feelings of sincerity about the sponsor brand (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006; Pontes et al., 2021). Hence, we propose the following hypotheses.

H4: *High (low) sponsor-brand authenticity accentuates (attenuates) the influence of brand community identification on (a) sponsor-brand advocacy (b) purchase intention, and (c) sponsor-brand choice.*

Moderation by sponsor-club brand congruence

Numerous studies in sponsorship context have examined the fan-brand congruence and consumer-brand congruence as an antecedent to sponsor brand attitude and purchase intentions (Pradhan et al., 2020; Calabuig et al., 2021). However, not many have investigated the role of sponsor-club brand congruence on club community members' sponsor-brand support decisions. We theorize that community members' sponsor support decision is contingent upon sponsor-club brand congruence. We conceptualize sponsor-club brand congruence as the club community members' perceived similarity between the image of club brand and sponsor brand (Pradhan et al., 2020). Congruence builds clarity in club community members' minds (Pradhan et al., 2020) and enhances their memory (Cornwell & Humphreys, 2013). Sponsor-brands that are highly congruent with club seem less annoying and more acceptable (Calabuig et al., 2021). Members with higher community identification feel more comfortable and pleased with high sponsor-club brand congruence as it contributes to their social identity derived from community participation (Tseng & Wang, 2023). Therefore, members with community identification show enhanced sponsor-brand support when they perceive high sponsor-club brand congruence because it reconciles easily with their pre-

existing schemas and consequently, facilitates smooth information processing (Vermeir et al., 2014). Conversely, less congruent sponsorship linkages between the sponsor and the club are inconsistent with consumer expectations, leading to ignorance and bewilderment (Jensen & Cornwell, 2017). Hence, it can create confusion and suspicion about the sponsor brand's motives in the minds of brand community members. Furthermore, incongruent information is challenging to synthesize, thus causing cognitive dissonance (Germelmann et al., 2020). It builds frustration, negative responses, and low brand recognition (Cornwell & Humphreys, 2013). Consumers take time to justify the association, which negatively influences their responses (Germelmann et al., 2020). Therefore, when exposed to the low-congruent sponsor brands, the brand community members identifying with the club might make decisions unfavorable to the sponsor. Brand community members identifying with the club exhibit higher brand advocacy, purchase intentions, and sponsor brand choice when they perceive that the sponsor brands is congruent with the club. We assert that members with brand community identification are engrossed with brands that have similar symbolic image to their own identity (Vermeir et al., 2014). Therefore, they would purchase those brands that satisfy their desires (Calabuig et al., 2021), in consonance with their community identification. This is because perceptions of congruence are fluently established in the memory, both cognitively and affectively (Germelmann et al., 2020). Hence, we advance following hypotheses.

H5: *High (low) sponsor-club brand congruence accentuates (attenuates) the influence of club brand community identification on (a) sponsor-brand advocacy (b) purchase intention, and (c) sponsor-brand choice.*

Empirical Research

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The current research conducts four experiments to test the proposed theoretical framework. For data collection, we selected The Indian Super League (ISL), the national football league in India where eleven sport clubs participate. For studies 1,2, and 3, the sampling frame includes the brand community members of Jamshedpur football club's (FC's) brand, competing in the ISL. The clubs are reputed and managed professionally as brands, which attract sponsors across industries. The brand community for Jamshedpur FC is known as 'The Red Miners', which shows its presence in the stadiums for the club's matches and across social media. The office of 'The Red Miners' reports more than six thousand registered community members. We conducted studies on the home matches of Jamshedpur FC at the stadiums an hour before the commencement of the matches. As the first three studies were conducted on the members of 'The Red Miners' community, we carefully ensured non-repetition of respondents in any two studies. Subsequently, a comprehensive study was carried out with a sampling frame that included the community members of Manchester United F.C., a professional football club based in United Kingdom. In studies, 1,2 and 3, we measured two outcomes of sponsorship — brand advocacy and purchase intention. In study 4, we measured the brand choice behavior of the consumers. The theoretical framework of our research study is presented in Figure 1.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Study 1: Impact of club brand community identification on sponsor support decisions

We conducted this study to examine our proposed model. The prime objective was to investigate whether club brand community identification affected community members' sponsor support decisions, such as brand advocacy and purchase intentions.

Participants

Ninety-one participants (41% female, average age = 24.02 years) were recruited from the members of the club brand community of Jamshedpur FC during an ongoing sporting event. The participants received specific club merchandise worth US$ 2.4 as a gift on completing the study. The brand community of Jamshedpur FC comprises 6000 active members who engage in supporting the club on and off the field. We instructed those grouped in the high identification condition to view themselves as being involved and similar to other members of the club brand community. We adapted the manipulation of club brand community identification from Blader (2007) as an essay writing task. The instructions for the essay writing task are provided in Appendix A.

Procedure and measures

We randomly exposed the participants to one of the essay writing tasks. After the essay writing task, we measured perceived club brand community identification with a 10-point scale adapted from Algesheimer et al. (2005), which served as a manipulation check. We wanted to ensure that our manipulation does not impact participants' community belongingness, which might confound the results and act as an alternate explanation to our outcome. Therefore, we measured participants' community belongingness (Kitchen, Williams, & Chowhan, 2012). Subsequently, we asked the participants to assess their purchase intentions of the sponsor-brand (Yoo & Donthu, 2001). We also asked them to assess their intentions to advocate the sponsor-brand by adapting a Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012) scale. We assessed all items on a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree). Lastly, we asked demographic questions to assess the participant's background.

Analysis and results

The study confirmed that the manipulations of club brand community identification via essay writing task were successful. The perceived club brand community identification was significantly greater for the high club brand community identification condition (M=9.75, SD = 0.32) than for the low club brand community identification condition (M=7.58, SD = 1.19; $F_{(1,89)}$ =141.09, p<0.01). The results also provided preliminary support that the club brand community identification significantly predicted the community members' sponsor support decisions such as brand advocacy and purchase intentions. We tested the main effects using one-way ANOVA. The results of the one-way ANOVA indicated that the main effect of club brand community identification on sponsor-brand advocacy indicated a significant effect ($F_{(1,89)}$ =27.39, p<0.001). We found that members who identify more with the brand community, i.e., the high identifiers, displayed higher intentions to advocate the sponsor-brand (M=6.53, SD = 0.52) than the low identifiers (M=5.76, SD = 0.85). Hence, H1a is accepted. The effect of club brand community identification on sponsor-brand purchase intentions too indicated a significant effect ($F_{(1,89)}$=77.57, p<0.001). Consistent with our hypothesis, the high identifiers displayed higher intentions to purchase the sponsor-brand (M=6.64, SD = 0.43) than the low identifiers (M=5.56, SD = 0.71). Hence, H1b is accepted. The results of two separate one-way ANOVA indicated an insignificant effect of brand community identification manipulations on participants' community belongingness ($F_{(1,89)}$ =2.25, p>0.13), ruling out the possibility of any confounding effects. Table 2 depicts the summary of the results.

[Insert Table 2 here]

Discussion

A direct and positive relationship between club brand community identification and sponsor support decisions revealed that sponsors of the club brands could cash in on the highly identified

brand communities that corroborate with the findings of Meenaghan (2013). After getting favourable main effects of club brand community identification on sponsor-brand advocacy and purchase intentions, we investigated two boundary conditions — brand authenticity (study 2) and sponsor-club brand congruence (study 3).

Study 2: Moderating role of sponsor-brand authenticity

The objective of this study is three-fold. First, we revalidate the findings of study 1. Second, we specifically investigate the impact of consumer's club brand community identification on club brand community engagement and assess the mediating role of club brand community engagement on the relationship between club brand community identification and the sponsor support decisions. Lastly, we experimentally manipulated sponsor-brand authenticity (high vs. low) and examined whether sponsor-brand authenticity accentuates the favourable impact of consumers' club brand community identification on their sponsor support decisions.

Stimuli development

We developed two fictitious ads to manipulate brand authenticity and tested them through surveys. The survey aimed to examine whether the conceptualized brand authenticity manipulation through the developed stimuli led to varying levels of brand authenticity. The stimulus was adapted from Guèvremont and Grohmann (2018), with certain minor modifications to suit the context of this study. The two fictitious ads were created based (see appendix B) on the conceptualizations provided by (Morhart et al., 2015), comprising the four dimensions — continuity, credibility, integrity, and symbolism. We elucidated the brand authenticity by the verbal cues through message statements. For instance, the high brand authenticity depicted "Providing the best-in-class

sportswear since 1950" for continuity and "The authentic choice of sportswear that you can trust" for credibility. On the other side, the low brand authenticity was elucidated by verbal message statements such as "Providing best-in-class sportswear since 2015" and "The athletic choice for your sporting activities". We designed the ads with similar layouts for both conditions. We controlled attitude towards the brand, brand quality perceptions, believability and attitude towards the advertisement.

Fifty-three brand community members (36% female, average age = 23.45 years) of the Jamshedpur FC participated in a paper and pencil-based pre-test. We informed them that a sportswear brand SPORTZY is sponsoring Jamshedpur FC and randomly assigned the participants to either of the two fictitious advertisements. The participants then responded to the scale items of brand authenticity, brand attitude, brand quality perceptions, believability, and attitude towards the advertisement. We adopted scale items of brand authenticity from Guèvremont and Grohmann (2018), brand attitude from Yoo and Donthu (2001), brand quality perceptions from Frazier and Lassar (1996), believability towards advertisement from Bhat et al. (1998), and attitude towards the advertisement from Kamins (1990). A seven-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree) assessed all the measures. All the constructed reported an acceptable internal consistency with the value of Cronbach alpha greater than 0.7. The perceived brand authenticity was significantly greater for the high authentic brand condition (M=6.42, SD = 0.58) than for the low authentic brand condition (M=4.33, SD = 0.83; $F_{(1,51)}$ =111.97, p<0.001). The brand stimuli did not differ significantly in terms of brand attitudes (p>0.55) and brand quality perceptions (p>0.34). The attitude towards the advertisements (p>0.90) and consumers' believability towards

the advertisement (p>0.83). We found similar results in the main study; therefore, we preferred not to report them subsequently.

Participants and Design

For this study, one hundred and fifty-four (34.4% female, average age = 22.92 years) members of the Jamshedpur FC brand community, who had not previously participated in the study in exchange for goodies from the club merchandise as gifts. The study consisted of a 2×2 between-subject design, with manipulations of consumer's club brand community identification (high vs. low) and perceived sponsor-brand authenticity (high vs. low). We randomly assigned the participants to one of the four experimental conditions.

Procedure

Before presenting the print advertisement, we manipulated brand community identification of the participants by engaging them in an essay writing task similar to study 1. After the essay writing task, we measured brand community identification with a 10-point scale adapted from Algesheimer et al. (2005), which served as a manipulation check. Next, we exposed the participants to one of the two pre-developed printed advertisements stimuli for brand authenticity. After that, we asked them to assess their perceptions of authenticity for the sponsor-brand SPORTZY and respond to the control variables. We asked the participants to indicate their purchase intentions of the sponsor-brand and their intentions to advocate for the sponsor brand. All the scales used are similar to the scales used in the pre-tests. Furthermore, we assessed members' club brand community engagement by adapting a scale from Algesheimer et al. (2005). We assessed all items of brand community engagement on a 10-point Likert scale (1=strongly

disagree to 10=strongly agree). All the constructed reported an acceptable internal consistency with the value of Cronbach alpha greater than 0.7. Lastly, we asked demographic questions to assess the participant's background.

Analysis and Results

We tested the manipulations through two-way ANOVA. The results confirmed that the manipulation of brand authenticity via the fictitious print advertisements was successful. The perceived brand authenticity was significantly greater for the high brand authenticity condition (M=6.22, SD = 0.64) than for the low brand authenticity condition (M=5.88, SD = 0.68; $F_{(1,126)}$ =8.35, p<0.005). The study also confirmed that the manipulation of club brand community identification via essay writing task was successful. The perceived club brand community identification was significantly greater for the high club brand community identification condition (M=9.22, SD = 1.05) than for the low club brand community identification condition (M=8.39, SD = 1.09; $F_{(1,126)}$ =19.26, p<0.01). For both manipulation checks, interaction effects were insignificant indicating that manipulation of one variable did not affect the other variable. After getting desired results for manipulations, we tested the hypothesized relationships.

We tested the main effects using one-way ANOVA. The results of one-way ANOVA indicated a significant effect of club brand community identification on sponsor-brand advocacy (p<0.00) and sponsor-brand purchase intentions (p<0.003). These results revalidated the acceptance of hypothesis 1. Further, the effect of brand community identification on the brand community engagement indicated a significant impact (p<0.01), such that the high identifiers engaged more with the brand community (M=9.18, SD = 1.37) than the low identifiers (M=8.21, SD = 1.47; $F_{(1,126)}$ =18.05, p<0.00). Thus, H2 is accepted. Table 3 presents a summary of the results.

We tested the mediation effects by applying the simple mediation model (model 4, Hayes, 2018) in PROCESS. Two separate mediation models for sponsor-brand advocacy and brand purchase intention as the dependent variable were estimated based on 10,000 bootstrap samples estimated with 95% CI (Hayes 2018), with club brand community identification as the dependent variable and club brand community engagement as mediating variable. The results indicated that the indirect effect of club brand community identification on sponsor-brand advocacy (b=0.27, SE = 0.08; CI= [0.0953, 0.4276]) and brand purchase intention (b=0.27, SE = 0.13; CI = [0.0290, 0.5275]) via club brand community engagement was significant, with a significant direct effects. Hence, hypotheses H3a and H3b were supported.

[Insert Table 3 here]

We examined how members' club brand community identification (BCI) and the sponsor-brand authenticity influence their brand advocacy and intentions to purchase the sponsor brand. First, we performed a 2 (BCI: high vs low) $\times$ 2 (authenticity: high vs low) ANOVA to examine its interaction effect on sponsor-brand advocacy. The results show that the identification $\times$ authenticity interaction was significant ($F_{(1,124)}$ =5.404, p<0.02), such that perceptions of high sponsor-brand authenticity strengthened the impact of club brand community identification on sponsor-brand advocacy. Specifically, for high brand authenticity, high identifiers exert significantly higher brand advocacy (M=6.40, SD = 0.62) than low identifiers (M=5.16, SD = 0.64; $F_{(1,75)}$ =74.57, p<0.001). On the other hand, for low brand authenticity, the brand advocacy increased marginally for high identifiers (M= 5.59, SD = 1,99) than for low identifiers (M=5.26, SD = 1.08; $F_{(1,75)}$ =0.83, p>0.37). These moderation effects are depicted in Figure 2a.

[Insert Figure 2a here]

Similarly, we performed a two-way ANOVA to examine its interaction effect on sponsor-brand purchase intention. The results illustrate that the identification × authenticity interaction was significant ($F_{(1,124)}$ =9.31, p<0.01), such that the perceptions of high sponsor-brand authenticity strengthened the impact of club brand community identification on sponsor-brand purchase intention. Specifically, for high authentic brands, high identifiers exert significantly higher brand purchase intention (M= 6.25, SD = 0.53) than low identifiers (M= 45.00, SD = 1.00; $F_{(1,75)}$ =45.46, p<0.001). On the other hand, for low brand authenticity, the brand purchase intention increased insignificantly for high identifiers (M=5.44, SD = 1.78) than for low identifiers (M=5.17, SD = 1.14; $F_{(1,75)}$ =0.61, p>0.44). These moderation effects are depicted in Figure 2b.

[Insert Figure 2b here]

Furthermore, two moderated mediation models were run using Hayes PROCESS Model 7 with 5000 bootstrap (Hayes, 2018) to estimate the overall model with sponsor-brand advocacy and purchase intention as outcome variables. For both models, club brand community identification served as the predictor variable, club brand community engagement the mediating variable, and sponsor-brand authenticity the moderator. Our findings indicated that sponsor-brand authenticity moderated the impact of club brand community identification on club brand community engagement. The interaction term (club BCI x brand authenticity) had a significant impact on club brand community engagement (B= 1.39, SE = 0.44, 95% CI [0.5051, 2.2696]). The results also indicated that sponsor-brand authenticity moderated the strength of mediating effect of club brand community engagement (a) between club brand community identification and sponsor-brand advocacy (index of moderated mediation: B= 0.39, SE = 0.20, 95% CI [0.0698, 0.8263]) and (b) club brand community identification and sponsor-brand purchase intention (index of moderated mediation: B= 0.39, SE = 0.21, 95% CI [0.0312, 0.8543]).

Discussion

We revalidated the hypotheses that club brand community identification increased sponsor-brand advocacy and purchase intentions. Our findings show a novel psychological mechanism (club brand community engagement) that underlies the influence of club brand community identification on sponsorship effectiveness. That is, the more the brand community members engage with the club brand community, the more they support the sponsors of the club brand. Additionally, sponsor-brand authenticity interacted with club brand community identification to moderate the relationship between (1) club brand community identification and sponsor-brand advocacy and (2) club brand community identification and sponsor-brand purchase intention. Particularly, when high identifiers of the brand community perceive the sponsor-brand as highly authentic, they behave more favourably towards the sponsor brand. In contrast, the low identifiers do not show a difference in their behavior concerning the authenticity of the sponsor brand.

Study 3: Moderating role of sponsor-club brand congruence

This study aimed to revalidate the impact of consumers' club brand community identification on club brand community engagement and their sponsor support decisions. The second objective of this study was to examine the impact of sponsor-club brand congruence (high vs low) on the consumers' sponsor support decisions.

Stimuli development

Two sponsor brands were intended to select for this study – one with the highest fit with the club brand and another with the lowest fit with the club brand. We suspected that brand familiarity and brand affect might confound our outcome; therefore, the objective was to choose two brands that

evoked similar levels of brand familiarity and brand affect but had varying levels of sponsor-club brand congruence. A paper-pencil based pre-test was conducted with twenty-five participants (38% female, average age = 22.15 years), who were the regular audiences of the club's matches. Participants were presented with the names of the real sponsors of the club brand Jamshedpur FC namely Tata Steel, Jusco, Nivia, Air Asia, Paytm and Tata Pravesh. The sponsors belong to various industries like Iron and Steel, utility services, airlines, e-commerce, and payment gateway, with varying levels of congruence with the sports club. We measured the brand familiarity, brand affect, and congruence between the six brands and the club brand Jamshedpur FC. The brand familiarity scale was adapted from Machleit et al. (1993), the brand affect scale was adapted from Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), and the scale of congruence was taken from Speed and Thompson (2000). The participants were then asked to assess each of the six brands.

We performed a pairwise comparison between the six brand sponsors to assess the sponsor-club brand congruence, brand familiarity, and brand affect. For further study, we choose the pair of brands that evoked similar brand familiarity levels and brand affect but significantly varied in congruence with the club brand. The results indicated that the brands Nivia and Paytm evoked similar levels of brand familiarity (M_{Nivia}=6.59, M_{Paytm}=6.51, $p<0.41$) and brand affect (M_{Nivia}=6.19, M_{Paytm}=5.97, $p>0.11$). Brand Nivia had the highest congruence with the club brand, and the brand Paytm had the lowest congruence with the club brand (M_{Nivia}=6.64, M_{Paytm}=5.95, $p<0.01$). We selected brands Nivia and Paytm, which reflected high congruence and low congruence with the club brand, respectively and had similar brand familiarity and brand affect amongst the consumers.

Participants and Design

One hundred and twenty members (45.83% female, average age = 24.14 years) of the club brand community participated in the study in exchange for goodies from the club merchandise as gifts. The study consisted of a 2×2 between-subject design, with manipulations of club brand community identification (high vs. low) and sponsor-club congruence (high vs. low). We randomly assigned the participants to one of the four experimental conditions.

Procedure

First, we manipulated the participants for their levels of identification with the club brand community, similar to study 1. Subsequently, the participants completed club brand community identification measures (Algesheimer et al., 2005), which served as manipulation checks. Next, we exposed the participants to one of the two conditions — high and low sponsor-club brand congruence. The logo of the sponsor-brand was affixed next to the press release for visual clarity. Brand Nivia indicated the high congruence condition, whereas brand Paytm indicated the low congruence condition (as specified from the pre-test result). The statements used to prime the participants for the high or low congruent condition are provided in Appendix C

The authors exposed the participants to a press release. We then asked them to indicated their perceptions of sponsor-club brand congruence; we measured on the pre-established scale by Speed and Thompson (2000). As control measures, we measured brand familiarity and brand affect using the same scales used in the pre-test. Next, the participants were asked to assess their club brand community engagement (Algesheimer et al., 2005), sponsor-brand advocacy (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012), and sponsor-brand purchase intentions (Yoo & Donthu, 2001) using pre-established scales. Lastly, we asked demographic questions to assess the participant's background.

Analysis and Results

We tested the sponsor-club brand congruence manipulation through two-way ANOVA, which was successful. Brand Nivia (M=6.56, SD = 0.68) had a higher congruence with the Jamshedpur FC club brand than the brand Paytm (M=5.41, SD = 0.55, $F_{(1,118)}$ =101.76, p<0.00). The manipulation did not significantly affect other variables such as brand familiarity and brand affect. The study also confirmed that the manipulations of club brand community identification via essay writing task were successful. The perceived club brand community identification was significantly greater for the high club brand community identification condition (M=9.71, SD = 0.38) than for the low club brand community identification condition (M=8.01, SD = 1.41, $F_{(1,118)}$ =80.90, p<0.00). For both manipulation checks, interaction effects were insignificant indicating that manipulation of one variable did not affect the other variable. After getting desired results for manipulating the treatment variables, we tested the hypothesized relationships.

We re-established the main effects using one-way ANOVA. The results of the one-way ANOVA indicated a significant effect of club brand community identification on sponsor-brand advocacy (p<0.01), sponsor-brand purchase intentions (p<0.001), and club brand brand community engagement (p<0.001). We also re-assessed the mediation effects by applying the two separate mediation models for sponsor-brand advocacy and brand purchase intention as a dependent variable using Hayes Process Model 4 (Hayes 2018). The results indicated significant indirect effects of club brand community identification through club brand community engagementon sponsor-brand advocacy (95% CI= [0.0922, 0.6078) and sponsor-brand purchase intention (95% CI= [0.0198, 0.5765]). Table 4 depicts the summary of the results of study 3.

[Insert Table 4 here]

We examined how members' club brand community identification and the sponsor-club brand congruence impact their intentions to advocate and purchase the sponsor brand. First, we performed a 2 (BCI: high vs low) $\times$ 2 (congruence: high vs low) ANOVA to examine its interaction effect on sponsor-brand advocacy. The results illustrate that the identification $\times$ congruence interaction was significant (F $_{(1,116)}$ =8.09, p<0.005), such that perceptions of high sponsor-club brand congruence strengthened the impact of club brand community identification on sponsor-brand advocacy. Specifically, for high sponsor-club brand congruence, high identifiers exert significantly higher brand advocacy (M=6.78, SD = 0.91) than low identifiers (M=5.98, SD = 1.06; F$_{(1,59)}$=10.11, p<0.01). On the other hand, for low sponsor-club brand congruence, the brand advocacy changed insignificantly from high identifiers (M=6.02, SD = 0.55) to low identifiers (M=6.04, SD = 0.55; F $_{(1,59)}$ =0.02, p>0.89). These moderation effects are depicted in Figure 3a.

[Insert Figure 3a here]

Similarly, we performed a 2 (BCI: high vs low) $\times$ 2 (congruence: high vs low) ANOVA to examine its interaction effect on sponsor-brand purchase intention. The results illustrate that the identification $\times$ congruence interaction was significant (F $_{(1,116)}$ =4.22, p<0.04), such that the perceptions of high sponsor-club brand congruence strengthened the impact of club brand community identification on sponsor-brand purchase intention. Specifically, for high sponsor-club brand congruence, high identifiers exert significantly higher sponsor-brand purchase intention (M= 6.96, SD = 0.19) than low identifiers (M=5.78, SD = 1.15; F$_{(1,59)}$=31.59, p<0.001). On the other hand, for low sponsor-club brand congruence, the brand purchase intention also increased significantly from low identifiers (M=5.97, SD = 0.56) to high identifiers (M=6.66, SD = 0.24; F$_{(1,59)}$=37.08, p<0.001). The moderation effect is depicted in Figure 3b.

[Insert Figure 3b here]

Moreover, we also examined two moderated mediation models by running Hayes PROCESS Model 7 with 5000 bootstrap (Hayes, 2018) to estimate the overall model with sponsor-brand advocacy and purchase intention as outcome variables. For both models, club brand community identification served as the predictor variable, club brand community engagement as the mediating variable, and sponsor-club brand congruence as the moderator. Our results indicated that sponsor-club brand congruence moderated the impact of club brand community identification on club brand community engagement. The interaction term (club BCI x sponsor-club brand congruence) had a significant impact on club brand community engagement (B= 1.57, SE = 0.34, 95% CI [0.8913, 2.2429]). The results also indicated that sponsor-club brand congruence moderated the strength of mediating effect of club brand community engagement (a) between club brand community identification and sponsor-brand advocacy (index of moderated mediation: B= 0.24, SE = 0.10, 95% CI [0.0478, 0.4662]) and (b) club brand community identification and sponsor-brand purchase intention (index of moderated mediation: B= 0.33, SE = 0.17, 95% CI [0.0417, 0.6805]).

Discussion

We revalidated findings of study 1; we found that club brand community identification increased sponsor-brand advocacy and purchase intentions and re-established the mediating effects of brand community engagement. Furthermore, sponsor-club brand congruence interacted with club brand community identification to moderate the relationship between (1) club brand community identification and sponsor-brand advocacy and (2) club brand community identification and sponsor-brand purchase intention. Findings revealed that the high identifiers compared to the low-identifiers showed higher advocacy and purchase intention towards the sponsor-brand under high sponsor-club brand congruence condition. Surprisingly, this study demonstrates that high and low

identifiers did not differ in terms of brand advocacy in low sponsor-club brand congruence condition. Conversely, high identifiers showed higher purchase intention than low identifiers, even in brand had low brand congruence condition.

Study 4: Testing a comprehensive model with brand choice and a different club community

This study extends the findings of previous studies in three ways. First, we tested the proposed comprehensive model that contained both the moderating variables— brand authenticity and sponsor-club brand congruence. Second, this study, conducted on a different sport club community and tested the external validity of the model successfully. While the previous three studies recruited participants from community members of Jamshedpur FC, India the current study drew participants from the community members of Manchester United FC in UK. This would increase generalizability of the findings of the study. s Third, unlike past research in the field of sponsorship, we manipulated club brand community identification using club performance. Extant literature (Ngan, Prendergast, & Tsang, 2011) suggests that community members display two kinds of emotions — basking-in-reflected-glory (BIRG) and cutting-off-reflected-failure (CORF). Both the emotions help consumers maintain a favourable self-identity (Pradhan et al., 2020). Therefore, this study manipulated participants' club through Manchester United FC's performance in 2022-23 Premier League season. Fourth, unlike the first three studies of this research wherein we measured sponsor-brand advocacy and purchase intentions as our dependent measure, this study used an actual consumer choice measure as an outcome variable.

Participants and Design

One hundred and sixty-three members (38.7% female, average age = 27.94 years) of Manchester United club brand community participated in an online study created in Qualtrics Platforms. The participants were recruited from the online crowd sourcing platform "www.prolific.ac' wherein participants were paid £2 per response. We adopted a one factor two level between-subject design that included manipulations of club brand community identification (high vs low) through team performance. We measured sponsor-club brand congruence and sponsor-brand authenticity using scales adapted from the literature. We randomly assigned the participants to one of the two experimental conditions.

Procedure

We collected data through an online experiment conducted among community members of Manchester United FC. The data were collected from the community member in three stages. In the first stage, we systematically selected participants for the online experiment. First, we recruited participants by shortlisting them through a few preliminary qualifying questions. The preliminary questions asked were: (1) Do you follow English Premier League club Manchester United? (2) Do you participate in the online community fora like Redcafe.net? and (3) Are you willing to participate in a subsequent online survey on Manchester United? Out of 624 respondents, only 196 were members Manchester United club community; all 196 were willing to participate in a subsequent survey. In the second stage, we manipulated the levels of identification of the participants with the club brand community. Following the method adopted from Cialdini et al., (1976), the club brand community identification was manipulated through a scenario-based manipulation where participants were randomly exposed to one of the two scenarios of Manchester

United's performance, (1) in a winning spree, and (2) in a losing spree in the ongoing English Premium Ligue. Cialdini et al., (1976) argued that participants tend to affiliate themselves with a winning club which results in a self-identification with the club due to BIRG. In the winning spree scenario, participants were provided with certain facts about the club under the heading of "reasons why Manchester United can easily finish among the top 4 this season". Conversely, in the losing spree scenario, participants were provided with relevant facts under the heading, "what went wrong with Manchester United: reasons for the club's decline." After the participants were exposed to the one of the scenarios, they were asked to describe the club's performance and how they felt or experienced being members of the club's community. Following Cialdini et al., (1976), we predicted that participants in the club wining scenarios, would use more "*we*" words to describe the team performance and their experience. In a contrast, participants in club losing scenario, would use more "*non-we*" words to describe the team performance and their experience (See table 5 for a few examples of "*we*" and "*non-we*" words used by respondents). We used the number of "*we*" and "*non-we*" words to check the manipulations of club brand community identification. We asked two independent coders (inter coder reliability $r = 0.87$) to count on the "*we*" and "*non-we*" words in both the scenarios. The study confirmed that the manipulations of club brand community identification via team performance scenarios were successful. Participants' club brand community identification measured through the use of "*we*" words was significantly greater for the high club brand community identification condition (M=3.89, SD = 1.41) than for the low club brand community identification condition (M=0.77, SD = 0.87, $F_{(1,161)} = 284.42$, $p < 0.00$). Conversely, participants' club brand community identification measured through the use of "non-we" words was significantly greater for the low club brand community identification condition

(M=4.56, SD = 1.16) than for the high club brand community identification condition (M=0.86, SD = 0.99, $F_{(1,161)}$=484.69, p<0.00).

[Insert Table 5 here]

Next, we measured participants' brand community engagement with the club using a similar scale used in study 2. Subsequently, we measured a control variable "presence of marquee player" in the team. Adapting from Ngan, Prendergast, & Tsang (2011), we asked "Assume that the 11 players of Manchester United team have average achievement, average physical appearance, and unremarkable characters. Would you agree or disagree that any of these players is a sports star?". We collected responses on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1= completely disagree to 7 = completely agree.

In the third stage, we collected data on sponsor-brand authenticity and sponsor-club brand congruence through scales adapted from existing literature (see Table 6). In this stage, respondent screening was conducted based on sponsor brand recall test. The recall test was conducted in two stages — unaided and aided recall. Initially, we asked the respondents to name the sponsor brand of the Manchester United FC. Those respondents who could recall any two of the sponsoring brands were included in the survey. Those who could not recall, as a part of aided brand recall, we showed them a mix of six brand logos and then asked to identify any two of the sponsoring brands. The list of six brands included three sponsor brands (TeamViewer, Adidas, and Apollo tyres) and three non-sponsors brand (LogMein Pro, Puma and Bridgestone). The sponsor brands of Manchester United FC received higher exposure during the matches English premier Ligue. The brand recall test helped the participant retrieve the sponsor brand-related information from their memory, which captured participants' cognitive responses toward the sponsor brand (Pradhan et

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al. 2020). Thirty-three participants who failed to recall or identify the sponsor brand correctly were dropped from the final data collection. Next, we recorded the responses of the participants on sponsor brand familiarity, sponsor-brand authenticity, and sponsor-club brand congruence scales (See Table 6). Finally, we exposed the participants to a choice. We asked them to imagine that they were in need of a remote desktop software and they were offered a voucher code of £20 to purchase one. We asked them — which one of the options they would choose: option 1 – a three-month subscription of TeamViewer, or option 2 - a three-month subscription of LogMein Pro. The choice task started with a brief discussion of TeamViewer as a recent official sponsor of Manchester United FC. This outcome variable was binary coded; response was coded as '1' if a participant chose option 1 and '0' if one chose option 2.

[Insert Table 6 here]

Analysis and Results

We re-established the main effects using a binary logistic regression as our outcome variable was a dichotomous variable. We used 'presence of marquee player' and 'sponsor-brand familiarity' as control variables. Results indicated insignificant impacts of marquee player (p>0.81) and sponsor-brand familiarity (p>0.27); hence, they were not included in subsequent analysis. Consistent with the findings of previous studies, the results of the logistic regression showed a significant effect of club brand community identification on sponsor-brand choice (b = 2.62, SE = 0.42, Wald = 38.50, $p < .00$); subjects who were primed to high club brand community identification showed a greater propensity to choose a sponsor brand (M = 89.16%, SD = 0.31) than those primed to low club brand community identification condition (M = 37.50%, SD = 0.49). We also re-assessed the mediation effects by applying Hayes Process Model 4 (Hayes 2018); we examined the role of club brand community engagement as a mediating variable between club brand community

identification and sponsor-brand choice. The results demonstrated significant indirect effects of club brand community identification on sponsor-brand choice through club brand community engagement (b = 0.57, SE = 0.21, 95% CI: [0.2284, 1.0460]). The results also revealed a significant direct effect of club brand community identification on sponsor-brand choice (b = 2.27, SE = 0.44, 95% CI: [1.4126, 3.1265]), a partial mediation model. Table 7 depicts the summary of the results of study 4.

[Insert Table 7 here]

To investigate whether this main effect was moderated by sponsor-brand authenticity, we conducted a binary logistic regression; we treated club brand community identification, sponsor-brand authenticity, and their interaction as predictors, and sponsor-brand choice as the outcome variable. The results revealed a significant effect of the interaction term (b = 2.01, SE = 0.42, Wald = 23.32, p < .00; see Figure 4a) on sponsor-brand choice. Specifically, for high sponsor-brand authenticity (conditional effects at 1 SD above the mean), high identifiers exhibit significantly higher brand choice (b = 6.39, SE = 1.08, p < .00). On the other hand, for low sponsor-brand authenticity (conditional effects at 1 SD below the mean), impact of club brand community identification was insignificant (b = 0.79, SE = 0.54, p > .15).

[Insert Figure 4a here]

Similarly, to investigate whether this main effect was moderated by sponsor-club brand congruence, we conducted a binary logistic regression with club brand community identification, sponsor-club brand congruence, and their interaction entered as predictors, and sponsor-brand choice as the outcome variable. The results revealed a significant effect of the interaction term (b = 2.07, SE = 0.52, Wald = 16.13, p < .00; see Figure 4b) on sponsor-brand choice. Specifically, for high sponsor-club brand congruence (conditional effects at 1 SD above the mean), high

identifiers show significantly higher brand choice (b = 5.51, SE = 0.98, p < .00). On the other hand, for low sponsor-club brand congruence (conditional effects at 1 SD below the mean), impact of club brand community identification was insignificant (b = 0.85, SE = 0.55, p > .12).

[Insert Figure 4b here]

Moreover, we examined two moderated mediation models with sponsor-club brand congruence and sponsor-brand authenticity as moderating variables, using Hayes PROCESS Model 7 with 5000 bootstrap (Hayes, 2018). For both the models, club brand community identification served as the predictor variable, club brand community engagement as mediating variable, and sponsor-brand choice as an outcome variable. The result reconfirmed that both sponsor-club brand congruence and sponsor-brand authenticity moderated the impact of club brand community identification on club brand community engagement. The interaction term (club BCI x sponsor-club brand congruence) had a significant impact on club brand community engagement (B= 0.61, SE = 0.16, 95% CI [0.2947, 0.9196]). The results also indicated that sponsor-club brand congruence moderated the strength of mediating effect of club brand community engagement between club brand community identification and sponsor-brand choice (index of moderated mediation: B= 0.37, SE = 0.18, 95% CI [0.1023, 0.8026]). Similarly, the interaction term (club BCI x brand authenticity) had a significant impact on club brand community engagement (B= 0.41, SE = 0.13, 95% CI [0.1560, 0.6648]). The results also indicated that sponsor-brand authenticity moderated the strength of mediating effect of club brand community engagement between club brand community identification and sponsor-brand choice (index of moderated mediation: B= 0.25, SE = 0.13, 95% CI [0.0533, 0.5633]).

Discussion

We revalidated the results of studies 1,2, and 3 that club brand community identification increased sponsorship effectiveness and demonstrated the mediating effects of brand community engagement. We extended the model examined in the previous three studies; we added a behavioral outcome — "sponsor-brand choice" in our model and consequently measured it. Furthermore, we revalidated that both sponsor-club brand congruence and sponsor-brand authenticity moderate the relationship between (1) club brand community identification and sponsor-brand choice. Our findings revealed that the high identifiers compared to the low-identifiers showed higher sponsor-brand choice under the high sponsor-club brand congruence and high sponsor-brand authenticity condition. The results of this study established higher external validity and better generalizability of our findings.

General Discussions

Theoretical contribution

Our research makes several meaningful theoretical contributions. First, in response to recent calls for more research (Wakefield et al., 2020; Cornwell, 2008), we advance the sponsorship literature by assessing consumer-level antecedents that impact sponsorship effectiveness. This adds to the field of brand communities by linking it with sponsorship literature. Furthermore, Cornwell et al. (2005) have highlighted the need to conduct experimental studies to understand sponsorship communications and effectiveness. Specifically, this experimental research offers key insights into how members in a brand community, with varying levels of identification, respond to and evaluate the sponsor brands. We conducted the experiments in a natural setting (unlike a lab experiment) by exposing consumers to both fictitious and real sponsors, thus enhancing internal and external validity.

Cornwell and Kwon (2019) suggested that engagement could be a promising way to achieve sponsorship success. Therefore, echoing the suggestions made by these researchers, we empirically demonstrate the mediating role of engagement practices in a brand community that can be useful in developing sponsorship effectiveness. Second, we extend the application of social identity theory in a sports sponsorship context that has implications for sponsorship effectiveness. We demonstrate how brand community members' social identification motivates them to engage with the brand community and support the brand's sponsors. We empirically show that brand community members' shared consciousness drives them to reciprocate favorably towards the club's sponsors. Third, we measured brand communities' sponsor support decisions by sponsor-brand advocacy, a less frequently used but essential construct in sport sponsorship literature. Furthermore, moving beyond consumers' stated intentions, we examined the drivers of sponsor brand choice, a measure of actual behavior. This is unlike prior studies that have measured consumers' sponsorship support decisions with sponsor attitudes and images (Pradhan et al., 2020). Fourth, the latest research in sponsorship domain has called for an understanding of the role of authenticity in sponsorship effectiveness (Cornwell, 2019; Cornwell & Kwon, 2019). We respond to these calls by demonstrating that they respond favorably to a sponsor-brand when they perceive it authentic. Fifth, most studies have focused on the congruence between the sponsor and sporting events (Carrillat & Grohs, 2019). In a contrast, we investigate the congruence between sponsors and club brands, in accordance with the suggestion of Koo & Lee (2019). Such field experiments with real brands as stimuli are likely to enhance our understanding of such effects. Furthermore, extant literature reveals a lack of unanimity over the role and impact of sponsorship congruence on sponsorship outcomes. Most of the previous studies (Dreisbach et al., 2021; Pappu

& Cornwell, 2014; Olson and Thjømøe, 2009) have treated consumer-brand congruence and sponsor-event congruence as antecedents of sponsorship outcomes; they do not show any unanimity. A stream of research argues that high congruence between the sponsor-brand and the sponsored property will increase sponsorship effectiveness (e.g., Dreisbach et al., 2021; Pappu & Cornwell, 2014; Mazodier & Merunka, 2012). In a contrast, some studies assert that even low congruence sponsorship linkages can be effective (e.g., Olson and Thjømøe, 2009). Our study however investigated whether sponsor-club brand congruence serves as a boundary condition to the relationship between club brand identification and sponsorship outcomes. This research revealed that both high-congruent and low-congruent sponsor brands could be successful, depending on consumers' identification with the brand community.

Fundamentally, consumers are becoming skeptical (Cornwell, 2019) about the increasing ubiquity of sponsorships and they vary in terms of their level perceived authenticity and sponsor-club brand congruence. Therefore, we elucidate the moderating roles of authenticity and congruence in sponsorships. Our study reveals that the sponsor-brand authenticity (Study 1) and sponsor-club brand congruence (Study 2) play a vital role in the sponsorship support decisions of a brand community. Furthermore, Cornwell and Kwon (2019) and Fechner et al., (2022) explicitly point out that sponsorship research must shift its focus from congruence to authenticity in these times of rising commercialization; we focus on these two moderating factors. Our research demonstrates that consumers' support for a sponsor brand accentuates for a high authentic brand even when it is less congruent with the club brand; however, their support will attenuate when they perceive a sponsor brand as less authentic.

Managerial implication

For sponsorship effectiveness, marketers must capitalize on brand communities, which bridge between sponsors and other consumers. It is also imperative to cultivate consumers' identification with the club's brand community, as it positively influences their sponsor support decisions (Cornwell & Coote, 2005). Marketers can achieve this by rewarding the club brand's highly identified brand community members through badges, titles, and so on. Furthermore, there must be mechanisms to foster brand community engagement to enhance sponsorship effectiveness. For example, in collaboration, marketers of the club brand and the sponsor companies can hold contests, games, and other interactive opportunities for the club's brand community members. It has a two-fold benefit for both stakeholders, as it will stimulate engagement toward the club brand and promote support for the sponsor brands. Furthermore, in times of rising commercialization, we suggest that sponsor companies focus on enhancing their brand authenticity. The sponsor brand's authenticity is a positive indication for consumers to base their sponsor support decisions. Therefore, sponsor companies must focus on the four dimensions of authenticity (i.e., continuity, credibility, integrity, and symbolism). A brand with a rich tradition can vouch for its heritage as a indicator of authenticity (i.e., continuity). Newer brands can focus on other authenticity aspects, such as credibility, integrity, and symbolism. A brand can position itself to reflect standards of excellence and dependability (integrity and credibility) or as one that can enable its consumers' identity creation (symbolism) (Raimondo et al., 2022). Our results reveal that highly identified brand community members support highly congruent sponsor brands. Interestingly, our study also found that even low-congruent sponsor brands supported the low identifiers of the club's brand community. Therefore, we suggest that both the high- and the low-congruent sponsor brands can benefit depending on how different consumers (high and low identifiers) perceive congruence.

Sponsor companies can proceed with sponsorship deals, irrespective of their congruence with the club brand.

In sum, we suggest that brand congruence, as a factor for sponsorship effectiveness, can be downplayed in this era of increasing commercialization. The focus must be on developing brand authenticity, mirroring a recent suggestion by Cornwell and Kwon (2019). Our findings reveal that sponsor brands benefit from brand communities despite having a high or low congruence with club brands. However, this is not the case with authenticity. Brands must develop brand authenticity, as consumers, irrespective of their identification with the brand community, will certainly not support a sponsor-brand that they perceive to be less authentic.

Limitations and future research directions

The study has certain limitations despite its contribution. Based on the findings of our study and its limitations, we suggest some future research directions. First, the study employs field experiments with offline brand communities. With the growing currency of online or social-media-based brand communities (Alonso-Dos-Santos et al., 2016, Ozuem et al., 2021), future studies can test these relationships with brand communities on online and social media. Second, the study is limited to a specific sport, i.e., soccer and its related club, limiting the generalizability of its findings. Future studies can replicate the study with other sporting events and sports clubs. Third, culture impacts the consumer-to-consumer interactions in brand communities (Alden et al., 2016). Consumers might base their decisions following their group membership in brand communities in a collectivist culture. However, when it comes to individualist cultures, consumers might make their own independent sponsor-brand choices irrespective of their support for the club brand community. Since the current study was operationalized in a collectivist culture, generalizing the study's findings must be administered with caution. Future studies can explore how consumers in

individualist cultures behave concerning their sponsorship decision making. Fourth, we suggest future researchers consider the broader picture of the sponsorship industry. This research, for instance, focuses on teams as properties but there are other properties, such as sports leagues or events that may not have natural brand communities. Future research should examine whether the advantages of brand community could be overshadowed or nullified by the issue of team rivalry (Grohs et al. 2015; Lin & Bruning, 2020). Fifth, we employed a fictitious brand as a stimulus to assess consumers' perception of sponsor-brand authenticity to minimize the effects of possible confounding variables, such as prior brand attitudes. Despite these advantages, a fictitious brand might block the ecological validity to some extent. Therefore, we suggest that future scholars employ real brands as a stimulus to build on the findings of this study.

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TABLES

Table 1: ***Summary of existing literature and positioning of the current research***

Study	Research Objective	IV	DV	Mediator	Moderator	Theory	Methodology	Findings	Context
Hung 2014	To analyze how creating and fostering brand communities impacts consumer-brand relationships, consumer engagement, and brand loyalty.	Consumer's need fulfilment and value perception, Brand community identification	Community referral and community citizenship actions	Brand-Self congruence, Authentic self-expression	NA	NA	Survey Partial least square (PLS)-SEM	Brand self-congruence and authentic self-expression mediate brand attachment and community identification processes. Similarity of perceptions among brand, community, and other members mediate the relationship between brand attachment and community identification.	Car club
Woisetschläger et al. 2008	To understand the drivers and consequences of consumers' participation in a brand community.	Brand community identification	Participation, WOM, Sponsor brand image, Community loyalty	NA	Consumer's interaction preference	Social identity theory	Survey Structural equation modelling (SEM)	Identification with community and satisfaction with community increases consumer participation that, in turn, engenders recommendation behavior, positive brand image of the community sponsor, and intention to continue community membership.	General brands
Zhou et al. 2012	To investigate the process by which brand community members establish brand relationships.	Brand community identification	Brand community commitment, Brand identification, Brand commitment	Brand Attachment	Perceived community–brand similarity	NA	Survey Partial least square (PLS)-SEM	Consumer brand attachment mediates the relationship between brand community commitment and brand commitment. Perceived community–brand similarity moderate effects of i) brand community identification on brand identification and ii) brand community commitment on brand attachment.	Chinese car club

Marzocchi et al. 2011	To understand the underlying processes through which brand community members develop brand loyalty.	Brand community identification	Brand loyalty (Attitudinal loyalty-resilience to negative information, Propensity to comment, Behavioral loyalty-social and physical promotion)	Brand Trust, Brand affect	NA	NA	Survey Structural equation modelling (SEM)	Brand community identification influences brand loyalty through the psychological mechanism of brand affect.	Motorcycle clubs
Algesheimer et al. 2005	To investigate how consumer's socialisation with a brand community affects their intentions and actions towards the community.	Brand community identification	Brand loyalty, Membership participation intentions, recommendation intentions, continuance intention, and behavior	Brand community engagement	Brand Knowledge and Brand Community Size	Reactance theory	Qualitative (in-depth interviews, focus groups), Quantitative (Surveys) Structural equation modelling (SEM)	Brand community identification leads to positive outcomes, such as greater community engagement, and negative consequences, such as normative community pressure and (ultimately) reactance.	European Car Clubs
Nørskov et al. 2016	To comprehend how the social contexts, personality attributes, and brand perceptions of brand community members may influence their desire to share ideas	Brand community identification	Willingness to share innovative ideas with the brand owner, Brand loyalty	NA	NA	NA	Survey Regression analysis	Brand community members' willingness to share their ideas is positively related to brand community identification and brand loyalty.	Lego community

Demiray & Burnaz 2019	To understand the impact of drivers of brand community identification, and consequently members' WOM and purchase intention for a product.	Brand community Identification	Brand community commitment, Brand WOM, Brand purchase intention	NA	NA	Social identity theory	Qualitative (Focus group discussions), Quantitative (Survey) Structural equation modelling (SEM)	Facebook brand community identification leads to community commitment, which fosters new product success, mainly through spreading WOM communication and increasing purchase intention.	Facebook brand pages
Mandl and Hogreve 2018	To draw focus on the importance of brand community identification (BCI) as a determinant of members' repurchase intentions and to look into how identification shields members' intentions from the negative effects of poor service	Brand community Identification	Repurchase intentions	Citizenship behaviors (feedback, helping, advocacy, and tolerance)	Brand community Identification (in another study)	Social identity theory	Survey Hayes Process macro	Brand community identification is a driver of repurchase intentions. BCI mitigates the negative effect of service failures on customers' repurchase intentions.	Musical event
Confente & Kucharska 2020	To investigate the effect of community identification in building attitudinal and behavioral brand loyalty.	Brand community Identification	Attitudinal and Behavioral brand loyalty	NA	NA	Uses and gratifications theory	Structural equation modelling (SEM)	Brand community identification is an important antecedent of attitudinal loyalty rather than behavioral loyalty.	Facebook brand pages
Chang et al. 2019	To understand whether and how brand community identification help both firms and individual members of the brand community.	Brand community Identification	Emotional brand attachment and equity, assessment, Brand extension	NA	NA	Social network theory	Survey Partial least square (PLS)-SEM	Once customers' identification with a brand community becomes salient, they strengthen their emotional attachment with the brand. Consequently, emotional attachment serves as a guiding principle in decision-making and thus strengthen brand equity and assessment of brand extensions.	Golf club community

Yoshida et al. 2015	To explain why sports fans, engage in social interactions with other fans, and maintain their membership in sports brand communities.	Brand (Fan) community identification	Team brand equity, Brand community engagement, Customized product use, Member responsibility, Positive WOM	NA	Fan Loyalty Program Participation	Theory of planned behavior	Survey Structural equation modelling (SEM)	Brand (Fan) community identification increases team brand equity and four fan community-related consequences, such as fan community engagement, customized product use, member responsibility, and positive word-of-mouth. Furthermore, the impact of team brand equity on positive word-of-mouth was strengthened by consumers' participation in loyalty programs.	Sports club
Alonso Dos Santos et al. 2016	To understand how members of a virtual brand community develop attitude toward sponsors	Brand community identification, Trust in brand community	Attitude towards sponsor	NA	Perceived sponsor opportunism	Image transfer	Survey Structural equation modelling and qualitative analysis	Brand community identification enhances attitude towards sponsors. Perceived opportunism decreases attitude towards sponsors.	Sports club

This study	To investigate whether and how members' identification with a club brand community influences sponsorship effectiveness and to examine the roles of sponsor brand authenticity and sponsor-club congruence in the relationships.	Brand community identification	Sponsor brand advocacy, sponsor brand purchase intention, sponsor brand choice	Brand community engagement	Perceived brand authenticity of sponsor, Sponsor brand-club brand congruence	Social identity theory	Experimental Design Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Hayes Process macro	Brand community identification increases brand advocacy, purchase intention, and brand choice. There is a novel pathway of psychological mechanism (brand community engagement) between brand community identification and brand advocacy. Brand authenticity and brand congruence serve as boundary conditions to the main effect. Both high-congruent and low-congruent sponsor brands could be successful, depending on consumers' identification with the brand community, a counter-intuitive finding.	Club brand community

Note: IV: Independent Variable. DV: Dependent Variable. NA: Not Applicable

Table 2: *Summary of Findings (Study 1):* ***Impact of club brand community identification on sponsor support decisions***

Hypothesis	Type	Test	Results	Conclusion
BCI→Sponsor-brand Advocacy	Main effects	One way ANOVA	M_{High}=6.53, SD = 0.52; M_{Low}=5.76, SD = 0.85; $F_{(1,89)}$ =27.39, p<0.001	Supported
BCI→Sponsor-brand Purchase intentions	Main effects	One way ANOVA	M_{High}=6.64, SD = 0.43; M_{Low}=5.56, SD = 0.71; $F_{(1,89)}$ =77.57, p<0.001	Supported

Notes: BCI, Brand community identification; SD, Standard deviation

Table 3: *Summary of Findings (Study 2):* ***Moderating role of sponsor-brand authenticity***

Hypothesis	Type	Test	Results	Conclusion
BCI→Sponsor-brand Advocacy	Main effects	One way ANOVA	M_{High}=5.99, SD= 1.52; M_{Low}=5.21, SD = 0.88; $F_{(1,152)}$=15.46, p<0.00	Supported
BCI→Sponsor-brand Purchase intentions	Main effects	One way ANOVA	M_{High}=5.84, SD=1.37, M_{Low}=5.09, SD = 1.16; $F_{(1,126)}$=14.48, p<0.00	Supported
BCI→BCE	Main effects	One way ANOVA	M_{High}=9.18, SD = 1.37; M_{Low}=8.21; SD = 1.47; $F_{(1,126)}$=18.05, p<0.00	Supported
BCI→BCE→ Sponsor-brand Advocacy	Mediation effects	Hayes PROCESS Macro (Model 4)	Indirect: b=0.27, SE = 0.08; CI=[0.0953, 0.4276] Direct: b=0.51, SE=0.20, 95% CI=[0.9100, 0.3965]	Mediation effect found
BCI→BCE→ Sponsor-brand Purchase Intention	Mediation effects	Hayes PROCESS Macro (Model 4)	Indirect: b=0.27, SE = 0.13; CI=[0.0290, 0.5275]) Direct: b=0.48, SE=0.20, 95% CI=[0.8709, 0.3750]	Mediation effect found
BCI × Sponsor-brand Authenticity→Sponsor-brand Advocacy	Moderation effects	2×2 ANOVA	$F_{(1,124)}$ =5.40, p<0.02	Supported
BCI × Sponsor-brand Authenticity→Sponsor-brand Purchase intention	Moderation effects	2×2 ANOVA	($F_{(1,124)}$ =6.31, p<0.01	Supported

Notes: BCI, Brand community identification; BCE, Brand community engagement; SD, Standard deviation

Table 4: *Summary of Findings (Study 3):* ***Moderating role of sponsor-club brand congruence***

Hypothesis	Type	Test	Results	Conclusion
BCI→Sponsor-brand Advocacy	Main effects	One way ANOVA	M_{High}=6.42, SD = 0.84; M_{Low}=6.01, SD = 0.83; $F_{(1,118)}$=7.07, p<0.01	Supported
BCI→Sponsor-brand Purchase intentions	Main effects	One way ANOVA	M_{High}=6.81, SD =0.26; M_{Low}=5.88, SD = 0.89; $F_{(1,118)}$=60.51, p<0.001	Supported
BCI→BCE	Main effects	One way ANOVA	M_{High}=9.76, SD = 0.40; M_{Low}=8.47, SD = 1.78; $F_{(1,118)}$=29.50, p<0.001	Supported
BCI→BCE→ Sponsor-brand Advocacy	Mediation effects	Hayes PROCESS Macro (Model 4)	Indirect: b=0.32, SE=0.13, 95% CI=[0.0922, 0.6078] Direct: b=0.08, SE=0.16, 95% CI=[-0.2294, 0.3955]	Mediation effect found
BCI→BCE→Sponsor-brand Purchase Intention	Mediation effects	Hayes PROCESS Macro (Model 4)	Indirect: b=0.28, SE=0.14, 95% CI=[0.0198, 0.5765] Direct: b=0.66, SE=0.12, 95% CI=[0.4161, 0.8997]	Mediation effect found
BCI × Sponsor-brand-Club Brand Congruence →Sponsor-brand Advocacy	Moderation effects	2×2 ANOVA	$F_{(1,116)}$=8.09, p<0.01	Supported
BCI× Sponsor-brand-Club Brand Congruence →Sponsor-brand Purchase intention	Moderation effects	2×2 ANOVA	$F_{(1, 116)}$=4.22, p=0.04	Supported

Notes: BCI, Brand community identification; BCE, Brand community engagement; SD, Standard deviation

Table 5: *Sample "we" and "non-we" wording used by respondents*

Respondents	Sample statements using "we", "us", or "our"
Respondent 1	We are always loyal to Manchester United even when our team is not doing so well. Our team have recently been playing very well and I am especially proud of the achievements
Respondent 2	I think our team are performing well in general…… we are all very excited for the future.
Respondent 3	,,, It gives us a deeper connection to the game, to our team and the other fans…. Like I said though, we are more of a global community of fans of Manchester United out there and I also feel a part of this group too. Our shared love of the game and of Manchester United as a team can cross cultural divides, oceans, language barriers.
Respondents	**Sample statements using "non-we" words such as "the team" and "they"**
Respondent 4	I like the team. they have been playing well. but some unforeseen reason their performance has declined for last few months.
Respondent 5	I like the team. they have been playing well. but some unforeseen reason their performance has declined for last few months…….The team seems like they can't be bothered and the new manager doesn't seem to be helping at all.
Respondent 6	I have been a Manchester United fan for many years and now they upset me……….I feel like the team has lost it's way……

Table 6: *Scale items used in Study 4*

| Construct and Items used	Cronbach α	Source od adaption
Brand Community Engagement		
I benefit from following the Manchester United online fan community's rules.	0.85	Algesheimer et al. (2005)
I am motivated to participate in the Manchester United online fan community's activities because I feel better afterwards.		
I am motivated to participate in the Manchester United online fan community's activities because I am able to support other members		
I am motivated to participate in the Manchester United online fan community's activities because I am able to reach personal goals.		
Sponsor-brand Authenticity		
The above sponsor-brands are timeless brands that survives trend.	**0.86**	Guèvremont and Grohmann (2018)
The above sponsor-brands are honest brand that accomplishes its value promise.		
The above sponsor-brands are with moral principles that cares about the consumers.		
The above sponsor-brands reflect important value by adding meanings to people's life		
Sponsor-club Brand Congruence		
There is a logical connection between the Manchester United and the sponsor brands.	**0.89**	Speed and Thompson (2000)
The image of the Manchester United and the image of the sponsor brands are similar.		
The sponsor brands and the Manchester United fit together well.		
The sponsor brands and Manchester United stand for similar things.		
It makes sense to me that the sponsor brands sponsor Manchester United.		

Table 7: *Summary of Findings (Study 4)*

Hypothesis	Type	Test	Results	Conclusion
BCI→Sponsor-brand Choice	Main effects	Logistic regression	M_{High}= M = 89.16%, SD = 0.31; M_{Low}=37.50%, SD = 0.49; b = 2,62, SE = 0.42, Wald = 38.50, p < .00	Supported
BCI→BCE→ Sponsor-brand choice	Mediation effects	Hayes PROCESS Macro (Model 4)	Indirect: b = 0.57, SE = 0.21, 95% CI: [0.2284, 1.0460] Direct: b = 2.27, SE = 0.44, 95% CI: [1.4126, 3.1265]	Mediation effect found
BCI × Sponsor-club brand congruence →Sponsor-brand choice	Moderation effects	Logistic regression	b = 2.01, SE = 0.42, Wald = 23.32, p < .00	Supported
BCI× Sponsor-brand authenticity →Sponsor-brand purchase choice	Moderation effects	Logistic regression	b = 2.07, SE = 0.52, Wald = 16.13, p < .00	Supported

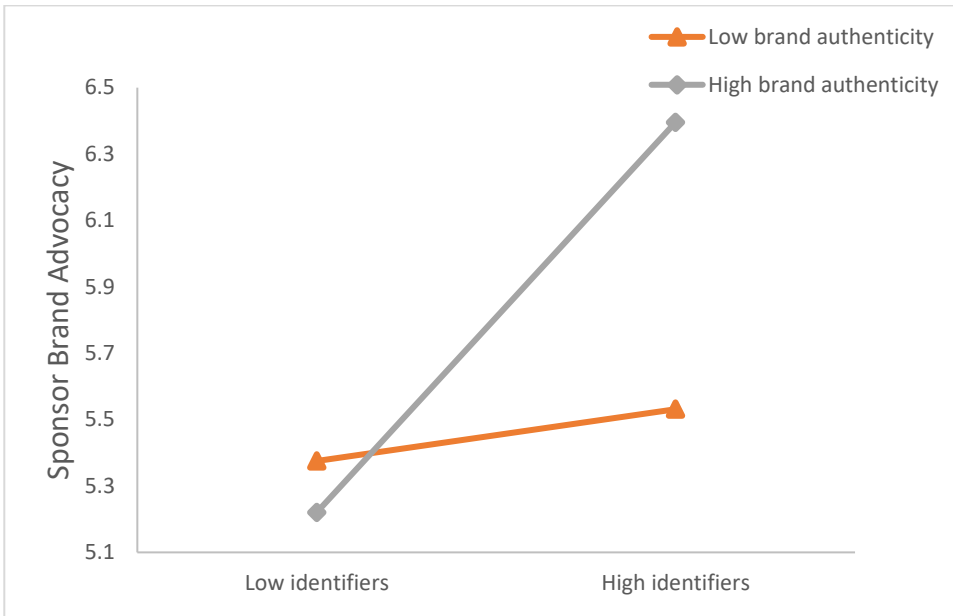# FIGURES

Figure 1

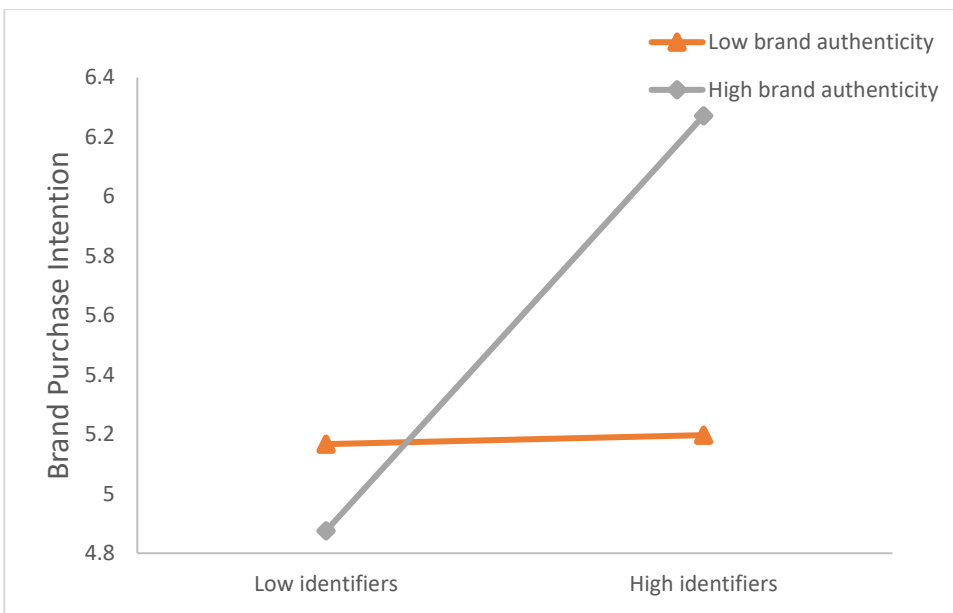*A conceptual model for brand community members' sponsor support decisions*
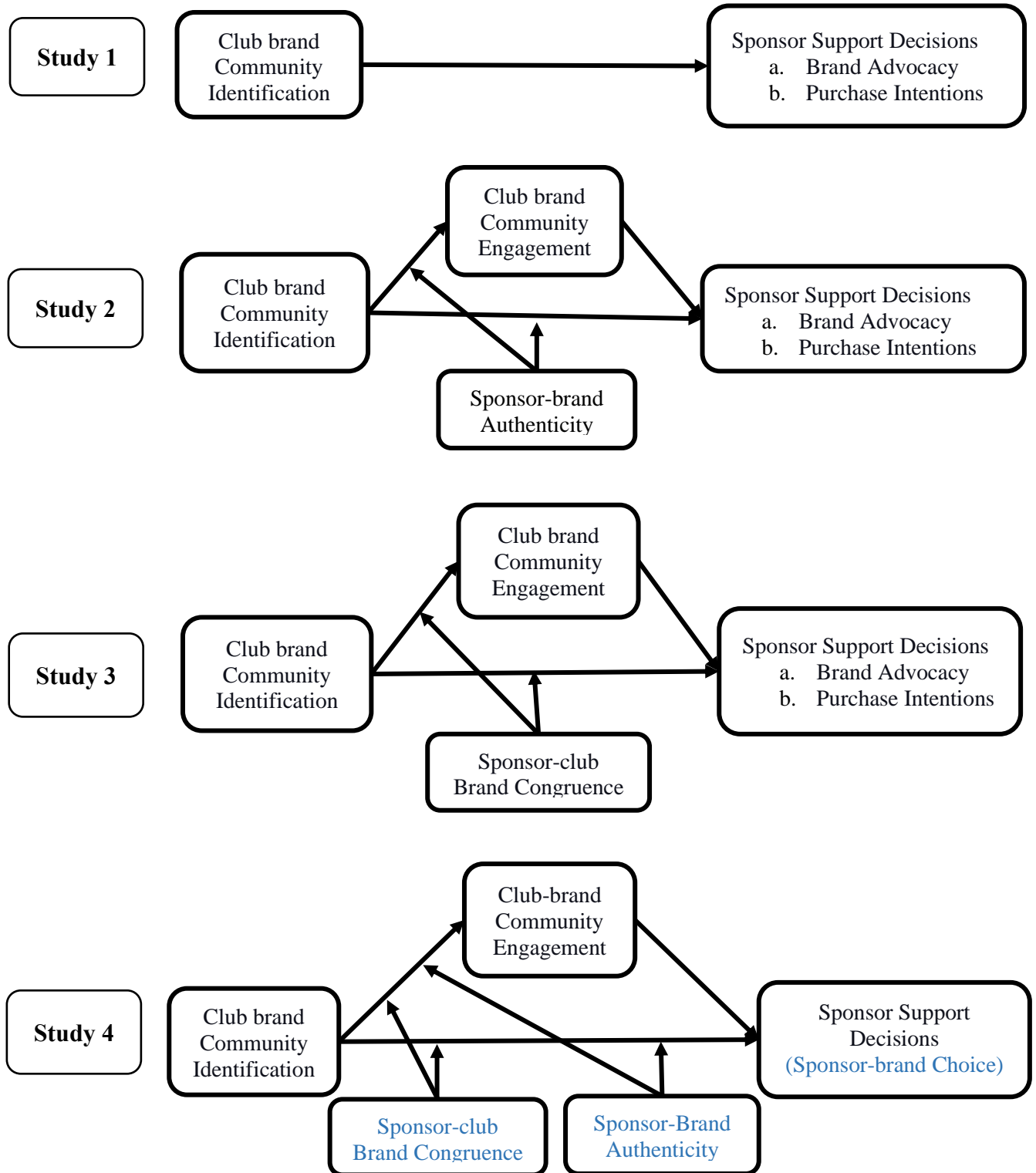
Figure 2a: *Moderating role of brand authenticity on sponsor-brand advocacy*


Note. The slope changes sharply, indicating that sponsor-brand authenticity sharply increases when we expose brand community members to a more authentic sponsor-brand.

**Figure 2b**: *Moderating role of brand authenticity on brand purchase intention*

Note. The slope changes sharply, indicating that sponsor-brand purchase intention sharply increases when we expose brand community members to a more authentic sponsor-brand.

Figure 3a: *Moderating role of brand congruence on sponsor-brand advocacy*
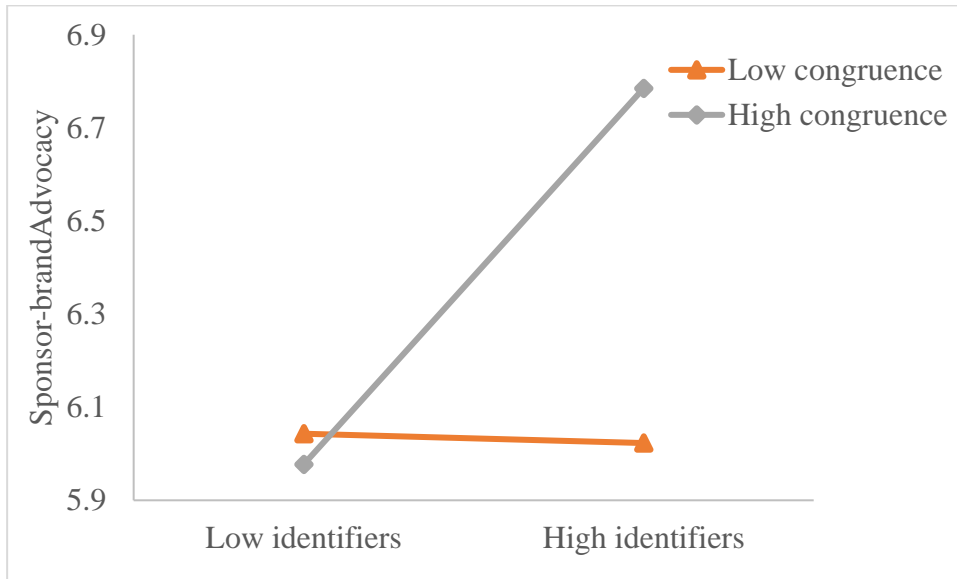
Note. In the high congruence condition, sponsor-brand advocacy of the brand community members increases sharply. Whereas, in the low congruence condition, sponsor-brand advocacy of the brand community members remains unchanged.
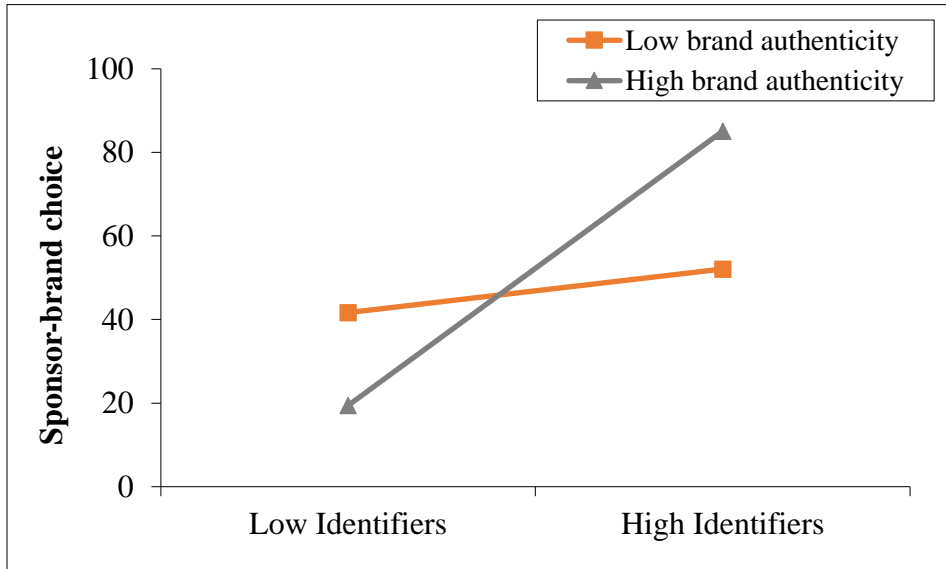
Figure 3b: *Moderating role of brand congruence on brand purchase intention*
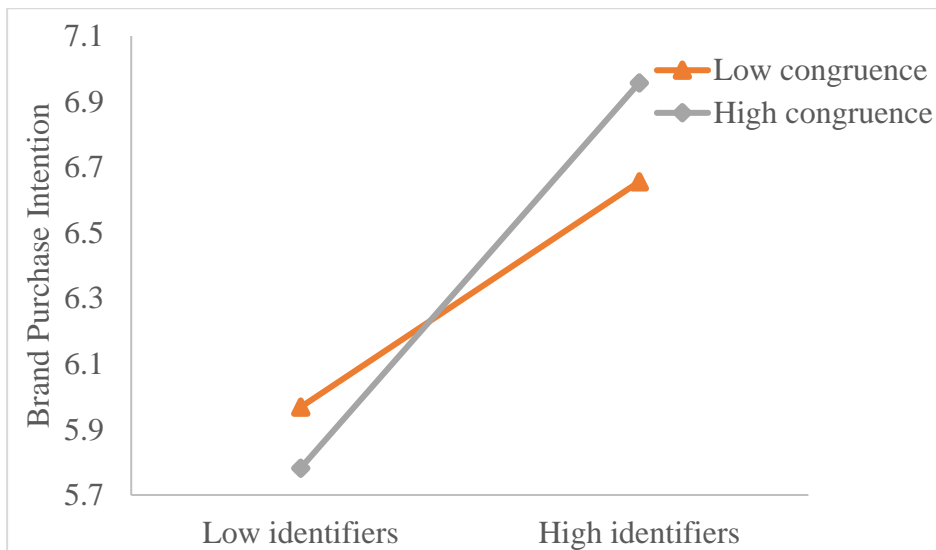
Note. In the high congruence condition, sponsor-brand purchase intention of the brand community members increases sharply. Whereas, in the low congruence condition, sponsor-brand purchase intention of the brand community members also increases with a lower slope.
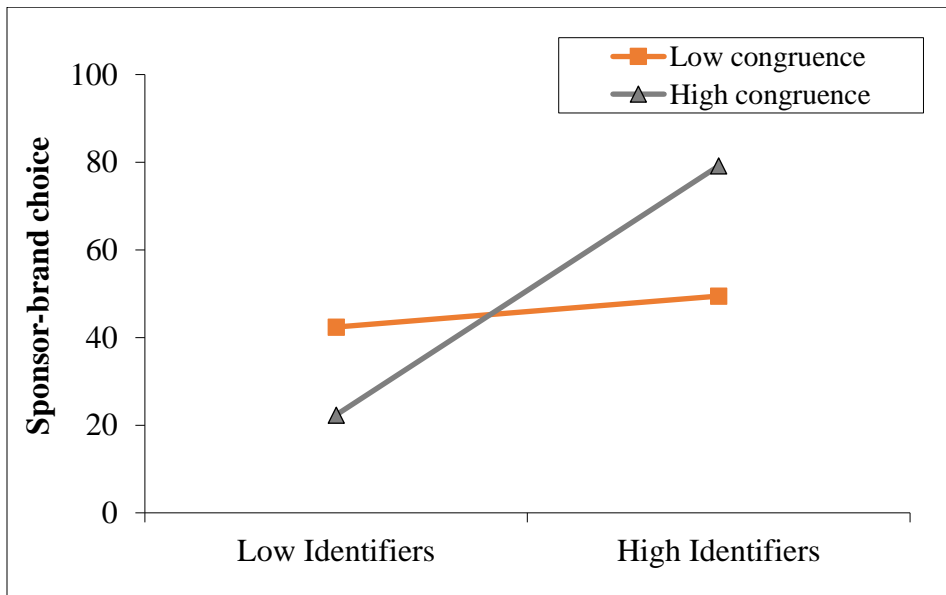
Figure 4a: *Moderating role of brand authenticity on sponsor-brand choice*

Note. In the high brand authenticity condition, sponsor-brand choice of the brand community members increases sharply. Whereas, in the low congruence condition, sponsor-brand advocacy of the brand community members remains unchanged.

Figure 4b: *Moderating role of brand congruence on sponsor-brand choice*

Note. In the high congruence condition, sponsor-brand choice of the brand community members increases sharply. Whereas, in the low congruence condition, sponsor-brand advocacy of the brand community members remains unchanged.

APPENDIX

Appendix A

Instructions for essay writing task to manipulate brand community identification

The instructions for the high-identification condition were as follows:

"In the space provided below, write 5–6 sentences about being a member of the Red Miners community. In what ways do you think you are similar to other members of the Red Miner community? Consider the interests, beliefs, values, etc., that you believe are similar to other members of the Red Miners community. Try to recall some specific experiences that made you feel like a part of the Red Miners community."

For the low identification condition, the instruction was as follows:

"In the space provided below, write 5-6 sentences about yourself. In what ways do you think you are different from others here at the Red Miners Community? Consider the interests, beliefs, values, etc., that you believe describe you. Try to recall some specific experiences that made you feel different from others at the Red Miners Community".

Appendix B

Stimuli used in study 2

a) Fictitious ad used for high brand authenticity condition

b) Fictitious ad used for low brand authenticity condition

Appendix C

Statements used to prime the participants for the high or low congruent conditions

For high congruent condition, i.e., brand Nivia - "*The following brand named NIVIA has announced an agreement to sponsor the Jamshedpur FC for the next five seasons. The company's spokesperson said that the sponsorship agreement was undertaken to showcase its products to the fans of the football club. The brand's exclusive merchandise will be made available during the club's home matches, and free fitness advice will be given to the fans*".

For the low congruent condition, i.e., brand Paytm - "*The following brand named PAYTM has announced an agreement to sponsor the Jamshedpur FC for the next five seasons. The company's spokesperson said that the sponsorship agreement was undertaken because the company's customers are also the fans of the football club. The company has also decided to give free coupons to the fans of the football club during the home matches*".