



The Emotional Impact of Sports Sponsorships: A Sentiment Analysis of Public Reactions on Reddit

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the role of sports sponsorships and the impact of sponsorship agreements on various stakeholders, along with the emotional reactions they evoke in the public. Sponsorship is viewed as a strategic partnership between companies and sports organizations, with the primary goal of increasing brand visibility and ensuring financial growth. The sentiment analyses presented in the article reveal a complex interaction between sponsorships and public opinion, examining the influence of emotions such as anger, anticipation, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, surprise and trust. These emotions are significantly affected by factors such as the commercialization of sports, manipulative practices in sponsorship agreements and ethical concerns. The study emphasizes that while sponsorships can enhance sports experiences, they can lead to negative perceptions if financial interests overshadow the values and integrity of sports. The article highlights the importance of transparency and ethical practices in sponsorship agreements and suggests that future research should delve deeper into the emotional effects of sponsorships. Additionally, it stresses the need for research that extends beyond platforms like Reddit to include other social media channels.

Keywords: Data Mining, Social Media Analysis, Sports Economics, Sports Sponsorships, Text Mining

JEL Classifications: C55, L82, Z20, Z22

1. INTRODUCTION

Sponsorship plays a crucial role in financing a wide range of activities, including sports, arts and social events. In particular, large sporting events rely on sponsorship for survival and growth (Speed and Thompson, 2000). On a global scale, investments in sports sponsorship have been consistently increasing, surpassing investments in arts, entertainment, festivals and charities. The primary reason for this increase is the impact of sports on large media markets (Cornwell, et al., 2024). However, despite the growth in sponsorships, there is still limited information on how sponsorships work and the factors that enhance their effectiveness as a marketing activity (Cornwell and Maignan, 1998). This lack of understanding makes it difficult to properly comprehend sponsorships and improve their applications for greater efficiency.

Sponsorships are generally divided into four main categories: Venues, equipment and physical elements; events, activities and programs; groups and individuals; organizations, leagues and associations (Cornwell, 2019). Sponsorships related to sports may involve one or more of these categories depending on the brand architecture within the sports context (Kunkel and Biscaia, 2020; Kunkel et al., 2017). In particular, large sports organizations greatly benefit from sponsorship agreements, which enhance brand recognition, boost sales and strengthen ties with the community (Cornwell and Kwon 2020). Moreover, sponsorships are vital to the sustainability of numerous organizations, ranging from small leagues to major sports events like the Olympics.

The financial support provided through sponsorships is directly related to the sport itself and holds significant importance within

the sports world (Cornwell and Maignan, 1998). At the same time, the views of sports consumers regarding sponsorships are highly significant. Although sports consumers may accept the interdependence of sponsorship agreements, they seek authenticity and sincerity (Charlton and Cornwell, 2019). If sponsorships are perceived as calculated and lacking in authenticity, they can negatively affect the effectiveness of these sponsorships (Woissetschläger et al., 2017).

In this context, analyzing data from social media platforms is crucial to better understand and optimize the effectiveness of sponsorships. Comments and interactions regarding sports sponsorships can provide valuable insights into how sports consumers react to sponsorships. By conducting sentiment analysis, we can determine the nature of these interactions and examine the impact of sponsorships on consumer perceptions in more detail. With the growing influence of sports sponsorships and social media marketing, this area has garnered significant interest in research. Numerous studies have examined the interaction between sponsorship content and engagement (Abeza et al., 2014; Brison and Geurin, 2021; Burton et al., 2024; Ericson and Lundell, 2024; Naraine et al., 2022; Weimar et al., 2022). However, there has been no study focusing on consumer comments and sentiments related to sports sponsorships through social media. Therefore, this study aims to understand how sponsorships are reflected to the consumer by examining comments on sports sponsorships on Reddit.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The process began with collecting comments related to sports sponsorship from Reddit. The search term “sports sponsorship” was used to restrict the dataset to only relevant posts. No other limitations, such as date, were applied, allowing for the collection of a broad perspective from sports consumers.

The data used in this study were collected from Reddit via a Python API wrapper. A total of 32,719 comments were gathered, with the oldest comment dated July 27, 2012 and the most recent comment dated February 10, 2025. The data is hourly. In this context, our population consists of the Reddit platform and our sample includes all users who commented on sports sponsorship-related posts. The data were analyzed using the NRC sentiment analysis method. Findings from the comments are presented in the findings section to support quantitative data and reveal the main themes. Prior to quantitative analysis, the data underwent preprocessing using various text mining techniques to prepare them for analysis. Sentiment analysis was then performed and the emotions in the comments were classified. A general summary of the methodology is presented in Figure 1.

In this study, the NRC Emotion Lexicon was used to examine the emotional tendencies in the comments. Developed by the National Research Council of Canada (NRC), this lexicon categorizes words based on emotions such as anger, anticipation, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, surprise and trust. The NRC Emotion Lexicon contains over 14,000 words and each word is associated with one or more of these emotions. It can be used to assess the emotional

Figure 1: Research process



tone of text data, helping researchers, marketers, or data scientists understand the sentiment and emotional reactions expressed within a body of text (such as social media posts, reviews, etc.). The NRC Emotion Lexicon can be accessed through an open-source tool, often integrated into Python-based libraries for sentiment analysis. This method categorizes each comment into specific emotional categories, scoring emotions like “Anger,” “Anticipation,” “Disgust,” “Fear,” “Joy,” “Sadness,” “Surprise,” and “Trust.” This approach enables a more detailed and comprehensive analysis of the emotional content of the comments. Based on the findings from the sentiment analysis, the comments within the relevant time period were used to explain the fluctuations in the 8 different emotions over time. In the context of this study, NRC analysis helps in understanding the emotional reactions of sports consumers to sponsorships, which can be crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of sponsorship campaigns.

Reddit is a platform where active discussions take place on a wide range of topics, with a large global user base. It was chosen for this study because it provides a space where users freely share their personal experiences and offer candid, authentic opinions. There is diversity among participants in terms of demographic factors such as age and geographic location, which contributes to a broad range of perspectives on the topic at hand.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Sentiment Analysis

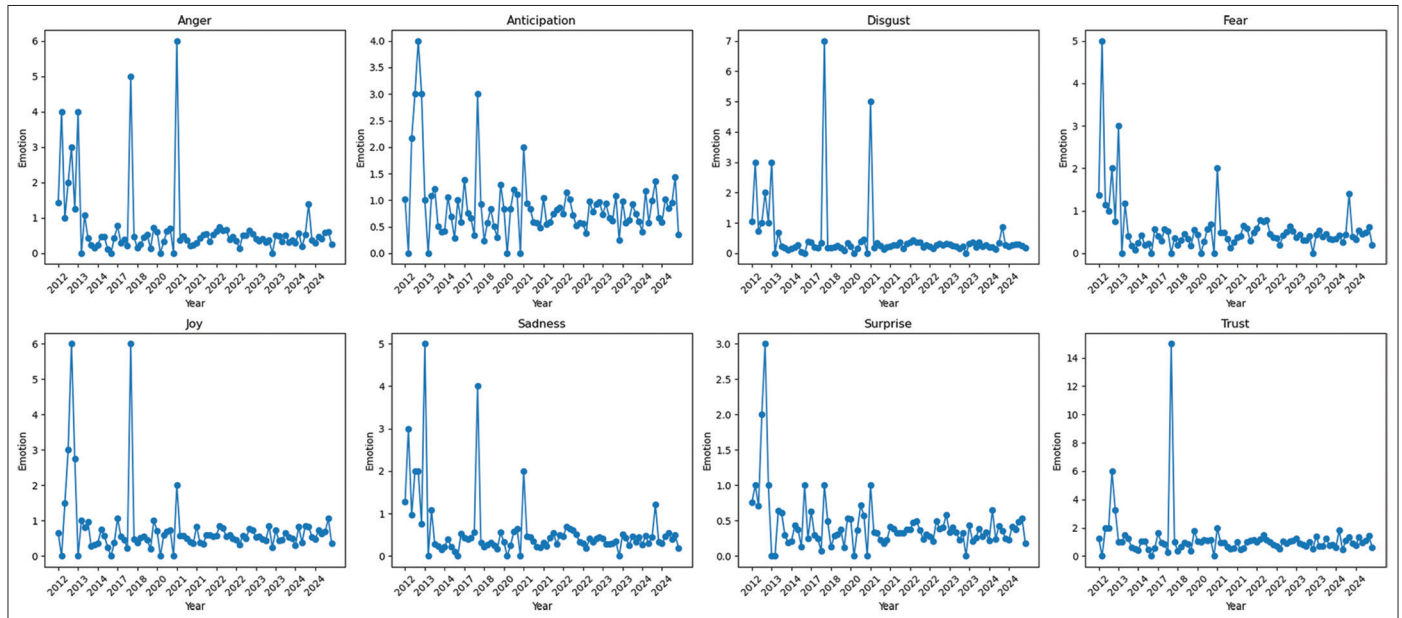
Figure 2 shows the changing emotional trends over time for hourly data related to sports sponsorship. Based on the NRC analysis results, these scores, along with the data obtained from the comments, are presented under 8 different emotion categories, with the trends of increase and decrease explained below.

3.1.1. Anger

A significant increase in anger scores was observed in 2021. The highest score was recorded on April 13, 2021, at 29. This peak stemmed from a comment reflecting deep frustration and a sense of injustice. The comment expressed anger due to manipulation, unethical practices and a lack of transparency. From a broader perspective, it resembled the manipulative use of sponsorship agreements for commercial purposes in the sports world. Specifically, the realization that a program initially presented as a documentary was actually designed to exploit participants for commercial gain sparked anger among viewers. Similarly, athletes and teams in the sports industry often face sponsorship agreements that prioritize financial profit over development opportunities.

Participants expected to have the opportunity to play the game, but instead, they were subjected to challenges determined by the

Figure 2: Sentiment analysis result



interests of sponsors and media companies. This reflected how athletes in the sports world are often treated as mere commercial tools. Additionally, the sexist and demeaning questions posed to participants, particularly dismissing the experiences of game developers like Zoe Quinn, mirrored the gender bias and unethical approaches prevalent in the sports industry. Such practices are directly related to gender inequality in sports and violations of athletes' rights.

Another high anger score was recorded on April 6, 2021, at 19. In this comment, the sponsorship system in Pokémon Sword and Shield was compared to real-life sports sponsorships. The user associated the character Rose's use of sponsorship agreements to consolidate personal power and financial gain with unethical sponsorship practices in sports. Rather than supporting the development of champions like Leon in the Galar region, Rose used sponsorship funds to strengthen his own commercial interests—an issue frequently observed in sports. The exploitation of sponsorships solely for financial gain, at the expense of the integrity of sports, was highlighted as a major cause of anger. Additionally, the obstruction of fair competition and development opportunities was perceived as damaging to the ethical nature of sports, further fueling frustration.

The primary reasons behind the rise in anger throughout 2021 were widespread frustrations related to financial, organizational and cultural changes in sports. Many comments reflected anger regarding inadequate sponsorship agreements, lack of athlete support and the commercialization of sports. In particular, athletes in niche sports like disc golf struggled to secure financial support to sustain their professional careers, which was a significant source of frustration. These athletes were often limited to sponsorships from disc manufacturers, which were insufficient for their professional needs. The stagnation in sponsorship opportunities and the slow development of media rights led to unmet expectations, increasing anger.

Issues related to media rights also contributed to the rising anger. While major sports leagues secured billion-dollar deals, niche sports lagged behind, triggering significant frustration. Although platforms like YouTube generated substantial revenue, content creators received inadequate compensation, failing to meet the expectations of athletes and media producers. Additionally, the increasing commercialization of sports, where club owners prioritized financial interests over the experiences of players and fans, fueled widespread disappointment. The shift in focus from sporting success to profit maximization led to major disillusionment among both fans and players.

Sponsorship agreements that failed to meet the needs of professional athletes, inadequate support for niche sports and mismanagement by club administrators were also key factors contributing to increased anger. A lack of awareness regarding mental health issues and barriers preventing athletes from expressing emotional struggles were further sources of frustration. The existence of double standards and the minimization of mental health concerns, coupled with societal intolerance, exacerbated the situation. Institutional inefficiency and a lack of accountability—particularly when organizations and club managers failed to meet the expectations of fans and athletes—deepened the overall frustration.

Following 2021, another year with high anger scores was 2017. A notable comment on September 26, 2017, scored 19 for anger, discussing the loss of sponsorship support by clubs and the resulting financial collapses, which caused significant frustration among club managers and fans. The loss of sponsorships, such as Uerdingen losing Bayer's sponsorship, demonstrated the critical role of sponsorships in the success and sustainability of clubs. The use of sponsorships solely for financial gain, while neglecting club values and social responsibilities, led to strong resentment. This scenario reflected the negative impact of sports commercialization.

Two significant spikes in anger were also observed in 2012. One of these was due to Blizzard's disregard for player expectations in favor of financial gain. Instead of improving the gaming experience, the company prioritized securing profits, which, like sponsorships in sports, created frustration by ignoring the needs of players and communities. The commenter noted that this approach resulted in anger, as it prioritized commercialization and sponsorships over the authentic player experience.

Another high anger score reflected frustration over the shift from an accessible and enjoyable competitive environment to one catering only to high-skilled players. Initially designed to be engaging and low-stress for a broader audience, the game eventually evolved into an experience tailored solely for elite players. This situation mirrored commercialization structures in the sports world that focus on investing in top-tier athletes while neglecting broader participation, ultimately leading to frustration.

Overall, the key factors behind the rise in anger in 2021 were linked to the increasing commercialization of sports, financial decisions affecting the essence of competition and the disregard for athletes' rights. Similar patterns had been observed in previous years, demonstrating that anger in both sports and gaming communities stemmed from fundamental systemic issues.

3.1.2. Anticipation

The fluctuating trend in the "Anticipation" graph is notable. The emotional level rises significantly in certain years, followed by a decline to lower levels, indicating that expectations regarding sports sponsorships fluctuate over time, reflecting varying emotional intensity.

The high level of "anticipation" in 2012 can be linked to the impact of sponsorships and events in sports. That year saw rapid growth in esports and the increasing integration of sponsorships into the gaming industry. The intense competition and major tournaments referenced in the comment highlight how sponsorships shaped the in-game experience. The widespread popularity of gaming tournaments and sponsor contributions raised expectations among both players and spectators, intensifying emotional reactions. Sponsorships pushed players to strive for greater success while also heightening viewers' expectations, reinforcing emotional engagement with the game.

Another comment contributing to the high "anticipation" score in 2012 discussed the strategic decisions necessary for the game's sustainability. The game emphasized the need to develop sponsorship and business model strategies to attract both professional players and a broader audience. This underscores how sponsorships are crucial for long-term success in sports, encouraging players to make greater emotional and financial investments in the game. The high score reflects strategic awareness and the potential long-term impact of these decisions.

The high "anticipation" score in 2017 stemmed from economic and organizational challenges faced by sports clubs and the critical role of sponsorships in ensuring long-term success.

Many clubs mentioned in the comment were struggling due to financial difficulties and poor management, which threatened their sustainability. While sponsorship agreements and financial support could strengthen clubs, the lack of sufficient backing led to inevitable decline. Uerdingen's loss of Bayer sponsorship serves as a key example of how vital sponsorships are to a club and how inadequate financial support can result in failure.

The high anticipation score in 2020 is linked to significant discussions about sponsorships and financial strategies in sports. The financial struggles faced by professional teams and organizations, especially due to the pandemic, had a profound impact. Mismanagement of sponsorships and the lack of long-term investment strategies contributed to the downfall of many teams, particularly in North America. Some team owners, focused solely on financial guarantees, failed to establish sustainable investment strategies, accelerating club decline. Their reluctance to invest due to perceived financial risks underscored the importance of strong sponsorship relationships. Prioritizing short-term profit over long-term sustainability frustrated both players and fans, increasing expectations for the future of sports.

Other fluctuations in anticipation scores were mainly caused by rising tension and uncertainty, particularly in esports and gaming communities. One key reason behind these high anticipation scores was the influence of sponsorship agreements and business models on competitive gaming dynamics, similar to traditional sports. This influence is often profit-driven, sometimes overshadowing the essence of the game. As a result, sponsorships and financial incentives can have negative effects, compromising in-game integrity and competition. The frustration and disillusionment reflected in the comments suggest that sponsorship agreements and financial motives can lead to unethical practices and decisions in gaming.

The issue of match arrangements, in particular, exemplifies how financial incentives can manipulate athletes. Such financial pressures drive decisions that stray from the core values of sports, creating direct impacts. Additionally, the inadequate support for players and the exploitation of their efforts for profit mirror the sponsorship-driven business models in traditional sports, where athlete well-being is often overlooked. These exploitative practices erode trust in esports and gaming communities, contributing to high anticipation levels.

In sports, sponsorships and financial considerations are often key factors influencing athletes' performance, motivation and strategic decisions. Similarly, sponsorships play a crucial role in esports and other digital competitions. The comments indicate that in an environment where sponsorship agreements dictate the decisions of athletes and organizations, financial pressures can manipulate participants in various ways.

Mentions of "game fixing" in the comments exemplify how sponsorship and financial interests can shape the internal dynamics of organizations. To maximize revenue from lucrative sponsorship deals, some organizations adopt manipulative strategies,

compromising ethical and professional responsibilities. These practices ultimately weaken trust within the community.

Similarly, discussions about traditional sports such as football and basketball reveal how clubs and organizations have become detached from their communities, prioritizing revenue-driven decisions over fan engagement. This shift has led to declining interest among younger generations. The increasing commercialization of football has turned matches and clubs into mere “business assets,” distancing the sport from its original essence. Similarly, the expanding commercial scale of esports could affect young players and audiences in the same way as traditional sports.

As a result, high anticipation scores reflect how sponsorships and financial goals influence decisions in sports and esports, distorting the original purpose of competition and normalizing unethical practices. In the long term, this could threaten the integrity of sports and gaming.

3.1.3. Disgust

The high “disgust” emotion score in 2017 is linked to financial struggles and unethical practices in both esports and traditional sports. Clubs facing financial difficulties and sponsorship disruptions negatively impacted performance, eroding trust among fans. The failures of financially struggling clubs may have heightened disgust among viewers. Additionally, internal corruption within clubs weakened sponsorship relationships, further diminishing trust among players and supporters.

In 2020, the high “disgust” score was attributed to ethical violations and financial manipulations, particularly in esports. Match-fixing, cheating and illegal betting became widespread, leading to a significant loss of trust within the community. These incidents violated the ethical values of games and players for financial gain, intensifying disgust among viewers. Sponsorships and the betting industry influenced esports organizations, leading some players to manipulate their performances and engage in fraudulent behavior. Notably, players leaking information to betting companies and profiting from rigged matches pushed ethical boundaries, undermining professional integrity and competition.

Organizations like ESIC attempted to address these issues, but their limited resources hindered efforts to combat match-fixing linked to organized crime, exposing industry weaknesses and increasing dissatisfaction. The high “disgust” score in 2020 reflects not only ethical breaches and financial manipulation in esports but also how these issues affected broader sponsorship and business dynamics.

Overall, the gaming sponsorship landscape, driven purely by financial interests, has disregarded ethical values, leading to widespread distrust among participants and viewers. Match-fixing and fraudulent behavior threaten competition integrity in both esports and traditional sports. When organizations and players prioritize profit over ethics and player rights, disillusionment spreads, normalizing unethical behavior and enabling continued exploitation within the industry.

3.1.4. Fear

The high “fear” emotion score in the comments is primarily driven by concerns about ethical issues in sports sponsorships and manipulative practices. Fear is especially prevalent in the esports ecosystem due to deceptive behaviors and unethical practices within certain organizations. Players and fans experience weakened trust in sports integrity due to actions by some teams, managers and organizations. Match-fixing scandals, as noted by former esports player Pimir, raise serious concerns about transparency and reliability. The link between sponsorships, gambling and match outcomes erodes the core values of competition and fairness.

Additionally, manipulative tactics used by stakeholders, such as pressuring players regarding match outcomes or exploiting young talents for financial gain, intensify fear. As fans and players realize how their emotional investments can be exploited by corporate interests, a sense of uncontrollability and distrust increases. The lack of transparency and accountability, coupled with the risk of reputational damage, deepens the erosion of trust in the system.

The conflict between sponsorship agreements and sportsmanship becomes more apparent when major sponsors have controversial or unethical backgrounds. Fear emerges from concerns that such deals threaten the purity of sports and undermine trust in its integrity. While sponsorships boost the economy, they also introduce ethical dilemmas that contradict the spirit of fair play.

In this context, fear is directly tied to the erosion of trust when sports and sponsorship relationships lack transparency and fairness. This issue is critical for maintaining sports as an ethical platform. Fear arises not only from threats to competition integrity but also from a system where financial interests overshadow fair play, reinforcing corruption and exploitation, ultimately leading to widespread distrust in sports.

3.1.5. Joy

The high “joy” emotion score is attributed to the complex interaction between sponsorships, commercialization and the fan experience in sports, particularly football. Football clubs and organizations, in their pursuit of lucrative sponsorship deals to enhance financial success, often place fans in a dilemma between appreciating improved infrastructure and feeling disconnected from the sport’s authenticity and community values. This creates a contradiction between fans’ desire to maintain football’s original sincerity and the changes brought by sponsorships and commercialization.

Comments reflect nostalgia for football’s earlier years, especially the 1990s, when the relationship between fans and players was more personal, fostering a deep sense of community. At that time, football was not just a game but a shared experience that transcended everyday life. However, as sponsorships and commercial interests grew, many fans felt distanced from the sport. Financially driven sponsorships have transformed football into a more corporate entity, often diluting the emotional connection that made it special. Nevertheless, if these sponsorships lead to tangible improvements—such as better facilities and enhanced fan

engagement—they can reignite enthusiasm and be seen as signs of progress rather than alienation.

The satisfaction expressed in high “joy” emotion comments is rooted in the hope that despite commercialization, football can reclaim its passionate and loyal nature. Fans believe sponsorships and investments could restore the excitement of the past rather than diminish the sport’s core values. When executed properly, sponsorships can enhance football’s quality and accessibility rather than detaching fans from the game.

The relationship between sponsorships and joy is multifaceted: When sponsorships strengthen the bond between clubs, players and communities, they enhance the fan experience and bring joy. However, when focused solely on financial gain, they can weaken the sport’s essence and erode fans’ emotional attachment. Sponsorships generate joy when they align with the sport’s identity but create dissatisfaction when they conflict with its core values.

A strong parallel exists between football and esports. The commercialization of football has brought financial growth to clubs, but fan loyalty and community spirit have been replaced by economic concerns. The nostalgia for “90s football” in the comments reflects this shift in emotional investment. Fans who experienced football as a pure and passionate sport now see a modern game shaped by corporate structures and sponsorship agreements. This transformation has led to frustration, reinforcing the longing for “old football.”

The connection between sponsorships and joy in the comments is evident: Sponsorships that enhance accessibility and inclusivity strengthen the fan experience and create joy. However, when they turn football into a commercial enterprise that treats fans as mere consumers, joy is replaced with disappointment. On the other hand, sponsorships that support community involvement, youth development and cultural ties add meaning for fans and generate joy. If they become overly commercialized and alienate fans, the emotional bond to the sport weakens.

A similar development is observed in esports. The decline of Counter-Strike esports highlights how corporate greed and sponsorships have damaged the authenticity of the scene. Just like in football, the shift from player-driven passion to sponsorship-driven financial interests has transformed the industry. In the past, esports were defined by the dedication of players and fans, but today, corporate influences significantly shape both the game and the fan experience.

In conclusion, the high “joy” emotion expressed in these comments underscores fans’ deep emotional attachment to their teams and the sport. However, this bond has become more complex due to sponsorships and commercialization. Joy still exists, but it is strongest when the authenticity of the sport and the sense of community are preserved. As modern sports become increasingly influenced by corporate structures, the relationship between fans and players grows more distant. This contradictory interaction highlights that sponsorships can generate joy when they support

the sport’s values, but when commercialization undermines these values, that joy can be lost.

3.1.6. *Sadness*

The high “Sadness” emotion score reflects the complex relationship between sports, sponsorships and the emotional impact this interaction has on players and fans. Particularly, comments from North America emphasize the emotional reactions to the weakening bond between players and fans during the pandemic. This situation can be seen as a consequence of the commercialization of sports, especially esports. Fans believe that clubs and organizations, by prioritizing financial gains, show disrespect to both players and supporters.

While sponsorships are an important strategy for clubs and organizations to secure large financial support, this can sometimes lead to deviations from the core essence of the sport. The high “Sadness” score shows that these deviations have caused disconnection and disappointment among fans. Comments criticize club owners and managers for chasing financial guarantees while disregarding the players’ talents and their relationships with the community. This not only causes frustration among players but also deep sadness among fans, as they see sports as a sense of belonging and community.

In other words, sponsorships, driven by economic interests, can weaken the spirit of the sport and the bond with fans. This commercialization can negatively impact fans’ emotional investment. Nostalgia for earlier times shows that these types of sponsorships, made only for financial gain, clash with the deep loyalty fans have for the sport. The high “Sadness” score reflects fans’ desire to regain the emotional connection they have lost due to the commercialization of the sport. Therefore, when sponsorships and commercial interests harm the core values of the sport and weaken the bond with the community, these emotional responses become inevitable. Fans do not see sports merely as a form of entertainment but as a cultural connection and sense of belonging and the weakening of this connection leads to deep sadness.

3.1.7. *Surprise*

The high “Surprise” emotion score in the context of sports and sponsorships highlights how unexpected events, announcements and changes can have a strong emotional impact. Sponsorship agreements, particularly in rapidly growing areas like esports, often result in unexpected and surprising outcomes. These outcomes are usually caused by changes made by clubs, players, or organizations in line with their financial interests.

For example, changes in sponsorship agreements that affect a player or a team can be perceived unexpectedly by the audience or community, which leads to an increase in the feeling of surprise. The rise in “Surprise” scores generally stems from the emotional reaction that a particular event or announcement can evoke among fans and viewers. Especially with the financial transformation of esports, changes in the bonds between players and fans, along with surprising developments, can lead to previously unexpected outcomes.

Surprises often occur in the relationships between large brands and sports organizations. These agreements sometimes create deviations from the essence of sports or alter the spirit of the sport for commercial gain. This transformation can unexpectedly generate negative emotions among fans, contributing to the high “Surprise” scores.

The increased pressure on athletes due to sponsorships can also lead to unexpected decisions or changes in public relations strategies. These developments may surprise viewers and fans as they go beyond their expectations.

The unexpected effects of sponsorships are particularly evident in deals with telecommunications brands, esports teams, or gambling companies. For example, when a telecommunications company sponsors Manchester United, some fans may view such deals as disproportionate and unsettling. The surprise here comes from the fact that sponsorships can fundamentally shape a team’s or athlete’s brand value and, at times, create tensions between commercial interests and fan loyalty.

The impact of sponsorships on athletes’ lives can also create surprise. Particularly in organizations like the UFC, sponsorships benefit from athletes’ images while athletes face career challenges. This situation highlights the unseen costs associated with lucrative sponsorships. High financial risks and the influence of sponsorships on the structure of competitions are causes of this feeling of surprise.

As sponsorships become more integrated into sports culture, some fans may be surprised by how the core values of sports—passion, competition and community—are overshadowed by financial incentives. This may lead to disappointment as fans realize how commercial pressures shape decisions in the sports industry. This dynamic is seen in the way football clubs have distanced themselves from local communities in favor of accepting commercial sponsorships, which creates surprise among long-time fans.

In conclusion, the “Surprise” emotion in the context of sports sponsorships highlights the emotional reactions to changes in sports culture and the profound impact sponsorships can have on athletes, teams and the wider sports ecosystem. While these sponsorships may be financially beneficial, they can unexpectedly disrupt the principles and dynamics that define sports competitions.

3.1.8. Trust

High “Trust” emotion scores in the context of sports and sponsorships clearly demonstrate the positive impact sponsorship agreements can have in strengthening trust. Sponsorship allows a brand to build trust with audiences and fans by collaborating with a sports organization or athlete. This trust is particularly important in long-term relationships and is directly linked to the authenticity and sincerity of the sponsorships.

When major brands make sponsorship agreements with sports organizations, fans see that these brands are not only providing financial support but are also contributing to the development of

the sport. For example, when a sports club or athlete gains financial resources through sponsorship agreements, viewers can accept these sponsorships because they trust the sincere contributions of these brands. This builds trust, which is crucial for the long-term success of the brands involved.

The high “Trust” emotion score in sponsorship agreements is also reinforced by another factor: the reliability of the brands. For example, large brands like Emirates continuously increase their brand recognition through sponsorships while gaining the trust of viewers and potential customers. These brands prove the effectiveness of their sponsorship strategies by observing increases in sales after their sponsorships. Therefore, sponsorship agreements not only provide financial benefits but also help reinforce the sense of trust.

As the feeling of trust in the sport and athletes grows through sponsorships, fans and viewers believe that these brands contribute to the sports ecosystem, which ensures the long-term success of the sponsorships. In this context, the high “Trust” scores mean that sponsorships increase trust in athletes and teams and the relationship between brands and sports is shaped by transparency and sincerity.

The connection between sponsorships and the sense of trust strengthens fans’ trust in brands through their relationships with athletes. Trust is shaped not only by performance but also by transparency and sincerity in the relationships between brands and athletes. When a brand’s support for sports and athletes is perceived as a trustworthy relationship by viewers, the brand’s success is long-term. On the other hand, if sponsorship agreements are seen as more commercial and manipulative, fans’ trust diminishes and their relationship with the brand is damaged. In this context, the high trust emotion score indicates that the sponsorships align with the integrity of sports and show respect for the values of fans.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, the sentiment analysis revealed that various emotions are prominent in relation to sports sponsorships and associated manipulative practices. The primary causes of high anger scores are linked to the commercialization of sports, the shaping of sponsorship agreements based on financial interests and the resulting barriers to players’ development opportunities. This mirrors unethical practices and manipulation within the sports world. Additionally, in the esports sector, the unethical use of sponsorships and financial manipulation have contributed to increased anger. The source of the high “anticipation” emotion is the fluctuating expectations caused by sponsorships in the sports world, with emotional intensity growing alongside the rise of esports and increasing influence of sponsors. High “disgust” scores reflect the loss of trust and dissatisfaction created by financial manipulations and ethical violations within the esports world. High “fear” scores are a significant concern during periods when sponsorships threaten the integrity of sports and overshadow the true essence of the game with financial interests. High “joy” emotion scores indicate the potential for sponsorships to enhance the quality of sports, but also highlight concerns that commercial

influences may lead to the loss of the sport's original spirit. Lastly, high "sadness" scores reflect deep disappointment among fans due to the commercialization of sports, which weakens community bonds and disregards athletes' rights.

Historically, sponsorships have been seen as charitable activities (Thwaites, 1994), transactions (Sam et al., 2005), strategic resources (Amis et al., 1997) and relationships that achieve mutual goals between commercial organizations (Farrelly and Quester, 2005). Contemporary sponsorships have evolved into more interactive and collaborative structures, emphasizing mutual and sustainable relationships (Urriolagoitia and Planellas, 2007). As an extension of this perspective, sponsorships are no longer merely bilateral economic transactions but are viewed as network relationships involving the sharing of resources and capabilities between sponsors and the sponsored parties (Jensen et al., 2016). Sponsorship programs play a crucial role in sharing strategic resources and building competencies (Amis et al., 1999) and often provide legal rights in exchange for financial or in-kind payments (Chadwick et al., 2022). Therefore, sponsorship should not only be regarded as a marketing strategy but also as a mechanism of economic value creation, resource allocation, and financial sustainability within the field of sports economics. Based on the findings of this study, this shift is often perceived negatively by sports consumers. High anger scores reflect discomfort caused by sponsorships manipulating the potential of athletes and teams for financial gain. Furthermore, deviations from the core values of sports and the neglect of ethical principles lead to a loss of trust, weakening emotional connections and reducing belief in long-term success. On the other hand, joy and trust emotions suggest that when sponsorships are managed correctly, they can build connections with fans and strengthen the essence of the sport.

Sponsorships by gambling companies lead to discomfort and perceived imbalance among fans and viewers. Such sponsorships create tension by conflicting with fan loyalty and team values. Moreover, the combination of gambling sponsorships with match outcomes can undermine the fundamental principles of competition and fairness, damaging the ethical nature of the sport. The feelings of surprise and fear elicited by these comments show that gambling sponsorships are not well received among sports consumers. Gambling sponsorships are the most common form of sponsorship in sports (Sharman, 2022), with gambling brands offering sports betting, casino games, lotteries, poker, bingo, slot machines and other betting types. Today, gambling sponsorships represent one of the most common and effective forms of gambling advertising. These sponsorships express a strategy where gambling brands provide financial resources to supported organizations (e.g., sports clubs or charities) to achieve their commercial goals (De Jans et al., 2024). For example, in 2023, eight football clubs in the English Premier League signed sponsorship deals worth approximately \$60 million by featuring gambling companies on their kits (Taylor, 2023). Gambling advertisements are considered important contextual factors that shape gambling participation (Bouguettaya et al., 2020; Shaffer et al., 2004; Hanss et al., 2015; Hing et al., 2015) and societal acceptance of gambling (Constandt

et al., 2022). Additionally, the gambling industry is unique due to its potential harm to public health. Therefore, gambling sponsorships are classified as unhealthy sponsorships (Boelsen-Robinson et al., 2022).

Based on the findings of this study, policy recommendations regarding sports sponsorships have been developed. Firstly, regulations should be implemented based on the principle of transparency to ensure that sponsorships remain within ethical boundaries. Sponsorship agreements should be designed to support the development of athletes, not solely based on financial interests. Additionally, sponsorship strategies that balance commercial influences without damaging the spirit of the sport should be developed. The role of gambling companies in sponsorships should be restricted, as these sponsorships may cause dissatisfaction among fans. Sponsorships in the esports sector should also be more closely monitored, with efforts made to prevent financial manipulations and ethical violations. Finally, promoting community involvement in sponsorship agreements will enhance the fan experience and support long-term success. These policy recommendations aim to ensure that sports sponsorships align with ethical values, protect the rights of athletes and contribute positively to the community. These recommendations, aligned with the core principles of sports economics, aim to protect the values of sport, safeguard athletes' rights, and ensure financial sustainability within an ethical framework.

The limitations of this study stem from the fact that, despite the large sample size, the underlying causes of the various emotions were not examined in detail. Future research can overcome these limitations by conducting more detailed analyses. In this regard, examining the comments on a yearly basis and investigating the emotional trends across different years more specifically is recommended. This approach would allow for a deeper exploration of the fluctuations in emotions related to sports sponsorship and provide clearer insights into how the underlying causes of these emotions change over time.

Additionally, this study did not sufficiently control for demographic factors such as age, gender and geographic location. Therefore, future studies should examine participants' demographic information more comprehensively and analyze how these characteristics influence emotional trends. Furthermore, incorporating data on participants' physical health and sports-related activities could help build a more comprehensive dataset.

This study focused solely on comments from the Reddit platform. Since Reddit targets a specific user group, the study only reflects the perspectives of Reddit users and the results may differ when compared to comments from other social media platforms. Future research could gather data from other social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook) to cover a wider audience and examine how emotional trends vary across different platforms.

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