



FACTORS INFLUENCING SPONSORSHIP MANAGEMENT IN PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUES OF THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

This research paper presents the factors that influence the management of sponsorships in the professional football league of Thailand. The research collected insights from semi-structured interviews with thirteen business organizations and four professional football clubs competing in the Thai football leagues to examine the factors influencing sponsorship management in the football leagues in Thailand. The research shows the factors that influence sponsorship management in professional football leagues in Thailand in three sections: sponsorship objectives, sponsorship decision-making, and evaluation of the effectiveness of sponsorship management in the Thai football leagues. The research also conducted documentary research related to sponsorship management in the Thai Football League to analyze the factors influencing sponsorship management in the Thai football League. The research work was analyzed using data triangulation and method triangulation to analyze the data to ensure reliability and accuracy. Research has shown that sponsorship objectives focus on creating a corporate image, building public view, and executive interest, where the sponsor and the sponsee (A person or organization associated with the sport to find capital, foods, accommodations, sports articles of clothing, rental of training facilities, sports-related resources, sports equipment for running a sports event. [01]) have the utmost importance. Creating visibility and giving opportunities to give back to society is of secondary importance. The decision-making of sports sponsorship is an essential part of the sponsorship management of the professional football league of Thailand. The research found that the views gained by sponsors and sponsees focus on the expense of the sponsorship. The image and status regarding the potential sponsored party are the first two factors influencing sponsorship decisions in Thai football. The revenue chance for the organization, the presentation to the organization's target market, and the capacity to develop the organization's image is a minor criterion for sponsoring decisions in the Thai football league. The research summary shows that the Thai league has not yet been planning to evaluate sponsorship effectiveness based on data obtained from the perspective of the sponsor and sponsee.

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Some sponsors have evaluated the sponsor's effectiveness, which then evaluates the effectiveness of sponsorship after the professional football league season in Thailand and focuses on conducting a sponsorship effectiveness evaluation in connection with the feedback measurement from the participating groups, the media exposure measurement, communication results measurement, and sales results measurement.

Keywords: Football, Sponsorship Management, Thailand

Introduction

Supposed to state that sports can generate income for the country, probably not wrong. The sports industry has attracted many people's attention from sports events, sports equipment consumption, and watching sports games through live broadcasts. For this reason, sport is a business that generates money and builds on investment in the domestic economy. Sport is an essential driver of the national economy in conjunction with sports products and services vital to any sports business. It is the first part of driving the sports industry. [2]

Currently, the sports business of Thailand divides into two parts. The first part is the production of goods consisting of manufacturing businesses to meet consumers' sports activities. The second part is the sports service. It is associated with business sectors focused on sports education, sports medicine services, sports entertainment, sports marketing management, and sports sponsorship. [2] From the 2014 data, 47.11% of the sports business operators in Thailand operate a place for exercise, sports teaching, and sporting events, followed by 27.30% of the sporting goods of retail business in the sports drinks sector is the least active among other sports sectors, accounting for 0.25% [3]. Becoming a sports sponsorship is a popular communication tool, especially for sporting events. Sports can create the right image and goodwill as the sponsorship of sports activities contributes to community participation. Therefore, getting the people involved in the activities is an essential part of supporting the sport. It affects the creation of public awareness of the business. [4]

Football has long been essential and has caught the attention of the public. Hence, it is not uncommon for businesses to use this channel to find business opportunities that sponsor professional football matches or clubs. It is the most accessible channel. The endorsement and promotion of sports by governments in many countries provide an opportunity for companies to promote and operate sponsorships and promote the sport of football to grow by leaps and bounds. Therefore, it makes companies that operate in various industries use it as a channel to advertise products or organizations such as the food and beverage industry, textile industry, entertainment industry, or even the industry that operates business related to gambling. [5] For the chest girdle sponsor, which has the most comprehensive ad space. Many professional football leagues can let jerseys be filled with full shirt and pants sponsorships. Whether in Sweden or Norway, professional footballers' shirts and pants are found in each football club full of supporters. [6] Premier League

teams are also allowed to find sponsors on the edge of their sleeves. This could help the English team increase their percentage of earning a bit more. That is not enough, and the sponsor can go in and support or become a partner with that club, whether it is the brand that is on the training shirt or making partnerships for football club players to market and participates in activities together for football fans to be a part of the club closely. As well as sponsors, betting sites have a role to play in football when opening to bet through the online system, which foreign countries can play comfortably, legally, famous gambling websites. Therefore, aiming to be a sponsor around the chest of teams worldwide to create acquaintance with gamblers worldwide at the same time. It can be seen how much sponsorship plays an important role in developing a football club's financial foundation. This is said in addition to the matter of money. It also creates a close relationship with the club and the fans as well. [7]

Global sponsorship is growing in popularity and prominence, as can be seen from IEG Sponsorship [8] conducted a survey of sponsors worldwide about the cost of sponsorship activities (Sponsors) from 2013 to 2017. The research shows that the costs associated with sponsors tend to increase dramatically worldwide. It is accounted for up to 62.8 billion US dollars and is considered an increase of 4.6% from 2016, a total cost of 60.1 billion US dollars. Most of the expenditures are related to investment in sponsoring activities. The information shows that the business operations associated with the sponsorship activity are continuously growing at a high rate in North America. North American businesses favor the promotion of their activities; it separates into six main activities. The rank orders from the most favored business organizations sponsorship: 1. sponsorship in sports activities 2. sponsorship in entertainment activities 3. sponsorship in charitable activities 4. sponsorship in artistic activities 5. sponsorship in event activities (Festivals or exhibitions and annual events) and 6. sponsorship to build relationships in the organization. (Associations and member organizations) by calculating the use of tools to support sports activities, accounting for 70 percent of all North American activity sponsorship. Out of the six activities mentioned, sports sponsorship has the highest value, accounting for 16.37 billion US dollars [9].

In Thailand, Football has become the most popular sport. Thai citizens play football for fitness, competition, or sporting excellence. It helps promote a professional sport that can generate income for athletes and stakeholders. According to the professional sports promotion Act 2013, an agency in Thailand whose primary mission is to promote football to upgrade to a professional sport, namely The Football Association of Thailand under the Patronage of His Majesty the King and the Sports Authority of Thailand. Both organizations are responsible for direct policies from the Ministry of Tourism and Sports to encourage sports development strategies for excellence and professional sports, one of the six main strategies of the sixth National Sports Development Plan (2017-2021) [2].

Thailand's football change made football clubs start with more fans interested in football, such as Muang Thong United, Buriram United, or Chonburi FC. As the fan base grows, the club's revenues boosted by tickets to the matches, the sale of souvenirs, and the most critical source of funding for the Thai football club is that the sponsor's amount will increase as these sponsorship organizations can advertise their products or

services to their audience, and it can be more and more precisely on that point. In addition to this income, the club also earned revenues from broadcasting live matches via television and created earning revenue from trading football talents and famous football players. We can see that our professional football in Thailand is continuously evolving, and it is a good idea to see this development goes sustainable. However, what has become of concern is that each club's sponsorship management in the Thai Premier League is essential to the football club's business operations to make Thai professional football successful or failure. In the past, these stories may not have been of much importance given the lack of intense competition for the sports and the increasing number of supporters' audience and supporters today. [10]

Therefore, this research objective is to study the factors that influence sponsorship management in professional football leagues in Thailand. It focuses on the sponsorship management stakeholders in the football league to find the factors that influence sponsorship management in professional football leagues in Thailand. It will help business organizations, football marketers, football event organizers, and football clubs understand the factors that influence sponsorship management in professional football leagues in Thailand and the extension of academic knowledge in Thailand's sports sponsorship even more.

Methodology

The research defines a research analysis unit. The Research was divided into two groups. The first group is the executives or sponsors of the management team of Thai football league sponsors at T1, T2, and T3. The sponsorship organization of the Thai League is certified by Thai League Company Limited, a juristic person of the Football Association of Thailand. The second group is the management team of professional football clubs that operate Thai football leagues at T1, T2, and T3 levels. Professional football clubs must be certified by the Thai League Company Limited, a juristic person, the Football Association of Thailand in 2020. In this regard, the research was randomized for research suitability.

Research cannot determine the size or amount number of samples available in advance. Because collecting information from them informants will only end when the data is saturated. It shows that the data is consistent and saturated to be accurate and reliable. This research study is qualitative. The research decided to use in-depth interviews to collect the unit of analysis data. Research in-depth and direct the interview process clearly and meet the research objectives. Therefore, the researchers chose to use a tool to collect data under qualitative research. The semi-structured interview guidelines are used data collection tool for this study. The interview guidelines are divided into two interviews to meet the analytical unit of objectives. The research has set criteria for selecting interviewees to obtain information from the interview to be consistent with the objective. The information obtained through the accurate collection from informants affects the reliability and accuracy of the research data.

The research's interviewee criteria are as follows: The interviewee must be ready and willing to provide the investigator with information throughout the data collection period. The interviewee must

be aware of the state of the information to take. The interviewee must provide the information in the data collection process on behalf of a business organization or professional football club in the Thai League only. The business entity to be interviewed must sponsor a Thai League or a football club sponsored by the Thai League by 2020, and a professional football club must be associated with the Thai League sponsorship by 2020. However, sponsoring business organizations and professional football clubs must be certified by Thai League Limited, a legal entity of the Football Association of Thailand. The interview guidelines are relevant to the objective of this research. The research chose the Irwin Interview Guidelines [11], modified by Greenhalgh and Greenwell [12], which are widely used abroad as a tool for applying the research interview guideline design. The research designs the interview guidelines in four parts for the Thai League sponsorship organization or a football club: general information about the organization, the sports sponsor's objectives (The question will be relevant to determining the sponsorship objectives of a company or professional football club. What is the procedure for determining the business's sponsorship objectives for a football club or football tournament? Which objectives are the most important and why?), the sports sponsorship decision making (The question will be relevant to sports sponsorship decision-making in professional football clubs. What factors do the company give importance to sponsorship and why? Who is responsible for making company sponsorship decisions?), and the sports sponsorship effectiveness evaluation (The question will be relevant to the sports sponsorship effectiveness evaluation. Does the company conduct the football sponsorship effectiveness evaluation?", How does the company conduct sponsorship effectiveness evaluation?). The interview guidelines will be sent to the informant ahead of time by email or by post, depending on the informant's wish to have the interviewer deliver the interview guide to the interviewee.

The research has conducted the interview process within the premises of a business organization or professional football club. The research has set an interview time of approximately 1 hour per time. Data Analysis, the research has selected a model of triangulation method to analyze the data. Data Triangulation is the process in which the information collected is compared and checked for its certainty. It will show the data's consistency and the discrepancy in the data from the data collection, which will show the correlation of the subsequent data. The research used the data collected to analyze to determine the corresponding frequencies. The research also used the method triangulation to analyze data obtained from the data triangulation to compare data obtained from multiple scenarios and sources to understand sponsors' perspectives and professional football clubs in Thailand leagues. Documentary research data is essential. Therefore, the research applied documentary research data results to study the data's accuracy and mutual consistency in the sponsorship of the Thai league. It supports the credibility and diversity of data analysis to be more multidimensional. The research includes data analysis in documentary research and interviews to analyze the factors influencing the management of sponsorships in the Thai League.

Results

The research was carried out and collected in Thailand using in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 17 informants from sponsors and sponsees in the Thai professional football league. The research indicates that the objective of sponsorship management. It can help explain the objective situation of sponsorship management in the Thai League. The corporate image is the objective that both sides agree on from the sponsorship management. It has a tremendous ability to create a positive image for professional football clubs and sponsors entering the Thai league competitions. The informant revealed, "Sponsoring a football club or football tournament has essential to improve the business's image, especially those related to liquor and gambling." The sponsor organizations and professional football clubs agree that sponsorships are created to promote publicity about the operations of their organizations or their products with football as a medium. The informant stated, "Football has the potential to reach the company's customer base for product promotion, and it also has a wide range of ages and genders. It is, therefore, a very high-quality medium for business operations." The interests of corporate executives are the objective of promoting smoother management and more efficient operations. The informant stated, "Most of the company's board of directors are usually men, so it is not unusual to sometimes focus on supporting football on behalf of the organization. It satisfies the individual needs of the executives but retains the benefits of running a common business." Building visibility is an objective that is often second to none in managing a sponsor, a sponsor organization, or a football club in the Thai League. In line with the objectives of social engagement, sponsor organizations and professional football clubs share similar views in selecting professional football as a means of social engagement through organizing activities that try to involve local society and people in activities organized by professional football clubs or sponsoring companies with football as a medium. Football clubs and sponsor organizations have chosen to use professional football events in the Thai league to reach their target consumers. It is hard to deny that the target audience of football fans or football spectators is often diverse and exciting in corporate sponsors and professional football clubs. Objectives related to the business relationship of the sponsor and professional football club are frequently featured. It shows that both expect professional football in the area for building business relationships with each other. Creating awareness is the objective of professional football clubs and sponsoring companies to use the Thai professional football competition sponsorships to create awareness among the people and the fans who enter watch matches and watch them live on various media. The last objective with more than half of the informants' frequency is brand positioning. Professional football clubs and sponsor organizations use professional football to position the brand for setting public awareness. The informant declared, "The company's objectives for sponsorship are clear and precise. It will help organizations visualize sponsorships and benefits and how they can be easily implemented in football sponsorship management. It is therefore imperative that management and related parties pay close attention to the consideration of sponsorship objectives."

In the current situation, the decision to sponsor a professional football league, which is informed by sponsorship, values the sponsor's cost and the image or status of the sponsor. It makes sense that

sponsorship budgets are currently extremely influential in professional football, which aligns with the image and status of professional football clubs or tournament organizers who need to have a positive image to be sponsored. The informant said, “The fact that the management of a professional football club or a football club that is well-managed and does not act illegally is often considered a special case because it will help the organization trust in managing the budget of sponsoring football clubs. It also can trust that the football club will not damage the company’s reputation.” Even more, Revenue opportunity is the next priority. The presentation to the organization’s target market, the capacity to develop the organization’s image were subsequently given priority with the same mean. It shows that football clubs and sponsors see the opportunity to present from sponsoring football to their customer or football audience and the ability to create an image of a football club sponsorship and match. The informant stated, “Companies often expect to generate revenue by selling or promoting their products to their business targets. Coming in to support football allows the company to be closer to its target audience.” The sponsorship’s entertainment or hospitality potentiality is the criteria that sponsorship perspectives pay attention to the sponsorship decision process in the Thai Football League. The opportunity to show the organization’s dedication to society and raise awareness of the brand is the criteria for sponsorship perspective decisions. The informant declared, “Sponsoring a football club is only meant to entertain the company’s customers, and it also fosters affinity with the community in which it operates.”

The sports sponsorship effectiveness evaluation represents a flaw in the management of sponsors in Thai professional football. Besides, the information also shows that those sponsor organizations or professional football clubs with a system for assessing sponsorship performance in the Thai League conduct sponsor performance assessments at the end of the season and during the competition season in the Thai League. It has been seen that at the beginning of the season, the sponsor organization and professional football club did not value sponsorship management efficiency. Effectiveness evaluation, sponsors, and sponsee perspectives are often given to the importance of the performance assessment relevant to the end measurement of the sponsorship program, the feedback measurement from the participating groups, the media exposure measurement, communication results measurement, sales results measurement. It shows that the professional football industry in Thailand is currently trying to evaluate the effectiveness of the feedback of football visitors and fans of professional football clubs who attend professional football matches. An informant mentioned it during the interview, “The company did not operate in this area because it thought it was unnecessary and unworthy of its operation, but the company chose to do so. It assesses its effectiveness by survey the satisfaction of customers who visit the football clubs sponsored by the company. Company may find other methods by which it can measure sponsorship effectiveness.” The informant also made a critical explanation on sponsorship effectiveness evaluation: “If a company or professional football club can systematically assess the effectiveness of football sponsorships, it will help the operations of the relevant business sector and the Thai football league to develop sustainably and efficiently. ”

Discussion

Interview results were presented from the perspective of thirteen sponsors and four sponsee perspectives. The Thai professional football sponsorship objective found that organization image, create publicity, and management interest where the three main objectives from both perspectives are essential. It is consistent with a Greenhalgh & Greenwell [12] study on the professional niche sports sponsorship: an investigation of sponsorship selection criteria. It reflects that football has the potential to create a positive image for businesses. Football is highly anticipated as a sport that will improve its image due to its ability to present the sport's principle of promoting positive thinking through football among the masses, but unlike other sports in Thailand, Football is also top-rated worldwide. Hence, it is common for football sponsorships or clubs to help create a positive image for businesses. The findings corroborated Greenhalgh & Greenwell's [12] opinion that sponsoring professional sporting events has the potential to generate publicity for products and services as well as corporate reputation. Football is known to have a vast audience potential, so the advantages of football matches are often used as a public relations space in many people. Football is also the sport that catches the media's attention in big or international tournaments. Football often uses this advantage to persuade sponsors who want to spread the word. activities or goods and services more effectively than other sports. It is hard to deny that football is popular among people of all social classes. Executives' interest in football is particularly popular with male executives. It inevitably leads to choose in sponsorship decision-making or interest in operations related to sports support. It is, therefore, an advantage of football that is often featured by corporate executives as the first sport when it comes to sponsoring a sporting event. It is consistent with Jensen et al. [13] that states the interest of corporate executives has a strong influence in determining the purpose of sponsoring a sporting event. It stems from the interests of the corporate management, the sponsors, and the personal wishes of the corporate executives. Moreover, Abratt et al. [14], stating that defining sports sponsorship objectives is consistently influenced by corporate executives.

The study of the decision of sponsoring the Thai professional football found that the expense of the sponsorship was the basis for the decision of the sponsor of the Thai professional football league. It reflects that the sponsorship decisions of the Thai professional football league tend to focus on the cost of sponsoring. The cost of sponsoring a professional football club or football match is often substantial due to the need for sponsorships that are somewhat greater than other sports. In addition, football often requires a lot of capital to develop competitiveness, making football clubs often offer a large amount of funding. Therefore, it is common for sponsors to focus on Make decisions that are related to sponsorship costs. It is consistent with Shank's [15] study, indicating that businesses often consider the cost of sponsoring a sporting event. Barros et al. [16] confirmed that corporate sports marketing activities are of great importance to budget considerations. Beiderbeck et al. [17] stated that sponsoring companies must consider the costs of sponsoring professional football league matches in the coronavirus outbreak. It helped confirm that as the Thai professional football league is struggling to withdraw or cut funding to support its sponsor's professional football clubs, it aligns with the organization's plans to deal with the economic crisis. The image and status regarding the potential

sponsored party are essential in the sponsorship decision-making process. Football is a prevalent sport and is often watched by the public for its activities. Sponsor companies need to consider the image and operation of football clubs more rigorously than decisions made in other sports. It is consistent with a study on Athlete brand identity, image, and congruence: a systematic literature review by Linsner et al. [18] stated that the image of football clubs and football players is essential in gaining revenue from football fans and generating interest in sponsorship from the private and governmental organizations involved in sport. Greenhalgh & Greenwell [12] also states that the image and status of professional sports often can decide on sponsorships by companies interested in sponsoring sports. It is relevant to the demographic and psychological aspects of business operations. Sponsoring a football match is often an opportunity to generate income for the sponsoring company. Sponsorship companies often take advantage of football, which is very popular in Thailand, to reach the target market and promote the product, thereby creating an opportunity to generate income for the business. According to the study of Professional football clubs and empirical evidence from the COVID-19 crisis: Time for sports entrepreneurship? by Hammerschmidt et al. [19], the sponsorships in professional football are trying hard to create opportunities to divide professional football revenues. Restrictions on marketing activities within professional football matches.

Lack of systematic evaluation of sponsorship effectiveness in Thai professional football leagues It reflects the problems facing the Thai professional football industry. It is a fundamental problem that has hindered the development of systematic sponsorship management due to the lack of resources for professional football clubs to operate and the lack of skilled personnel. Evaluating the sponsorship effectiveness of professional football clubs is slowly evolving, but significant professional football clubs are still making efforts. Businesses that sponsor football matches and professional football clubs face costs of evaluating sponsorship effectiveness, leading many companies to opt out. It further underscores the lack of promotion in evaluating the sponsorship effectiveness in Thai professional football. Silva [20] said that the football sponsorship effectiveness is excellent potential for indicating successful sponsorship results in football, and the results of the best football sponsorship effectiveness evaluations will come from competition groups and online media. Silva's comments confirm that a football sponsorship effectiveness evaluation is critical to the success of the sponsorship service in Thai football.

The research has summarized the research results as follows. Creating a corporate image, building public view, and executive interest are the three sponsorship objectives where both the sponsor's perspective and the sponsee are of the utmost importance. Creating visibility and giving opportunities to give back to society is of secondary importance. It was consistent with the sponsoring objectives mentioned from both perspectives from the sponsor's point of view for sponsoring purposes. The organization's image creates publicity, management interest, create visibility, and social involvement in the top five in which the perspective of a sponsor sets the objective of sponsoring the professional football league of Thailand. There is a difference between the sponsor's perspective for sponsoring purposes in the sponsee's perspective. Sponsee's

perspective is focused on organization image, creating publicity and management interest, entering the target market, and positioning the brand.

The decision-making of a sports sponsorship is an essential part of the sponsorship management of the Thai professional football league. The research found that the views gained by sponsors and sponsees focus on the expense of the sponsorship, and the image and status regarding the potential sponsored party are the first two factors that influence sponsorship decisions in the league of Thai professional football. It shows that sponsorship in professional football in Thailand emphasizes the cost of sponsorship and the image or status of a sponsored professional football club. The revenue chance for the organization, the presentation to the organization's target market, and the capacity to develop the organization's image is a minor criterion for sponsoring decisions in the Thai Professional Football League, which both perspectives consider it to be three factors are essential in making a sponsorship decision. The research aimed to present the criteria that influence decisions in the Thai professional football league sponsor from the sponsor's perspective. It will be found that the influencing criteria for deciding sponsors are as crucial as the decision criteria being presented from both perspectives.

Contrary to the sponsee's view that the image and status regarding the potential sponsored party will be more critical than the sponsorship expense, the priorities will differ from the sponsor's point of view. The occasion to raise awareness of the brand, the revenue chance for the organization, and the capacity to develop the organization's image is the decision criterion that sponsee gave a second priority to the previous two.

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