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INFLUENCE OF FAN IDENTIFICATION AND PERCEIVED GROUP NORMS ON FANS' PURCHASING INTENTIONS TOWARDS CURRENT AND FORMER FOOTBALL CLUB SPONSOR

Abstract

Sports, due to its publicity and social role is an exceptional channel for sponsorship activities. In addition to marketing of sports, goal of sports marketing is marketing through sports. This paper explores changes in fans' buying intentions toward current and former sponsors when a change of a football club's main sponsor occurs. Additionally, the role of fan identification and perceived group norms on purchasing intentions is explored. The research was conducted on a sample of 370 respondents. The results of hierarchical regression analysis show that fan identification and perceived group norms are significant predictors of purchasing intentions. Higher values of the Fan Identification and the Perceived Group Norms (PGN) indexes are related to the more pronounced intention to buy more often with the current and less often with the former sponsor. The research confirms the mediating role of PGN in relation to the HFI index and purchase intentions. This

work contributes to knowledge by providing insights into the dynamics of fans' purchase intentions in the specific situation of sponsor change.

Keywords: sports sponsorship, fan identification, perceived group norms, purchasing intentions

1.   INTRODUCTION

The rising popularity of professional, amateur and recreational sports has led to an increasing interest among various non-sports companies for participating in sports activities. Wann and James (2018) state that, nowadays, it could be argued that sports, and sports fans are everywhere. Considering fan's focus on sports clubs and events, combined with the fact that they can be profiled on a range of characteristics (socio-demographic, lifestyle etc.), sporting events or clubs can serve as an ideal tool in reaching the desired target market. Football, as one of the most-watched sports in the world is of particular interest to sponsors, and football fandom is particularly prominent in Europe. European football clubs enjoy great popularity and attract millions of spectators and fans to stadiums every year (Richter, 2021; *Champions League 2021/2022 - Attendance*, 2022) while at the same time inspiring strong emotions among the hundreds of millions of people who watch matches via television or the Internet. Ratten and Ratten (2011, p. 618) conclude that "sport is an international business activity that is entrepreneurial in nature".

Obviously, from a financial perspective, sponsors are very important for the functioning of sports clubs. Sponsorship is one of the most common sources of funding for various events or clubs, and according to Keshkar, Lawerence, Dodds and Santomier (2019) sponsors most often use events or clubs to raise consumer awareness of a product or service. Unlike donations, sports sponsorships are based on reciprocity (Demir & Soderman, 2015), and Madrigal (2000) notes that, in addition to raising brand awareness through sport-related advertising, main reasons for sponsors to finance sports clubs include improving their image, attracting the attention and building positive attitudes among fans of the sponsored club.

Given that the sponsors support their favourite club in achieving sporting goals, fans consider the sponsors as important partners and accept them as members of the inner group related to the club they are willing to support (Olson & Thjømøe, 2009). Madrigal (2000) and Hickman (2015) emphasize that the more fans are connected to their club, the more they support the sponsor by buying and consuming the sponsor's products. However, managing sports sponsorships is not free of challenges. Namely, problems may arise, as indicated in the study by Dalakas and Levin (2005) when fans who strongly support their club and who usually share aversion or even hatred towards rival clubs, extend such negative emotions onto rival club's sponsors.

This paper builds upon Levin, Beasley and Gilson (2008) who examined fans' purchasing intentions towards current and former sponsors of NASCAR teams. Their research revealed that fans are more likely to buy products from the current sponsor, with fan identification and perceived group norms acting as

significant predictors of buying intentions. Additionally, the findings of Moskowitz and Wertheim (2011) were considered, as they showed that the match results are not always directly related to the number and intensity of loyalty of the fans and that, despite poor results, there will be clubs with a passionate fan base and a large number of tickets sold. HNK Hajduk Split football club presents an excellent example of such a club. It had won its last national title in the 2004/2005 season and, apart from three national cup victories (most recent during 2021/22 season) had no major successes neither in the European competitions nor in the Croatian league. Despite that, Hajduk is the club with the largest stadium audiences in Croatia, the highest number of seasonal-ticket subscribers and the biggest television viewership (*Gledatelji - SuperSport HNL*, 2022; Matteoni, 2022). With these characteristics making Hajduk fans an ideal source of insights, this research focuses on the purchasing intentions of Hajduk fans towards the current and former sponsors of the club. Hence, this paper aims to empirically test the relationship between fan identification and purchase intentions toward current and previous team sponsors in the context of European (namely – Croatian) fans. Additionally, the role of fan identification and mediating role of perceived group norms on purchasing intentions are examined.

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Globally, sports fans spend billions of euros each year on match tickets, club merchandise, as well as on the products and services of sponsors (*Deloitte Sports Business Group*, 2022). Fans are one of the main sources of income for sports clubs and, as such, are necessary for their successful operation. The ability to attract a fan base with a sense of community is one of the key tasks of sports clubs, and one of the primary goals of sports marketing is to encourage fans to identify with the club (Sukhdial, Aiken & Kahle, 2002).

Fan identification designates the degree of psychological connection between fans and the club and can be defined as the spectator's connectedness to the club, coupled with experiencing of club's successes and failures as his own (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Madrigal & Chen, 2008). Potter and Keene (2012, p. 349) state that "*high identification fans feel like the team is a representation of themselves and they are, in turn, a representative of the team*". Funk and James (2001) argue that fans go through different stages of identification with their club (awareness, attractiveness, connection and loyalty) making it a continuous, time and context-dependent relationship instead of a fixed and stable one. Fans with high levels of identification with the club consider *"being a fan"* to be an important part of their personality and are willing to adjust their lifestyle in order to express commitment to their team (Thorne & Bruner, 2006). Furthermore, they go through a wide range of emotions due to their fandom and are less likely to abandon their clubs when they perform poorly. They often become fanatical and spend significant amounts of time, money and effort going to matches and buying products and services of the club and / or sponsors, thus acting beyond the pure spectatorship of the sport (Potter

& Keene, 2012). On the other hand, fans with a lower degree of identification with a sports club tend to avoid the burden of loss (Dalakas, Madrigal, & Anderson, 2004).

The extent of identification of fans with the club is influenced by many factors, including socialization agents (parents and peers), geography, player attractiveness, club success and perceived similarities between fans and the club (Wann, 2006). Furthermore, previous studies have shown that identifiying as a sports fan is related to gender and age of individuals (Levin et al., 2004; Allison & Knoester, 2021). Fan identification is associated with a variety of affective, cognitive, and behavioural outcomes (Wann & Pierce, 2003). These outcomes include fan loyalty, perceived attractiveness of the sponsor brand, regular watching of sporting events, buying official club products, travelling to away matches, feeling of satisfaction with participating in sporting events and future intentions to watch matches.

Research on the effect of fan identification on the perception of club sponsors has shown a positive relationship between the degree of fan identification and the reactions to sponsor. Fans with a high degree of identification are more aware of club sponsors, hold more positive attitudes, are more satisfied with them and are more likely to buy their products (Chih-Hung Wang, 2012; Levin et al., 2008; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Madrigal, 2001). Previous research has shown that fan identification, in addition to helping predict fan reactions to sports sponsorships, helps to explain purchase behaviors toward sponsors' products / brands (Cormwell, Weeks & Roy, 2005).

Based on the arguments provided in the discussion above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1a: There is a positive relationship between fan identification and the intention to buy more often from the current sponsor

H1b: There is a negative relationship between fan identification and the intention to buy less often from the former sponsor

Social identity theory explores how people define themselves through belonging to numerous and diverse social groups throughout their lives. Social identity refers to the part of an individual's understanding of the world around him derived from the knowledge obtained through his group membership along with the value and emotional significance they attach to that membership (Haslam, Jetten, Pastmes & Haslam, 2009). Identifying with a particular social group promotes individuals' awareness of group norms and understanding of the group's expectations related to acceptable ways of thinking and behaving in the context of the group (Terry & Hogg, 1996). Additionally, when an individual deems the characteristics of his group superior to those of the other groups, identification with the group gives him a sense of prestige and increases his own sense of importance.

Societal norms have been defined in various way in the literature. Lapinski and Rimal (2005) distinguish between collective and perceived norms. Collective ones are defined as the prevailing rules of behavior which actually apply in a collective (e.g., community, culture etc.), while perceived norms represent the

individual mental interpretation of collective norms. Collective norms are rarely clearly defined and can be misunderstood by individuals, leading to differences in perceived norms among group members. Tankard and Paluck (2016) indicate that subjective perceptions of norms, regardless of their accuracy, become the main guide of an individual's behaviors. In this paper, the conceptualization of group norms based on Madrigal (2002) and Levin, Beasley and Gilson (2008) was used. According to these authors, group norms serve as normative drivers of an individual's behaviour in certain situations, hence it can be expected that purchase intentions will be more pronounced when such intentions are backed by informal norms of the group (in this case, fans) i.e., when they are directed towards club sponsors. The opposite also applies, i.e., it can be expected that purchase intentions will be discouraged when they are directed towards subjects deemed as antagonistic (former sponsor) by the reference group (fans).

Based on such conceptualization of norms, hypotheses H2a and H2b have been proposed:

H2a: There is a positive relationship between perceived group norms and the intention to buy more often from the current sponsor

H2b: There is a positive relationship between perceived group norms and the intention to buy less often from the former sponsor

Finally, a mediating role of the perceived group norms on the relationship between fan identification and purchase intentions was analysed. Namely, conceptual work of other researchers (Levin et al., 2008; Markovsky & Lawler, 1994; Ashforth & Mael, 1989) suggests that, before they understand group norms and choose to act in accordance with the norms, individuals identify as fans of a particular club. Hence, hypotheses H3a and H3b propose the following relationships:

H3a: Perceived group norms mediate the link between fan identification and the intention to buy more often from the current sponsor

H3b: Perceived group norms mediate the link between fan identification and the intention to buy less often from the former sponsor

3.   EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

3.1.   Research methodology

Primary data was collected during May 2021, by means of an online survey using a convenience sample of HNK Hajduk Split fans. A questionnaire was created using Qualtrics platform and invitations to participate in the survey were distributed in various open and closed online groups (supporter forums, Facebook and Whatsapp groups) bringing together Hajduk fans and sympathizers on all the major social networks and messaging apps. A total of 462 respondents completed the questionnaire, out of which 370 were included in the data analysis. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions organised into several segments. Introductory and final segments of the questionnaire included general

socio-demographic questions about the respondents, while the central segment of the questionnaire contained adopted versions of commonly used scales related to constructs relevant to the research topic. Namely, the central segment consisted of six questions forming fan identification scale (Wann and Branscomb, 1993), two questions measuring perceived group norms (Madrigal, 2000) and four questions on awareness of and purchasing intentions towards current and former sponsors (Levin et al., 2008). Questions adopted from existing scales were translated into Croatian using professional translation services and independent translators for each step in the forward-backwards translation process in order to ensure content equivalence.

3.2.   Research results

3.2.1.   Analysis of collected data

Out of a total of 370 respondents, 286 were male (77.3%) and 84 female (22.7%). The largest number of respondents 205 (55.4%), belongs to the age group under 35, 151 respondents (40.8%) were in the 35-55 year age group, while there were only 14 (3.8%) respondents over 55. Such distribution of the respondents was expected considering mode of administration of the survey and it reflects penetration of internet usage in general public in the Republic of Croatia. In terms of average monthly income, the largest number of respondents (134 of them or 36.2%) have income higher than HRK 7.501 (1.001 EUR), 61 respondents (16.5%) were in the HRK 6.001–7.500 (801-1000 EUR) range, 79 respondents (21.4%) were in the HRK 4.501-6.000 (601-800 EUR) range, while 40 respondents (10.8%) have an average income in the HRK 3.000-4.500 (400-600 EUR) range. Finally, 56 respondents (15.1%) have a monthly income of up to HRK 3.000 (400 EUR). In terms of monthly household income, majority of respondents - 184 (49.7%) fall into category above HRK 12.001 (1.601 EUR). A total of 101 respondents (27.3%) were from the HRK 8.001-12.000 (1.066-1.600 EUR) category, while 51 respondents (13.8%) were in the HRK 6.000-8.000 (800-1.066 EUR) category. Finally, 34 respondents (9.2%) were from the lowest household income category of less than HRK 6.000 (800 EUR).

Table 1

Mean values and dispersion measures of the HFI scale

	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
During the season, how regularly do you watch Hajduk live (at the stadium) or on TV?	4.15	1.254	1	5
During the season, how regularly do you follow Hajduk on the radio or in the newspapers?	3.55	1.542	1	5
During the season, how often do you follow Hajduk on the Internet?	4.25	1.251	1	5
How often do you display club insignia or labels in the workplace, place of residence or on clothing.	3.14	1.488	1	5
To what extent do you see yourself as a Hajduk fan?	4.01	1.192	1	5
To what extent do your friends and family see you as a Hajduk fan?	3.1	1.355	1	5

Source: Author's research

Table 1 shows the measures of the central tendency and dispersion of the answers of all respondents for the six original items of the HFI (Hajduk Fan Identification) measurement scale, determining the degree of identification of an individual with the club. The results show that Hajduk fans most often follow their favourite club online (average 4.25) and on live TV (4.15) whereas radio or/and newspapers are used less often (3.55). Respondents mostly see themselves as big fans (4.01) with scores on their perception of how their peers see them as fans were slightly lower (3.91). Based on the average score of only 3.14, it is clear that the least important element in the identification process is visible displaying of club insignia outside of sport events context.

HFI index, calculated as the sum of the average values of the six items forming HFI scale, is 23.0027 (standard deviation 6.27616) indicating a relatively high degree of identification of an average respondent with the club. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the HFI scale is 0.865, indicating high internal consistency and satisfactory reliability of the scale. While the average item to total correlation (0.53433) is slightly higher than recommended values from 0.15 to 0.5 (Briggs & Cheek, 1986), it is still acceptable in terms of internal consistency of the observed items. After examining the reliability of the measurement scale, KMO and Bartlett test were additionally performed to determine the suitability of the data for factor analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test value of 0.842, which can be considered very good (Field, 2009), confirms the suitability of data for factor analysis. Based on the results of the Bartlett test (χ^2 =1210.385; sig. level 0.000), the null hypothesis was rejected, meaning that there is a significant correlation between the original items. With both tests positive, factor analysis was performed.

Table 2 displays the results of eigenvalues and the percentages of explained variance based on which the number of factors is determined. Analysis revealed only one factor (component) with an eigenvalue greater than 1 (3.717), explaining 61.945% of the total variance.

Table 2

Eigenvalues and percentages explanation of HFI scale variance

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative%	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative%
1	3.717	61.945	61.945	3.717	61.945	61.945
2	0.857	14.283	76.228			
3	0.545	9.090	85.318			
4	0.426	7.097	92.415			
5	0.274	4.573	96.988			
6	0.181	3.012	100.000			

* Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Source: Author's research

Table 3 shows the factor loadings, representing the correlation coefficients between the extracted factor and the associated variables (ranging from 0.597 to 0.874) and suggesting the importance of individual variables within the extracted factor.

Table 3

Factor structure of the HFI scale

	Component
	1
During the season, how often do you watch HNK Hajduk Split live (at the stadium) or on TV?	0.850
During the season, how regularly do you follow HNK Hajduk Split on the radio or in the newspapers?	0.597
During the season, how regularly do you follow HNK Hajduk Split on the Internet?	0.780
To what extent do you see yourself as a fan of HNK Hajduk Split?	0.856
To what extent do your friends and family see you as a fan of HNK Hajduk Split?	0.874
How often do you display club insignia or other symbols in the workplace, place of residence or on clothing.	0.731

* Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Source: Author's research

Table 4 shows the measures of the central tendency and dispersion of the responses for the original items of the perceived group norms (PGN) scale.

Table 4

Mean values and dispersion measures of the PGN scale

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Most Hajduk fans whose opinion I appreciate would say that it is good to buy the products of the club sponsors.	370	1	5	3.95	1.289
Most Hajduk fans who are important to me would approve of buying the products of the club sponsors.	370	1	5	3.99	1.275

Source: Author's research

The average value of answers for both items is fairly high and similar 3.99 and 3.95, reflecting perceived support for purchases of club sponsor's products by other Hajduk fans, whom respondents consider to be important or whose opinion they value. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the PGN scale is 0.893, indicating high internal consistency and the reliability of the scale. With PGN index of Hajduk fans, calculated as the sum of average values of individual PGN scale items, being 7.95 (on a scale from 2 to 10; std. dev. 2.437), it can be argued that, on average, respondents perceived a high level of normative group norms related to purchase of sponsor's products.

When responses on the HFI index items are broken down by gender, resulting mean values for males and females are 24.03 and 19.05, respectively. In order to test this difference for statistical significance, a t-test was performed. Since

the value of the Leven's test was statistically significant (F = 40.786, p <0.001), the t-test results were interpreted assuming that the variances were not equal. The results of the t-test reveal a statistically significant difference in the average value of the HFI index between men and women (t = 4.872, p <0.001), with the average value of the HFI index 4.531 points higher in men compared to women.

In order to estimate the relationship between the HFI index and the personal monthly income of the respondents and the HFI index and the age of the respondents, the Spearman rank correlation coefficient was used. The results show that the correlation between the HFI index and the personal monthly income of the respondents lies in the weak to moderately strong relationship range (r = 0.202). The coefficient is statistically significant (p <0.001) and positive, meaning that a higher value of the HFI index for respondents with higher monthly incomes can be expected. As for the correlation between the HFI index and the age of the respondents, the results show a statistically significant (p <0.001) weak positive correlation (r = 0.157), indicating that older respondents have a higher HFI index value.

Results relating HFI, gender and age are in line with similar previous studies (Levin et al., 2004; Allison & Knoester, 2021) whereas finding relating income and HFI diverges from them, indicating positive relationship between income and HFI index values.

Further analysis (table 5) reveals moderate positive correlation between the HFI index and the items from the PGN scales. Namely, coefficients are r = 0.357 for the first PGN item (fans whose opinion I appreciate would say that it is good to buy products from a sponsor), and r = 0.358 for the second PGN item (fans who are important to me would approve of buying the products of sponsors).

Table 5

Pearson correlation coefficient between HFI index and individual items of PGN scale

		HFI index	Most HNK Hajduk Split fans…	
			whose opinion I appreciate would say how good it is to buy club sponsor products.	which are important to me would approve the purchase of club sponsor products.
HFI index	Pearson Correlation	1	0.357**	0.358**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000
	N	370	370	370

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Author's research

Both coefficients are statistically significant (p <0.001). Thus, it can be concluded that fans with a higher HFI index value will be more likely to think that buying products and services from current club sponsors is what other fans consider appropriate.

Further analysis of the answers of 370 respondents was conducted on their awareness of the current and former sponsors of the club and the arithmetic mean and measures of the dispersion of the HFI index for respective (aware/unaware) groups. The results reveal that 335 respondents (90.5%) were aware of the current sponsor of Hajduk, while only 35 (9.5%) were not. The arithmetic mean of the HFI index for unaware and aware respondents were 16.5429 (SD = 7.11396) and 23.6776 (SD = 5.79107), respectively. In order to determine whether observed differences in the arithmetic mean values of the HFI index across respondents grouped according to their awareness of the current club sponsor were statistically significant, a t-test was performed. Since the Leven's test was not statistically significant (F = 3.773, p = 0.053), the t-test was interpreted assuming equal variances. The results of the t-test indeed confirm a statistically significant difference in the average value of the HFI index between respondents (t = -6.778, p <0.001), with the average value of the HFI index 7.13475 points higher for respondents who are aware of the current sponsor. Analysis of the awareness of the previous sponsor uncovered that only 90 respondents (24.3%) were aware that Konzum was a former sponsor of the club, while 280 (75.7%) were not aware of it. The arithmetic mean of the HFI index for aware and unaware respondents were 25.1 (SD = 4.825) and 22.33 (SD = 6.542) respectively. In order to test whether these differences were statistically significant, t-test was performed. Since the value of the Leven's test was statistically significant (F = 14.330, p = 0.000), the results of the t-test were interpreted assuming that the variances were not equal. The results of the t-test show that there is a statistically significant difference in the average value of the HFI index between respondents grouped according to their awareness of the former sponsor (t = -4.320, p <0.001), with the average value of the HFI index 2.771 points higher among the aware respondents.

Following segments presents an analysis of respondents' purchase intentions toward current and former sponsors taking into account the HFI index. In terms of the stated intention to buy in the stores of the current sponsor, 50.8% of respondents expressed intention to shop more often in current sponsor's stores, 17.6% of respondents were undecided, while 31.6% did not express intention to buy more often from the current sponsor. Considering the statistically significant correlation coefficient (r = 0.471, p < 0.001) it is clear that there is a moderate positive association between the HFI index and the stated intention to shop more often in the stores of the current club sponsor. It can be concluded that fans who have a higher value of the HFI index indicate higher intention to buy products and services from the current sponsor of the club. When looking at the responses with regard to the intentions to shop with the former sponsor, 26.5% of respondents intend to shop less often, 24% of respondents are undecided while 49.5% do not intend to shop less often from the former sponsor. Considering a positive and statistically significant correlation coefficient (r = 0.359, p <0.001), a moderate positive association between the HFI index and the intention of the respondents to shop less often in the shops of the former club sponsor is identified.

3.2.2.   Hierarchical regression analysis

Tables 6 to 17 show the results of two parallel hierarchical regression analyses looking at the effects of the HFI index and the PGN index on purchase intentions with current and former club sponsors. In the first step, the influence of the control variable (PGN index) was investigated, while in the second step, the influence of the predictor variable (HFI index) was investigated. Table 6 provides an overview of descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for all the variables in regression analysis. From the results, a moderately strong and positive, statistically significant correlation between the observed variables is evident (r = 0.359 to r = 0.637, p < 0.001).

Table 6

Descriptive statistics and intercorrelation matrix of observed variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. HFI index	23.00	6.276			
2. PGN index	7.95	2.437	**0.376 ****		
3. I intend to go shopping in Tommy stores more often because he is the current sponsor of Hajduk.	3.28	1.543	**0.471 ****	**0.637 ****	
4. I intend to go shopping in Konzum stores less often because he is no longer a sponsor of the club.	2.56	1.479	**0.359 ****	**0.409 ****	**0.623 ****

N = 370; ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Author's research

Table 7 shows the basic indicators of the estimated research model. The correlation coefficient is statistically significant and at r = 0.637 (p < 0.001) shows a moderately strong and positive linear association between the PGN index and the intention to shop more often at Tommy stores.

Table 7

Basic data on the estimated model of the impact of PGN index and HFI index on the intention to buy from the current club sponsor

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	0.637 [a]	0.406	0.404	1.191	0.406	251.048	1	368	0.000
2	0.684 [b]	0.468	0.465	1.129	0.062	42.844	1	367	0.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), PGN index
b. Predictors: (Constant), PGN index, HFI index
c. Dependent Variable: I intend to go shopping in Tommy stores more often because he is the current general sponsor of HNK Hajduk Split.

Source: Author's research

The introduction of the HFI index into the regression equation in the second step increases the percentage of the explained variance by 6.2% (R square change). After the introduction of the HFI index, the correlation coefficient is R =0.684

and shows a moderately strong and positive linear relationship between the PGN index and the HFI index with the intention to shop more often from the current sponsor. The coefficient of determination (R Square) is 0.468, which means that the estimated regression model interpreted 46.8% of the sum of the squares of the total deviations of the dependent variable from its arithmetic mean. All estimated regression parameters are statistically significant at p < 0.001.

Table 8

Results of hierarchical regression analysis

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero order	Partial	Part	Toler.	VIF
2	(Constant)	-0.936	0.253		-3.697	0.000	-1.434	-0.438					
	PGN index	0.339	0.026	0.536	13.030	0.000	0.288	0.390	0.637	0.562	0.496	0.858	1.165
	HFI index	0.066	0.010	0.269	6.546	0.000	0.046	0.086	0.471	0.323	0.249	0.858	1.165

a. Dependent Variable: I intend to go shopping in Tommy stores more often because they are the current general sponsor of HNK Hajduk Split.

Source: Author's research

Table 8 shows that perceived group norms are an important predictor of the intentions to buy from the current sponsor (βeta =0.536). The value of the t-test for this parameter (PGN index) is t =13.030 and is statistically significant at p <0.001. Thus, it can be concluded that the regression analysis confirmed hypothesis H2a. Furthermore, table 8 reveals a weak and positive, statistically significant relationship between HFI Index and purchase intentions at the current club sponsor (βeta =0.269, p<0.001) recognising fan identification as a mild predictor of purchasing intentions.

Table 9

Basic data on the estimated model of the impact of PGN index and HFI index on the intention to buy from a former club sponsor

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	0.409[a]	0.168	0.165	1.351	0.168	74.049	1	368	0.000
2	0.465[b]	0.217	0.212	1.313	0.049	22.994	1	367	0.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), PGN index
b. Predictors: (Constant), PGN index, HFI index
c. Dependent Variable: I intend to go shopping in Konzum stores less often because he is no longer the general sponsor of the club.

Source: Author's research

Table 9 shows the data of the estimated research model including PGN and HFI indexes and purchasing intentions related to the former club sponsor. Value of the correlation coefficient R = 0.409 (p <0.001) shows a significant and positive, moderately strong linear relationship between the PGN index and the intention to buy less often in former sponsor's stores. The introduction of the HFI index in the second step of the regression analysis significantly increases the percentage of explained variance of the intention to buy from the former sponsor by 4.9% (R square change). After the introduction of the HFI index, the correlation coefficient is R =0.465 (p <0.001) and shows a significant, positive and moderately strong linear relationship between the variables PGN index and HFI index with the intention to purchases less often from the former sponsor. The coefficient of determination (R Square) is 0.217, which means that the estimated regression model interpreted 21.7% of the sum of squares of the total deviations of the dependent variable from its arithmetic mean.

Table 10

Results of hierarchical regression analysis

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero order	Partial	Part	Toler.	VIF
2	(Constant)	-0.274	0.294		-0.931	0.353	-0.853	0.305					
	PGN index	0.194	0.030	0.319	6.404	0.000	0.134	0.253	0.409	0.317	0.296	0.858	1.165
	HFI index	0.056	0.012	0.239	4.795	0.000	0.033	0.079	0.359	0.243	0.222	0.858	1.165

a. Dependent Variable: I intend to go shopping in Konzum stores less often because they are no longer the general sponsor of the club

Source: Author's research

Table 10 reveals PGN Index as a significant weak predictor of the intention to buy from former sponsor (βeta= 0.319, p <0.001). Hence, it can be concluded that H2b hypothesis was confirmed by regression analysis. Additionally, Table 10 shows a significant and weak positive relationship between fan identification and purchase intention with the former club sponsor (βeta =0.239, p < 0.001), revealing fan identification as a mild predictor of purchase intentions toward the former sponsor. Such a finding confirms hypothesis H1b.

3.2.3. PGN mediation test using multiple regression analysis

A mediation test was performed using multiple regression analysis to test hypotheses that perceived group norms mediate the relationship between fan identification and intention to buy more frequently from the current and less frequently from the former sponsor. The procedure described by Baron and Kenny (1986) was applied and is discussed below.

Table 11 shows the values of the estimated parameters of the influence of fan identification on perceived group norms. The resulting parameter β1 with the HFI as the independent variable is 0.146 and statistically significant at p<0.001. Hence, it can be concluded that HFI index has a statistically significant and positive effect on PGN index.

Table 11

Results of regression analysis of the impact of fan identification on perceived group norms

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero order	Partial	Part	Toler.	VIF
1	(Constant)	4.586	0.447		10.258	0.000	3.707	5.465					
	HFI index	0.146	0.019	0.376	7.789	0.000	0.109	0.183	0.376	0.376	0.376	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: PGN index

Source: Author's research

The results of the regression analysis shown in Table 12 reveal a significant positive relationship between fan identification and the intention to shop more frequently at the current sponsor's stores. The resulting parameter β1 with HFI index as the independent variable is 0.116 and statistically significant at p<0.001, indicating that the HFI index has a statistically significant and positive impact on the intention to shop more often with the club's current sponsor.

Table 12

Results of the regression analysis of the impact of fan identification on the intention to purchase from the current sponsor

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero order	Partial	Part	Toler.	VIF
1	(Constant)	0.620	0.270		2.298	0.022	0.089	1.150					
	HFI index	0.116	0.011	0.471	10.230	0.000	0.093	0.138	0.471	0.471	0.471	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: I intend to go shopping at Tommy's stores more often because they are the club's current general sponsor.

Source: Author's research

Table 13 shows the values of the estimated parameters of the influence of fan identification on the intention to buy from the former club sponsor. The resulting parameter β1 with HFI index as the independent variable is 0.085 and is statistically significant at p <0.001, indicating that the HFI index has a significant impact on the intention to shop less often at the former club sponsor.

Table 13

Results of regression analysis of the impact of fan identification on the intention to buy from a former sponsor

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	0.615	0.273		2.250	0.025	0.077	1.152					
	HFI index	0.085	0.011	0.359	7.385	0.000	0.062	0.107	0.359	0.359	0.359	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: I intend to go shopping in Konzum stores less often because he is no longer the general sponsor of the club

Source: Author's research

The results of the regression analysis shown in Table 14 (the estimated parameter $\beta 1$ with PGN index as the independent variable is 0.403 at $p < 0.001$) reveal a significant, positive relationship between perceived group norms and the intention to shop more often at the stores of the current club sponsor.

Table 14

Results of regression analysis of the impact of perceived group norms on the intention to buy from the current club sponsor

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	0.076	0.212		0.361	0.718	-0.340	0.492					
	PGN index	0.403	0.025	0.637	15.844	0.000	0.353	0.453	0.637	0.637	0.637	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: I intend to go shopping at Tommy's stores more often because they are the club's current general sponsor.

Source: Author's research

The results of the regression analysis shown in Table 15 (the estimated parameter $\beta 1$ with PGN index as the independent variable is 0.248 at $p < 0.001$) reveal a significant, positive relationship between perceived group norms and the intention to shop less often at the stores of the former club sponsor.

Table 15

Results of regression analysis of the impact of perceived group norms on the intention to buy from a former club sponsor

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	0.588	0.240		2.452	0.015	0.117	1.060					
	PGN index	0.248	0.029	0.409	8.605	0.000	0.192	0.305	0.409	0.409	0.409	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: I intend to go shopping in Konzum stores less often because they are no longer the general sponsor of the club

Source: Author's research

Finally, Table 16 presents the results of regressing the purchase intentions towards current sponsor on both HFI and PGN indexes.

Table 16

Results of regression analysis of the impact of fan identification and perceived group norms on the intention to buy from the current club sponsor

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	-0.936	0.253		-3.697	0.000	-1.434	-0.438					
	HFI Index	0.066	0.010	0.269	6.546	0.000	0.046	0.086	0.471	0.323	0.249	0.858	1.165
	PGN index	0.339	0.026	0.536	13.030	0.000	0.288	0.390	0.637	0.562	0.496	0.858	1.165

a. Dependent Variable: I intend to go shopping at Tommy's stores more often because he is the club's current general sponsor.

Source: Author's research

Baron and Kenny (1986) state that the mediation test is confirmed if the independent variable (HFI index) is shown to significantly influence the dependent (purchase intentions) and the mediator variable (PGN index), while the mediator must significantly influence the dependent variable when treated as the predictor alongside the independent variable. Mediation can be complete or partial, depending on the extent of reduction of the influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable (with complete removal of influence indicating complete mediation).

Thus, when comparing the results displayed in table 12 ($\beta 1 = 0.116$, statistically significant and positive relationship between HFI and the intention to shop more often in current sponsors' stores) with the results presented in table 16, partial mediation by the PGN index is revealed. Namely, the non-standardized regression coefficient of HFI index is reduced from $\beta 1 = 0.116$ to $\beta 1 = 0.066$, while remaining statistically significant ($p = 0.00$). Additionally, a Sobel test was performed (test statistics 6.6200; std.er. 0.0074; p-value: 0.000) and a reduction in the parameter $\beta 1$ (approx. 0.049494) due to the PGN mediation effect was identified. Based on the results of the mediation test, hypothesis H3a is confirmed.

Table 17

Results of regression analysis of the impact of fan identification and perceived group norms on the intention to buy from a former club sponsor

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	-0.274	0.294		-0.931	0.353	-0.853	0.305					
	HFI index	0.056	0.012	0.239	4.795	0.000	0.033	0.079	0.359	0.243	0.222	0.858	1.165
	PGN index	0.194	0.030	0.319	6.404	0.000	0.134	0.253	0.409	0.317	0.296	0.858	1.165

a. Dependent Variable: I intend to go shopping in Konzum stores less often because he is no longer the general sponsor of the club

Source: Author's research

Following the same procedure, when comparing the results displayed in table 13 ($\beta 1 = 0.085$, statistically significant and positive relationship between HFI and the intention to shop less often in former sponsors' stores) with the results presented in the table 17, partial mediation by the PGN index is revealed. Namely, the non-standardized regression coefficient of HFI index is reduced from $\beta 1 = 0.085$ to $\beta 1 = 0.056$, while remaining statistically significant ($p = 0.00$). Additionally, a Sobel test was performed (test statistic 4.9477; std. error: 0.0057; p-value: 0.00) and a reduction in the parameter $\beta 1$ (approx. 0.02832) due to the PGN mediation effect was identified. Based on the results of the mediation test, hypothesis H3b is confirmed.

3.3. Research limitations

Although the sample size (N=370) was substantial, the sampling procedure employed – i.e., convenience sampling, limits the representativeness of the sample and ability to generalise results. Furthermore, as indicated when describing the sample characteristics and regarding the sample structure in terms of socio-demographic characteristics, there is a notable over-representation of the younger fanbase cohort. Finally, although the survey is anonymous, the influence of the social desirability and the bias of the respondents when participating in the survey, considering the emotional dimension of fandom, should not be neglected. Additional limitations can be found in the fact that only one football club and only one sport were covered by this study, making the results fairly specific and potentially omitting idiosyncrasies of other sports. The cross-sectional nature of this research could also influence the results of the study, as the respondents' attitudes and intentions are likely influenced by the recent results of the club at the time of data collection. An additional potential limitation could stem from the fact that the former sponsor of Hajduk Split (Konzum) is a national retail chain headquartered outside of Split, while the new sponsor (Tommy) is headquartered in Split. Depending on the extent of ethnocentricity of the Hajduk Split fans, this fact could also amplify their behavioural intentions towards club sponsors, thus skewing the findings from this study. However, with these limitations in mind, it can be said that the results are suitable for making indicative conclusions and provide a solid base for future investigation of variables analysed in this work.

4.   DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

The focus of the work was on the purchase intentions of football club fans in the specific situation of change of the main sponsor. The results reveal fan identification and perceived group norms as significant predictors of purchasing intentions. Furthermore, the results suggest that fans will generally exhibit intentions to purchase more products from the current and less from the former club sponsor. In the analysis, the effect of sponsor change is emphasized by the fact that both sponsors come from the same industry – a situation in which fans generate

additional negative emotions towards the former sponsor. This finding is even more important when viewed in the context of Levin et al. (2008) study which failed to prove the link between fan identification and the intention to purchase less frequently from former event sponsors, but who (in Levin et al.'s case) came from different industries. As the relationships identified in this research are significant, positive and moderately strong, it can be argued that individual fans will increasingly identify with the club and the "prototype" fan group over time, resulting in increasing differences in purchasing intentions towards current and former sponsors. Finally, this study revealed perceived group norms as a mediator of the relationship between fan identification and their purchasing intentions.

These research findings can primarily serve potential sponsors in making decisions about entering or leaving sponsorship agreements with sports clubs. Obviously, clubs and sponsors need to build relationships with fans, but also with each other through consistent approach to sponsorship, as such approach benefits all the included parties in the long run. Study reveals that outspoken and passionate fans have a significant impact on those who are building their identification with a club and that they (passionate fans) can influence opinions and purchasing decisions. It follows that if sponsors can reach such passionate fans, they will also secure a channel to individuals who are only beginning to build their fandom. Future research should provide additional empirical evidence of the validity of the proposed research model. For this reason, research should be conducted on a wider base of football fans (from various clubs) as well as on fans of clubs from different sports in order to identify similarities and differences in the resulting constructs and relationships among variables. Additionally, research on dynamic relationships between fan identity and other fan behaviour related constructs (e.g., fan engagement) could pave new routes towards understanding complex fan behaviours. Finally, it would be very interesting to conduct such research in cultures with varying attitudes towards sports fandom and the respective importance of fandom in everyday life.

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UTJECAJ IDENTIFIKACIJE NAVIJAČA I PERCIPIRANIH GRUPNIH NORMI NA KUPOVNE NAMJERE NAVIJAČA PREMA AKTUALNOM I BIVŠEM SPONZORU KLUBA

Sažetak

Sport i vezani događaji predstavljaju iznimno učinkovit kanal za sponzorske aktivnosti uslijed publiciteta koji generiraju, kao i uloge koje igraju u društvenom životu suvremenog čovjeka. Sportski marketing, uz promociju sportskih događaja, klubova i opreme, za cilj ima i promociju marki i tvrtki izvan sporta (primarno sponzora). Ovaj rad istražuje razlike u iskazanim kupovnim namjerama navijača prema aktualnom i bivšem sponzoru u situaciji promjene glavnog sponzora nogometnog kluba. Dodatno, istražuje se uloga identifikacije navijača i percipiranih grupnih normi na kupovne namjere. Istraživanje je provedeno na uzorku od 370 ispitanika. Rezultati hijerarhijske regresijske analize pokazuju da su identifikacija navijača i percipirane grupne norme značajni prediktori kupovnih namjera. Više vrijednosti indeksa navijačke identifikacije (HFI) i indeksa percipiranih grupnih normi (PGN) vezane su za izraženiju namjeru učestalijeg kupovanja pri trenutnom i rjeđem kupovanju kod bivšeg sponzora. Istraživanje potvrđuje medijacijsku ulogu percipiranih grupnih normi u odnosu HFI indeksa i namjera kupnje. Doprinos rada ogleda se u analizi specifične situacije promjene sponzora kluba i razumijevanju kupovnih namjera navijača te njihova odnosa prema sadašnjem i bivšem sponzoru.

Ključne riječi: *sportsko sponzorstvo, identifikacija navijača, percipirane grupne norme, kupovne namjere.*

JEL klasifikacija: L83, M31.