

# THE EFFECT OF ORGANIZER-SPONSOR CONGRUENCE ON SPONSOR CREDIBILITY AND THE MODERATING ROLE OF INVOLVEMENT

*O Efeito da Congruência Organizador-Patrocinador na Credibilidade do Patrocinador e o Papel  
Moderador do Envolvimento*

Luiz Silva dos Santos<sup>1,4</sup>

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0942-9677>

E-mail: luizsilvadossantos@uol.com.br

Evandro Luiz Lopes<sup>2,3</sup>

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2780-4215>

E-mail: evandro.lopes@espm.br

Ana Karina Santos<sup>4</sup>

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6243-4611>

E-mail: anakst@gmail.com

<sup>1</sup>Universidade Nove de Julho, São Paulo, Brasil

<sup>2</sup>Escola Superior de Propaganda e Marketing, São Paulo, Brasil

<sup>3</sup>Universidade Federal de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brasil

<sup>4</sup>Universidade de São Paulo, Departamento de Psicologia, São Paulo, Brasil

## Abstract

Sports sponsorship has been increasingly used as a marketing tool and as a financial support for the organization of sporting events. The

## Resumo

O patrocínio esportivo tem sido cada vez mais utilizado como ferramenta de marketing e como suporte financeiro para a organização

aim of this study was to investigate whether consumer involvement with the brand, the product and the sporting event moderates the organizer-sponsor congruence, and enhances the perceived sponsor credibility. The sample consisted of 700 runners who participated in three street racing events. Data were analyzed using the partial least squares structural equation modeling. The congruence between the brand and the event sponsorship did not affect the consumer's perception of the sponsor's credibility. The perceived sponsor credibility was enhanced by the congruence between the sponsor's product and the sponsorship, and by the consumer's involvement in the sporting event. The empirical evidence of the hypothetical relationships confirmed in this research sheds light on the mechanisms by which sponsorship leads to a beneficial consumer response.

**Keywords:** Sport Sponsorship; Sporting Event; Event Organizer; Involvement; Congruence.

de eventos. O objetivo deste estudo foi investigar se o envolvimento do consumidor com a marca, com o produto e com o evento esportivo modera a congruência entre o organizador e o patrocinador, e aumenta a credibilidade percebida do patrocinador. A amostra foi composta por 700 corredores que participaram de três eventos de corrida de rua. Os dados foram analisados por meio da modelagem de equações estruturais de mínimos quadrados parciais. A congruência entre a marca e o patrocinador do evento não afetou a percepção do consumidor sobre a credibilidade do patrocinador. A credibilidade percebida do patrocinador foi influenciada positivamente pela congruência entre o produto do patrocinador e o patrocínio, e pelo envolvimento do consumidor no evento esportivo. A evidência empírica das relações hipotéticas confirmadas nesta pesquisa lança luz sobre os mecanismos pelos quais o patrocínio leva a uma resposta benéfica do consumidor.

**Palavras-chave:** Patrocínio Esportivo; Evento esportivo; Organizador de Eventos; Envolvimento; Congruência.

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## INTRODUCTION

Sports sponsorship has been increasingly used as a marketing tool (Cornwell, 2019) and as an important financial support for the organization of sporting events (Cárdenas et al., 2013). The literature has extensively examined the importance of sponsor-sporting event congruence. However, there are no studies that address the organizer-sponsor congruence. A search on the Web of Science database and in specific journals focused on events and sports marketing showed that there are no studies available on this topic between 2010 and 2020.

Sport involves people emotionally (Teal et al., 2020), whether they are practitioners or spectators. The emotional impact of sport is explicit in the repercussion of diverse sporting events, such as the Olympics or a regional soccer championship. Companies benefit from sports sponsorship as a means to achieve business objectives (Ghezail et al., 2017). Sporting event sponsorship is one of the most embracing activities in the contemporary marketing context. The experiential nature of events is perfectly suitable to facilitate proximity and intimacy with consumers (Donlan & Crowther, 2014).

Although a successful sponsorship is profitable, sports sponsorship can be a risk. The success of an event in delivering the desired results is not predictable. The exposure of a brand through sports may not be efficient. In this case, the event sponsor associated with the organizer can adopt a specific strategy for brand exposure (Melo Neto, 2003).

This study expands the literature on marketing sponsorship by considering sponsor credibility as a dependent variable to measure the effects of sponsorship, given that advertising communications are received with a certain skepticism evoked by commercial goals and consumer beliefs about

advertisers' motivation (Meenaghan, 2001). Additionally, this research addresses the relationship between organizer and sponsor as factors that impact consumer perception of sponsor credibility, which in turn will influence their attitudes towards the sponsor and behavioral intentions.

As stated by IEG Consulting, only 66% of companies evaluate the effect and financial return of sponsorships for the institution (IEG Sponsorship Report, 2018). Despite sponsor and organizer being fundamental communication tools, for many years this relation has not received the necessary attention in marketing literature. Accordingly, the research question of this study is: What are the effects of the congruence between the organizer and the sponsor of the event on the sponsor credibility, moderated by the consumer's involvement with the brand's and sponsor's product, and with the sporting event?

## **THEORETICAL REVIEW**

### **Sporting Event Organizer**

The whole process involving a sponsorship must include well-planned actions with the event organizer aiming at the achievement of the objectives, such as a positive influence on consumers' attitudes and intentions (Sbrighi, 2006).

Event organizer is a company which engaged in planning, organizing, leading and delivering the event (Mei & Andry, 2019). The success of an event depends on these managerial skills (Abson, 2017). One of the tasks of the event organizer is to define and employ strategies in structuring the event and retaining the audience's interest in the sport. Moreover, event organizers need to ensure the favorable outcome of the sporting event through persuasive marketing campaign to attract spectators (Chiu, Won, & Leng, 2018).

The organizer selects potential sponsors, supports in the achievement of the established objectives, identifies aspects to be improved and conducts the evaluation of the effective execution of the contract (Cárdenas et al., 2013). Therefore, the event organizer also becomes a central point to be focused as a communication tool for the sponsoring brand. On the other hand, corporate sponsorship helps to build or strengthen a favorable image for the event organizer on a corporate and brand level (Grohs & Heribert, 2014).

Melo Neto (2003) suggests that the organizer and the sponsor must have similarities with the event, in order to positively influence consumer behavior. The author states that, when this relationship is not established the sponsorship becomes just an uncritical exposure of a brand to the event audience. Fleck and Quester (2007) point out that more favorable evaluations by consumers of a brand in relation to the marketing actions would lead to congruence. On the other hand, a high degree of incongruence would tend to generate a negative outcome. Thus, the authors consider that consumer evaluations of a product or a brand should be considered as components of congruence, which, in turn, lead to positive consumer responses. From these perspectives, we consider that the success of the sponsorship depends on the work performed by the event organizer. Therefore, we put forward the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1.** Participants' evaluation of the event organizer enhances sponsor credibility.

### **Sponsorship of sporting events**

Sports sponsorship is defined as the investment in an event, team, or athlete, aiming to obtain commercial advantages from the association with the sport (Farrelly & Quester, 2005). Sponsorship involves an exchange of resources between independent parties with the expectation that a corresponding return will be received. A key concept behind this logic is the benefit of both parties and the mutual exchange (Blake et al., 2019).

Sports sponsorship is one of the fastest growing marketing communication tools for reaching target audiences. The growth rate of sponsorship spending is higher than that of traditional media advertising and sales promotion (International Events Group [IEG], 2018). According to the 2018 IEG Sponsorship Report, about 70% of all sponsorship money is invested in sporting events.

Sponsorship of sporting events provides benefits to the companies, such as increased engagement with consumers and brand image improvement (Farrelly & Quester, 2005; Walraven et al., 2016). Through sport sponsorship, companies can gain competitive advantage (Hino & Takeda, 2020). Fans watch the athletes' competitions while receiving visual information from the sponsoring brand logo, displayed throughout the stadium, on the playing field, and on the athletes' uniforms. The main benefits are related to the impact on the consumer's perception of the sponsor's credibility (Koo & Lee, 2019). Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed:

**Hypothesis 2.** Participants' evaluation of the sponsor enhances sponsor credibility.

### Congruence

The concept of congruence was first introduced in social psychology to examine memory and attitude development (Jagre et al., 2001). According to Osgood and Tannenbaum (1955), congruence is the perception of adjustment between objects; humans evaluate different objects and develop attitudes based on the perceived congruence between them. Combining two objects with separate meanings causes a process of congruence, resulting in a change of attitude to sustain cognitive consistency and to maintain commonality between different objects (Solomon et al., 2014).

Tsiotsou and Alexandris (2009) emphasized the importance of congruence as a theoretical concept to facilitate the understanding of how sponsorship works. The congruence facilitates the introduction of new products on the market and the consumer processing of marketing messages (Fleck & Quester, 2007). Parolini et al. (2019) conducted a study that described which sponsor profile would be considered most suitable for a street racing event, from the perspective of the event participants. The results showed that participants suggested that sponsors should be brands congruent with the sport. Furthermore, sponsorship was considered an essential element of the event.

Consumers are likely to remember congruent information associated with their previous experiences, such as those related to the sponsorship company's product (Lee & Cho, 2009). The higher the degree of congruence with the organizer, the more likely people are to remember the sponsors. If the degree of coherence is high, the cognitive scheme will be more easily used by consumers (Na & Kim, 2013; Prendergast et al., 2010).

### Involvement

Involvement is defined as a person's perceived relevance of the object based on personal demand, values and interest in the product (Zaichkowsky, 1985). There is not a consensual definition of involvement. However, researchers have agreed that the best approach is to associate involvement with a specific domain like, product involvement, advertising message involvement, or sport involvement.

The adaptation of the concept of involvement in the context of sporting events has recently been used and seems particularly appropriate to extend it to consumer behavior research (Funk & James, 2001). Guthrie & Kim (2009) state that involvement refers to the needs, values and self-concept of an individual, and expresses the person's beliefs and feelings about an object. In other words, the concept does not apply to the object itself, but to the way in which the person responds to it.

If the characteristics of the product are associated with the consumers' objectives and values, they will experience feelings of personal importance and, consequently, an involvement with the product. The importance of a product is represented by the relationship between individuals' needs and values (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2000). Zucco et. al (2015) state that "from the sponsorship point of view, it seems evident that a good prior involvement is a condition for consumers to perceive sponsorship positively and be willing to spend their time and spend their money in favor of their team" (p. 144).

Involvement as a moderating variable has to do with the fact that consumers involved with the product perceive messages and information differently from those not involved. They tend to focus more on attribute and performance information. On the other hand, uninvolved consumers tend to evaluate the product or service based on some superficial analysis of available cues and stimuli

presented to them (Katherine & Stephen, 2002). Thus, consumer involvement is likely to have an impact on the sponsor credibility and enhances information processing related to the sponsored sporting event (Chang & Gibson, 2011).

### **Moderating role of involvement**

Several studies on sponsorship have considered involvement as a moderating variable. Koo and Lee (2019) found out that sport involvement moderates the effectiveness of sponsor-event congruence. According to McDaniel (1999) sporting involvement moderates the relationship between sponsor-event congruence and consumer responses. The study conducted by Inoue, Funk, & McDonald (2017) revealed that involvement had a positive mediating effect on the relationship between perceived corporate social responsibility and consumer loyalty. Sport involvement was also a strong moderating factor between corporate image and brand love, positively influencing purchase intention (Trivedi, 2020). Alexandris, Theodorakis, Kaplanidou, & Papadimitriou (2017) showed that sport involvement played a moderating role in the relationship between perceived event quality and event loyalty. According to Dos Santos, Moreno, Gascó & Lizama (2021) involvement moderates the relationship between sponsorship and perceived product quality.

Chandrashekar and Grewal (2003) considered involvement as a moderating variable between the association between published price and internal price references. Miniard et al. (1991) found that the moderating effect of involvement reduces the differences in the perception of an individual with a higher level of involvement in relation to the visualization of a figure related to a certain product that has no association, and of another figure associated with the product.

In sports sponsorship, highly involved consumers in sports may have a more sophisticated processing of a marketing message, as opposed to consumers with low involvement. Consequently, those with high involvement in sports may pay more attention to incongruent combinations than to congruent combinations between sponsors and events. However, for consumers with low involvement this effect can be mitigated, as congruent and incongruent pairs may not receive enough attention from this group. This thought process can lead to skepticism in the sponsor's motives and negatively affects the sponsor's credibility.

### **Sponsor credibility**

Corporate credibility is a dimension of corporate reputation and represents the degree to which consumers believe in the trustworthiness of the company (Lafferty, 2009). Sponsor credibility is an important variable for measuring sponsorship effects, given that marketing communications may be received with low credibility due to consumer beliefs about advertisers' business motivation (Meenaghan, 2001).

Research supports the hypothesis that the sponsor-event congruence positively influences sponsor credibility (Wang, 2017). If a fan's perception of the match between their favorite team and their sponsor's brand is high, they are likely to develop a sense of sponsor credibility (Rifon et al., 2004). Studies of social media content and information sources have also shown that consumers were more willing to engage with posts that they considered credible (Keib & Wojdyski, 2018; Westerman et al., 2014).

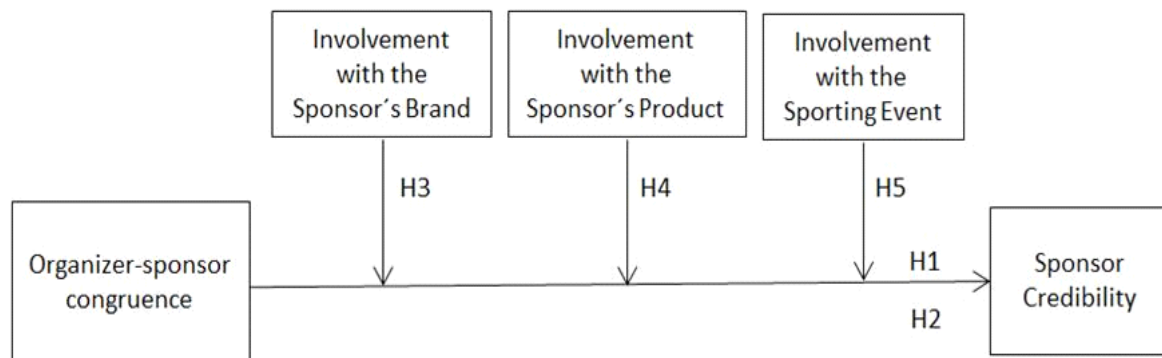
Koo and Lee (2019) suggested that there is a lack of research focused on the moderating role of involvement. The authors also stated that studying the moderating role of involvement is very significant, as it may influence the consequence of stimuli on the sponsor's benefits. They showed that sport involvement moderates the efficiency of sponsor-event congruence on sponsor credibility, with a positive effect on consumer's attitude and purchase intention. According to the authors, the path to reach the sponsor's objective goes through congruence, involvement and credibility. The empirical model of this study (Fig. 1) proposes that consumer involvement (with the sponsor's brand, the sponsor's product and the event) moderates the organizer-sponsor congruence and enhances sponsor credibility. Hence, the following hypotheses are proposed:



**Hypothesis 3.** Organizer – sponsor congruence is moderated by the involvement with the sponsor's brand and enhances sponsor credibility.

**Hypothesis 4.** Organizer – sponsor congruence is moderated by the involvement with the sponsor's product and enhances sponsor credibility.

**Hypothesis 5.** Organizer – sponsor congruence is moderated by the involvement with the sporting event and enhances sponsor credibility.



Source: the authors

**Figure. 1** Tested Model

## METHOD

### Participants

Participants were approached and invited to participate in the study during the delivery of participation kits and in the days of the events in São Paulo, Brazil. The events were: 1st Mag Run SP, held on December 22nd, 2019; São Silvestre Pedestrian Race, held on December 31st, 2019; and 14th São Paulo International Half Marathon, held on February 2nd, 2020.

A total of 822 interviews was conducted. After checking and validating the inclusion criteria, 700 valid questionnaires remained. Questionnaires that showed inconsistencies in the responses were discarded. There is a theoretical discussion regarding the ideal sample size for the application of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), however Garson (1998) and Hair Jr. et al. (2014) suggest using 5 to 10 cases per estimated parameter. As the data collection instrument consists of 66 questions, there are  $66 \times 5 = 330$  respondents. Thus, the total of 700 interviews is satisfactory and meets all the criteria recommended in the literature.

In terms of the demographics of the sample, 537 were men (76.7%) and 163 women (23.3%). The age ranged from 18 to 81 years old ( $M = 47.2$ ;  $SD = 13.07$ ). Most of them were married (43.9%), followed by singles (39.9%), divorced (11.1%) and others (05.0%). The majority was educated at a secondary level (52.4%), followed by university graduates (47.6%). About 79% had a job.

### Instruments

Six Likert scales, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), were used. In order to measure the sponsor - event congruence, items from the scale developed by Fleck and Quester (2007) were adapted and ten questions were used: five assertive questions for the organizer and five for the sporting event sponsor. The involvement was measured using three scales adapted from Zaichkowsky (1985, 1994) and Shank and Beasley (1998). The scales were composed of ten items that assessed the participants' involvement with the sponsor's brand and products, and with the sporting events. The six items of Sweney and Swait's (2008) scale were adapted to assess sponsor credibility. The data collection instrument was divided into two parts: the first, with the 46 questions of the scales

and the second part with questions about gender, age, marital status, level of education and income, for the demographic description of the participants.

### **Data analysis**

Descriptive analyses were performed using the program Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0. Multivariate analyses using the partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to test the proposed hypotheses. SmartPLS 3.2 software was used to analyze the data.

The technique used was the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), with estimation by Partial Least Squares, according to the guidelines and evaluation criteria suggested by Hair et al. (2016). Bido, Souza, Silva, Godoy, and Torres (2009), pointed out that the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique provides the examination of the structure of interrelationships in a series of multiple regression equations. The equations, in turn, simultaneously describe the relationships between constructs involved in the analysis. In this study, the estimation model with latent variables was adopted. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), used as the statistical technique for data analysis in this study, is justified because it is a multivariate method for analyzing the interdependencies and confirming and quantifying the effects between the dependent and independent variables. Thus, it is expected to confirm or reject the hypotheses.

## **RESULTS**

Table 1 presents the results of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for the constructs (organizer, sponsor, involvement with the sponsor's brand and product, involvement with the sporting event and sponsor credibility), the composite reliability, and the internal consistency analysis (Cronbach's Alpha). As recommended by Hair et al. (2014), the composite reliability and the internal consistency values were both greater than 0.70. All average variance extracted (AVE) values were greater than 50% (Fornell & Larcker's, 1981).

**Table 1**

AVE, Composite Reliability and Internal Consistency (Cronbach's Alpha).

Constructs	AVE	Composite reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
Organizer	0,524	0,846	0,771
Sponsor	0,619	0,890	0,845
Sponsor's brand involvement	0,509	0,910	0,889
Sponsor's product involvement	0,508	0,911	0,916
Sporting event involvement	0,566	0,928	0,913
Sponsor credibility	0,560	0,883	0,842

Source: the authors

The results according to Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criteria are described in Table 2. The square roots of the AVE construct validity should be greater than the correlation with the other constructs (Chin, 1998). Ringle et al. (2014) suggest applying the discriminant validity analysis of the observed variables to test the variances.

The bootstrapping algorithm (random resampling with replacement) of the SmartPLS software was used with the parameter of 5000 for the number of cases and samples as suggested by Hair et al. (2016). In this step, for 95% reliability, Student's t-values must be above 1.96 and the p-value above 0.05. The significance values (t) consider three critical values for t: 5%, 1% and 0.1%. These are the type I error levels ( $\alpha$ ), which shows the level of probability of rejecting the null hypothesis when in fact it is correct (Hair et al., 2014).

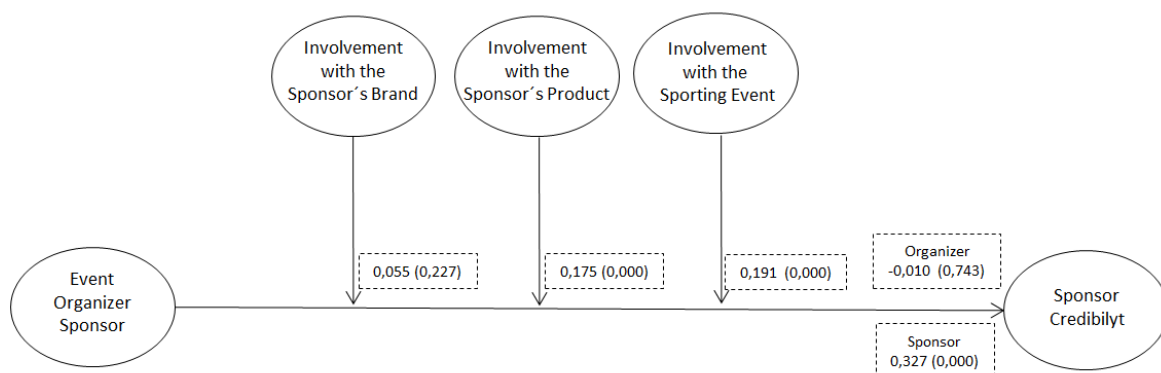
**Table 2**

Discriminant Validity Results (off-diagonal) and Square Roots of the AVE (in bold).

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Organizer	<b>0,6891</b>					
2. Sponsor	0,6026	<b>0,8252</b>				
3. Sponsor's Brand involvement	0,5456	0,7564	<b>0,7959</b>			
4. Sponsor's Product involvement	0,4679	0,6359	0,6985	<b>0,8942</b>		
5. Sporting Event Involvement	0,4154	0,5156	0,6010	0,7758	<b>0,8154</b>	
6. Sponsor Credibility	0,3845	0,4510	0,5278	0,6541	0,7545	<b>0,8669</b>

Source: the authors

The values of the path coefficients ( $\beta$ ) and the significance (t-values) were used to evaluate the structural model. The variance explained of the endogenous variables ( $R^2$ ) was analyzed in order to verify the explanatory power of the relationships. The values of the variance explained of the endogenous variables ( $R^2$ ) should be equal to or greater than 10% (Falke & Miller, 1992). The results indicate that the structural model of this study has an adequate adjustment. The structural model results are illustrated in the Figure 2 and listed in Table 3.



Source: the authors

\*Values outside the parentheses are the standardized structural coefficients (betas) and the values inside the parentheses are the -p values.

**Figure. 2** Result of the structural model**Table 3**

Structural Model Results and Significance.

Hypothesis	Path coefficient ( $\beta$ )	t-value	P-value	Result
H1 – Organizer → Sponsor Credibility	-0,010	0,329	0,743	Rejected
H2 – Sponsor → Sponsor Credibility	0,327	6,938	0,000*	Supported
H3 - Sponsor's Brand involvement (Organizer – sponsor congruence) → Sponsor Credibility	0,055	1,207	0,227	Rejected
H4 - Sponsor's Product involvement (Organizer – sponsor congruence) → Sponsor Credibility	-0,175	3,871	0,000*	Supported
H5 - Sporting Event Involvement (Organizer – sponsor congruence) → Sponsor Credibility	0,191	4,792	0,000*	Supported

Source: the authors; Note:\*pvalue &lt;0,0001



## DISCUSSION

This study showed that consumer evaluation of sponsorship had a positive impact on consumer perception of sponsor credibility, which in turn is influenced by the organizer-sponsor congruence and moderated by the consumer's involvement with the event. The consumer's evaluation of the event organizer had no influence on sponsor credibility. Although the success of the event also depends on the managerial skills of the organizer, the consumer presumably considers sponsoring and organizing to be distinct entities with specific actions and responsibilities. The scope of sponsorship depends on the relationship between the sponsor and the target consumer (Crimmins & Horn, 1996). It should be part of a larger strategy to cause the expected cognitive and emotional consumers' responses (Cornwell, 2019). In this study, we had a sporting event and sponsorship aimed at a specific audience, which implies that this connection must be carefully arranged.

The congruence between the brand and the events sponsorship did not affect the consumer's perception of the sponsor's credibility. On the contrary, Trivedi (2020) pointed out that sport involvement was a factor that strengthened the relationship between the company image and brand love. This relationship between involvement and brand was not found in this study. A plausible justification is that participants did not directly associate the brand with the sponsor, maybe due to a low level of involvement. As described by Koc (2019), low involved consumers are likely to forget marketing communication information, whereas high involved consumers tend to be more sensitive to marketing communication information. Another explanation is the lack of a direct relationship (between the brand and the sponsor) that was not established before or during the event. Lee and Koo (2016) observed that high involvement consumers presented more positive attitude toward the brand when the congruence sponsor-brand was clearly perceived. Sponsorship success depends on the sponsors' ability to explain how their connection with the sponsored entity should be interpreted (Wang, 2017).

The study supported the hypothesis that the congruence between the sponsor's product and the sponsorship enhances the perceived sponsor credibility. Possibly, because the product is something more tangible and concrete than the brand, the participants of the street races could easily establish a mental connection between the product and the sponsor. Another possible explanation is that involved individuals pay more attention to message processing and non-involved individuals may not pay attention to marketing actions. Previous research suggested that product involvement is associated with the consumer information processing. Santos et al. (2021) found that highly involved consumers have a higher perception of product quality. The study by O'Neill and Lambert (2001) showed that the greater the involvement with a given product, the lower the price awareness. This result is associated with the hedonism related to the consumption of products and the consumer's involvement. Thus, the consumer focuses less attention to the price and more to the hedonic relationship with the product. In this sense, involvement moderates the time pressure along the path from perceived value to purchase intention.

The results of this study are consistent with the findings by Koo & Lee (2019). The authors suggest that perceived sponsor credibility enhances when consumers are involved with the sporting event. A sponsorship campaign in which sponsor-organizer congruence occurs can positively influence the perceived sponsor credibility, especially with consumers involved with the product and the sporting event. The triad "congruence - involvement - credibility" is a promising way to achieve sponsorship objectives. Also in line with Parolini et al. (2019), the connection between the sponsor and the organizer enabled the cognitive construction of a perception of credibility, which is an indicator of the success of sports sponsorship. At this point, it is possible to state that the sponsorship objective has been achieved.

The involvement with a sporting event can provoke positive emotions (Meenaghan, 2001), affecting the outcomes linked to sponsorship (Cornwell et al, 2005; Ko et al. 2008). Furthermore, being involved with an event can lead the participants to expend more money (Lee et al., 2012) and to enhance the recall of the sponsoring brand (Lardinoit & Derbaix, 2001). Such involvement, is a

significant factor influencing the desired consumer behavior. For example, Chiu, Won, & Leng (2018) found out that involvement was predicted sporting events attendance intention.

We empirically identified that the effectiveness of organizer-sponsor congruence was moderated by involvement. Researchers have emphasized the importance of sport involvement in a sport management context. McDaniel (1999) suggested the important role of sport involvement as a moderator in the relationship between sponsor-event congruence and consumer responses. Dos Santos et al. (2021) observed that consumers with a high level of involvement were more sensitive to product value than those less involved. The highly involved consumers were influenced by the costs on the purchase decision process. On the other hand, highly involved consumers can have more knowledge about the product and be more sensitive about the value.

Our results showed the moderating role of involvement. Similar findings have been observed in several studies. According to Kim, Morgan, & Assaker (2021) involvement has a strong effect on consumers' loyalty. Involvement is also seen as a form of emotional attachment that depends on how the product reflects personal beliefs and values. Dos Santos et al. (2021) stated that fan involvement can moderate the relationship between perceived sponsorship leverage and the process of image transfer. Alonso-Dos-Santos, Vveinhardt, Moreno, & Montoro-Rios (2016) argue that individuals who are more involved process the image transfer effect. According to Tsitskari et al. (2014) individuals who are involved in an activity are more likely to remain customers in the future. When individuals are involved to a high degree, they will prefer to spend more time, money, or energy to participate in additional activities or to consume related products.

From a theoretical perspective, considering the role of the event organizer brings a new variable to studies on sponsorship. For this reason, this research sets a precedent for further studies. Since companies sponsor events that usually involve an organizer, a better understanding of the relationship between the event and the sponsorship outcomes is needed. From a managerial perspective, including the organizer as a variable of great importance in marketing campaigns can make sporting event sponsorship more successful.

Convincingly, a joint work with the event organizer is crucial for the sponsorship, especially in those events that have active participants and not just spectators. The participants' experience in events may be decisive for the success of the sponsorship. As stated by Parolini et al. (2019) "when the runner perceives the added value of the event and is satisfied, he feels motivated to continue practicing street racing, aiming for a new experience in another sporting event" (p.410).

Organizer-sponsor congruence may be rooted in similarities of values. Sponsoring a sporting event should articulate the values in common between the event and the sponsoring company, so that the sponsor can persuasively communicate the importance of supporting the event. These values and beliefs should be known before committing the sponsor's resources. One way to gain this insight is to make analyses of other events and organizers that are aligned with their values.

A challenge to overcome is the development of strategies aimed at increasing consumer involvement. These actions can enhance the perceived credibility, which ultimately generates economic benefits through sponsorship. A solution to optimize the level of congruence and involvement is to promote activities during the event in which people can participate and share experiences. Joint activities stimulate people's sense of belonging and the feeling of intimacy with the products, the brand and the event.

## CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study, the effects of the organizer-sponsor congruence of a sporting event and the influence on perceived credibility, mediated by the involvement, were investigated. The empirical evidence of the hypothetical relationships confirmed in this research sheds light on the mechanisms by which sponsorship leads to a beneficial consumer response.

This research adds important information to the scientific literature on sports sponsorship. Empirical evidence is demanded due to the high levels of accountability required in marketing. The large financial investment in sponsorship justifies the need to explore moderating variables, such as involvement, as a way to segment the target audience by level.

Congruence was defined based on event sponsorship marketing literature. However, congruence is a broad construct and was addressed from different perspectives. Involvement was not measured in levels, so it was not possible to segment the sample by this criterion. It is possible that in the domain of sponsorship, the effects of the sponsor-organizer congruence vary according to consumer's involvement level. Studying the moderating factor of involvement at different levels may reveal more detailed results.

The current work was conducted within a particular sport discipline that represents specific values. The method used in this research may have influenced the sample, given that the respondents may have specific characteristics unique to street runners. Despite the limitations, the results contribute to the understanding of the role of congruence, involvement and the organizer in the success of sponsored sporting events.

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