
Sponsorship of grassroots sport: a scoping review of research

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Biographical statements

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Abstract

Grassroots sport is under increasing financial pressure with sponsorship providing a key income stream. This paper offers the first scoping review on the management of grassroots sponsorship, determining the state of research in this area to provide suggestions for further scholarly attention. Searching literature up until 2020 using terms including grassroots sport and sponsorship, 18 articles were returned, with descriptive then thematic analysis being undertaken. The review reports that studies are being conducted in economically leading countries, tending to focus on events and, to lesser extents, sport properties. Eight themes were constructed encompassing the securing, maintaining, and use of sponsorship, and grouped into two categories: (i) pre-sponsorship, and (ii) during sponsorship activity. Study in this area was stressed as being still in its infancy and largely atheoretical, with this paper serving to facilitate further conversation and investigation into the managerial practices associated with grassroots sport sponsorship.

Keywords: sport sponsorship; grassroots sport; scoping review; management; sponsor; sponsee

Introduction

In many countries, grassroots sport is considered the ‘lifeblood of sport’, and the ‘backbone’ of national sporting systems, occurring in communities nationwide (Sport and Recreation Alliance, 2022; Wicker et al., 2012). It is a setting characterised by significant voluntary commitment and one where a mass number of individuals ‘play out’ their leisure time, that, in turn, furnishes physical and mental health, individual development, social, and economic benefits. Yet grassroots sports properties are constantly faced with concerns of financial viability and sustainability, often struggling to generate the revenues to, for example, cope with infrastructure, land, and administrative costs, and are therefore reliant, to differing extents, upon external funding sources (Bradbury et al., 2021; Ennis, 2020). Whilst sponsorship is therefore a perennial necessity for grassroots sport organisations, it carries a contemporary salience given the wide-reaching detriments brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic across the globe that placed many non-profit sport organisations on a precarious financial footing (Hindmarsh et al., 2024). Likewise, private businesses with limited human resources are also faced with increasingly uncertain financial environments, and grassroots sport properties provide one mechanism by which to access and leverage targeted consumers (Zinger and O’Reilly, 2010). It is therefore prudent that such sponsors develop their understanding of how to utilise such non-profit sport organisations effectively (Mazodier et al., 2015). Together, Mazodier et al. (2015) emphasise that the sponsorship of grassroots sport organisations provided by corporate enterprises has the potential to contribute to the social development of and within communities and local areas.

Despite the growing emphasis from practitioners to undertake sponsorship, Cornwell and Kwon (2020) highlight a paucity of extant literature that examines the management of and within sport sponsorship. Seemingly little has subsequently changed in this space since similar

claims were made by Berrett and Slack (2001) almost two decades earlier. More specifically, grassroots sport sponsorship remains an underdeveloped research area (Hindmarsh et al., 2024; Mazodier et al., 2015; Misener and Doherty, 2014), with limited peer-reviewed material published in relation to its management, negotiation, implementation, and evaluation. Although several non-profit sport sponsorship related works (e.g., Berrett and Slack, 2001; Doherty and Murray, 2007) offer valuable contributions in relation to approaches taken to sponsorship delivery, the focus of such studies largely concerns national sport organisations (NSOs). NSOs are characterized as: organisations that employ paid staff and are typically much better resourced compared to smaller non-profit organisations such as voluntary sport clubs (VSCs) (Robinson, 2011); that have been considered as ‘out of touch’ with grassroots sport (Grix, 2009; Renfree and Kohe, 2019); more inclined to allocate resources to elite over local level sport (Goodwin and Grix, 2011); and that seldom deliver direct sporting opportunities to individuals on the ground.

Sponsorship within elite sport has garnered disproportionately more academic attention to that of the grassroots setting (Hindmarsh et al., 2024). As is often reflected in the strategic objectives of the respective sets of organisations, drivers of sponsorship in grassroots and elite sport contexts tend to differ (Wang et al., 2024). Grassroots sport often focuses on delivering “opportunities for recreational and competitive sport participation” (Misener and Doherty, 2014 p.124), whereas professional sport is instead interested in balancing on-field success with bottom-line results (Di Simone and Zanardi, 2021). Distinction can be further drawn from the formality in sponsorship management whereby elite sport adopts more business-like principles over the more informal approaches observed in grassroots: this is perhaps best exemplified by contrasting the formal written sponsorship contracts signed in elite sport compared to such agreements in grassroots sport which are often characterised by ‘handshake’ or verbal contracts (Cornwell, 2020). Finally, the scale and focus of sponsorship also contrasts, with grassroots

often possessing a local community focus whereas elite sport concentrates more on targeting wider audiences (Cornwell, 2020).

To set the context for this scoping review, it is important to unpack how we are conceptualising both ‘grassroots sport’ and ‘sponsorship’. Beginning with grassroots sport, we draw upon the European Parliament and Council of the European Union (2021) who describe the phenomenon as “physical leisure activities practised regularly at non-professional level by people of all ages for health, educational or social purposes”. In conjunction, and following Mazodier et al. (2015, p. 317), we consider grassroots sporting organisations as those “promoting participation in amateur sports, including local sporting clubs, domestic leagues and local sporting venues”. To this effect, grassroots sports organisations are characterised as non-governmental, not-for-profit, democratic, and membership-based in nature: they may employ some salaried staff, but volunteers contribute to the majority, if not all of the operational support under the leadership of a voluntary board (International Sport and Culture Association, 2013).

Sponsorship is an established facet of the modern marketing mix employed by businesses, yet how it has been studied, understood, and approached by the academic community has shifted over time (Johnston and Spais, 2015; Ryan and Fahy, 2012). Prior to the 1980s, the philanthropic approach of gifting and underwriting causes was antecedent to contemporary notions of sponsorship, and which subsequently shifted to the market-centred sponsorship of the 1980s built around brand image, awareness, and return on investment – demands which called for suitable monitoring and evaluation measures. During the 1990s, this consumer-centred approach gave way to a strategic resource perspective whereby sponsorship was understood as a source of competitive advantage, and it is at this point that the notion of corporate social responsibility (CSR) began to be considered in relation to grassroots sport sponsorship in the mid-2000s (Ryan and Fahy, 2012). CSR initiatives are common practices

employed by businesses across the globe and may include donations, sponsorships, staff volunteering, and fundraising activities as a means of demonstrating, *inter alia*, a commitment to strengthening the wellbeing of a community through corporate citizenship (Batty et al., 2016; Palmer et al., 2017). Moving deeper into the 2000s, understandings of sponsorship (and CSR) have sought to recapture its social dimension, viewing it as a process of interaction, partnership, and networked relations between sponsor, sponsee, and connected others (Ryan and Fahy, 2012). Indeed, more contemporary works highlight the development of the sponsor-sponsee relationship as one not only contingent on the actions of one another, but which is at once affected by a broader network of stakeholders outwith the immediate dyad (Cornwell et al., 2024; Hindmarsh et al., 2024).

Given that understandings of the concept and the priorities for studying it have evolved over time, it is perhaps unsurprising that there is no universally agreed definition of sponsorship. To compensate for this and to convey to readers the essence of the concept as it pertains to the grassroots sport context, we define, as an artefact of this scoping review, sponsorship as: a series of financial or in-kind exchanges between stakeholders both inside and outside of the sponsor-sponsee dyad to forge a mutually beneficial relationship which enables all parties to fulfil or partially fulfil their remit. Whereas stakeholders inside the dyad refers to those directly impacted by the sponsorship (e.g., sponsors, sponsees, volunteers, employees), stakeholders outside the dyad relate to those with reduced impact from the partnership yet may still hold power as to how sponsorship is managed (e.g., consumers and NSOs (Hindmarsh et al., 2024). The purpose of this scoping review, therefore, was to map the literature pertaining to sponsorship in grassroots sport up to 2020, and specifically, its management, to address the principal research question: ‘what is the state and focus of research associated to the management of grassroots sport sponsorship?’.

Methods

Peters et al. (2015) highlights the utility of the scoping review for exploring research fields either of a complex nature, or, of more relevance to this study, a field not extensively reviewed previously. To execute the review, this study followed the framework of Arskey and O'Malley (2005) given its application within other sport management published scoping reviews (e.g., Dowling et al., 2018; Inoue et al., 2015). In a process led by the first author, the review was conducted across five stages: (i) identifying the research question; (ii) searching for and identifying relevant studies; (iii) selection of studies; (iv) data charting and, (v) collating, summarising, and reporting results.

Identifying the research question

The starting point of any scoping review is to formulate a research question to guide the search strategy (Arskey and O'Malley, 2005). Considering the study's purpose, the research question for the review concerned 'What is the state and focus of research associated to the management of grassroots sport sponsorship?'

Searching for and identifying relevant studies

Firstly, we chose the search terms and keywords. The search terms highlighted in Table I were employed in various combinations.

[Insert Table I found at bottom of manuscript]

As the selection of database is controlled by the topic of interest (Grewal, 2016), we referred to databases specialising in sport, business, and management disciplines. Consequently, studies were identified through seven electronic databases: ABI/Inform (ProQuest), Business Source Complete (EBSCO), Emerald, Science Direct, SportDiscus (EBSCO), SpringerLink, and Taylor and Francis.

Selection of studies

Grounded through the study's definitions of 'sponsorship' and 'grassroots sport', any peer-reviewed study fixating on sport sponsorship management at the grassroots level was included. To do so, we followed the approach from Dowling et al. (2018) that saw us individually undertake a title and abstract analysis to discern whether each study satisfied the criteria, with articles excluded if both reviewers identified the paper as not fulfilling the specifications for inclusion. In cases of split opinion, a full copy of the article was acquired and scrutinised by both researchers until reaching a shared decision.

The criteria for article exclusion reflected the reviews inclusion parameters and were ruled out on several determinants. First, due to the practical constraints of cost and time associated with translating material not published in English, only peer-reviewed articles written in English were included for review – meaning that some papers of potential relevance may have been left out (Arskey and O'Malley, 2005). Secondly, any article published after 2020 was excluded. The choice for limiting articles to 2020 and not beyond was due to the review being a component of a wider piece of work that used its findings to inform the study's future research direction. Third, commensurate with other scoping reviews (e.g., Dowling et al., 2018), any textbooks, theses, and conference proceedings were removed, and only peer-reviewed works were included, accepting that by excluding grey literature noteworthy material may be

overlooked. Fourth, aligning with the grassroots sport definition applied within this study, sponsorship research with a commercial and elite sport lens was eliminated. Connecting to this point, certain terms rendered articles ill-suited for the review. For example, ‘amateur sport’ returned articles concerning the Olympics – a mega-sporting event securing significant sums of finance through sponsorship – and thus varying sizeably from grassroots level sport. Likewise, studies exploring (inter)collegiate sports sponsorship were removed even though being viewed as amateur because of its differential nature to the grassroots sport context (cf. Osborne et al., 2019).

Sponsorship articles fastened to NSOs or regional associations of NSOs – namely recovered from the ‘non-profit sport’ and ‘not-for-profit sport’ search terms – were removed despite being the governing bodies of grassroots sport organisations. This was owing to the International Sport and Culture Association (2013) arguing for grassroots sport to be differentiated to NSOs. The same terms yielded sport for development and peace research. Although these organisations and initiatives are organised away from high-level performance or commercial purposes whereby volunteers can assist in its operations, such programmes possess different missions and remits to those organisations delivering sport for participatory and/ or competitive reasons and were thus withdrawn. Due to the noted complexities around grassroots sport, all papers selected for review had to solely focus on the sponsorship process related to sport at the grassroots level.

The narrow inclusion criteria meant a significant number of papers were removed (n=12,351), rendering 16 articles germane to the study’s purpose. Consistent with other scoping reviews (i.e., Kubacki et al., 2018), included articles underwent a backward and forward searching process whereby the bibliography of each included paper was reviewed to verify no studies meeting the criteria were overlooked. To avoid the omission of relevant articles, the first author

read the titles of each paper from each of the 16 included papers' bibliographies to identify an additional 71 articles for potential inclusion. However, the subsequent screening of the potential papers' abstracts by both researchers culminated in two of these papers being included as they met the study's inclusion criterion. This backward/forward process, combined with the initial searching of papers, rendered a total of 18 articles for review. Figure 1 summarises the search process adopted to review the research surrounding grassroots sport sponsorship.

[Insert Figure 1 found at bottom of manuscript]

Data charting

To extract the content from the 18 articles included, we were guided by Levac et al. (2010) in developing a data charting form whereby we collectively decided on which content should be coded. As seen in previous scoping reviews (e.g., Dowling et al., 2018; Inoue et al., 2015), the content extracted consisted of both core information relating to the author(s), year of publication, journal of publication, and study location, as well as more substantial information concerning the study's purpose and/ or aim, research method, and key findings/ outcomes. For consistency, and as per suggestions from Levac et al. (2010), at this stage we each independently coded data from the first eight articles before discussing the results to arrive at a common understanding of what specific data should be coded before applying this to the remaining papers. After coding all articles, we both collectively reviewed the data charting form, reflected in Table II that not just summarises the extracted data but also highlights the themes constructed from each paper as a result of the analysis. In instances of difference, we re-reviewed and discussed the paper until reaching a consensus.

[Insert Table II found at bottom of manuscript]

Collating, summarising, and reporting results

Aligning to Arksey and O'Malley (2005), and past scoping reviews in sport management (e.g., Dowling et al., 2018; Inoue et al., 2015), descriptive then thematic analysis was carried out. For descriptive analysis, frequencies were used to present a numerical summary of the nature, extent, and distributions of the reviewed studies. Here, as shown in Table II, information covering publication year; journal publication; location; sport setting and context; and methodological approach were used to describe the research. The thematic analysis adopted an iterative and inductive approach whereby themes were constructed from the papers in which we each independently carried out analyses before agreeing on key themes collectively. Figure 2 subsequently illustrates the themes built from the analysis carried out.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive analysis

Publication year

The search strategy resulted in articles spanning a timeframe of 23 years (1996-2019) with none returned from 2020. Suggesting greater attention is beginning to focus on this area, a total of 14 articles were published during and after 2010, whereas only one article was published during the 1990's, with a further three more between 2000 and 2009.

Journal Publication

Articles were published in 13 different journals and were attached to several disciplines, with marketing and management journals accounting for the bulk of publications (n=13). Here, the *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship* published the most papers (n=4), while *Sports Marketing Quarterly* and *European Sport Management Quarterly* each printed two articles. Also aligning to journals in the discipline of marketing and management were *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal*, *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, *Journal of Sponsorship*, *Management Decision*, and *Managing Leisure* that each published one article. Journals in the disciplines of events (*Journal of Convention and Event Tourism*), health (*Health Promotion International*, and *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport*), and politics (*International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, and *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*), each printed one paper.

Location

Using the United Nations World Economic Situation and Prospects Report (2024) classifications, each study was set in an economically leading country. Like previous systematic reviews in broader sponsorship research outlining most work originated from North America (Cornwell and Maignan 1998), the largest amount of research exploring the management of grassroots sport sponsorship (n=10) similarly came from USA and Canada, followed by Australasia (Australia and New Zealand) (n=5). The study found only two European studies explored sponsorship of grassroots sport (Andreini et al., 2014 – Italy; Miragaia et al., 2017 – Portugal) and a further one study from Asia (Sung and Lee, 2016).

Sports setting and context

Most studies refrained from categorising the sponsorship being delivered, either describing the varied industries the respective sponsors operate within (i.e., food and beverage industries) or not listing any specific details (n=14). Four studies alternatively classified sponsors in accordance with their tier/ level of sponsorship, ranging from title/ major sponsors who hold the highest level of rights for association with a sports property to third tier/ minor sponsors who often receive less visibility and integration (Miloch and Lambrecht, 2006; O'Reilly et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2016; Sung and Lee, 2016). Although articles covered several sports, over half dealt with community sport event (CSE) sponsorship (n=14) to reinforce studies arguing investigation into sponsorship rarely veers from events (e.g., Cornwell and Kwak, 2015). Here, sponsorship research either investigated multi-sport event (state) festivals (n=3), single running races/ race series running events (n=5), or triathlons (n=2). Whilst one study made no mention to the type of CSEs sponsorship being explored (Miragaia et al., 2017), three studies employed a multiple case study design focusing on varying CSEs (Batty et al., 2016; Lamont and Dowell, 2008; Mackellar, 2015). The remaining studies examined the VSC setting (n=3) or instead focused on a combination of VSC and CSE sponsorship (Slack and Bentz, 1996).

Methodological approach

Whilst investigating this environment, a mono-method approach has often been applied, with only one mixed-method study (Smith et al., 2016) and two articles adopting a multi-method approach where several forms of data collection were used (Mackellar, 2015; O'Reilly et al., 2019). Most research employed a quantitative design implementing questionnaires (n=10). Work involving a single qualitative method of inquiry was identified in four studies, each implementing either interviews or case study research designs incorporating interviews. The remaining study by Kelly et al. (2014) utilised secondary data to examine their given issue.

Thematic analysis

The authors inductively built themes by assessing the core arguments presented in each article included in the review to follow suggestions by Jones et al. (2011). This resulted in the construction of eight themes that culminated in two higher order themes concerning (i) pre-sponsorship and (ii) during sponsorship practice. While Figure 2 illustrates the higher and lower order themes constructed and the number of articles attached to them, Table III specifically lists the relevant article(s) associated with each theme and are reviewed in the following section. Here, it must be acknowledged that most studies were not placed into a singular theme given their natural overlap with other categories.

[Insert Figure 2 found at bottom of manuscript]

[Insert Table III found at bottom of manuscript]

Pre-sponsorship Agreement Practices.

Pre-sponsorship agreement practices surrounded tasks carried out by the sponsee and sponsor prior to a deal. Here, the review found six practices attached to this sub-theme, these being: motivations, initiation, objectives, sponsorship proposal and/ or packages, selection and decision-making, and planning.

Motivations. Why businesses engaged in grassroots sports sponsorship was explored across four articles. Wider cultural motives including “for the good of the town” and “promoting a healthier lifestyle” (Mackellar, 2015 p.18) as well as for philanthropy and/ or personal preferences were noted throughout this theme (Lamont and Dowell, 2008; Slack and Bentz,

1996). Indeed, despite sponsors placing greater prominence on commercial return compared to altruism, philanthropy still served as a core factor in a sponsors' decision (Smith et al., 2016). Ideas that sponsorship has evolved into a market- and consumer-orientated platform offering mutual benefit (i.e., Johnston and Spais, 2015; Ryan and Fahy, 2012) may be one that is thus not fully reflective of the grassroots sport setting. Indeed, this alternative outlook highlights that although sponsorship differs to philanthropy, the boundaries have become blurred (Plewa and Quester, 2011), and that sponsorship, through CSR and strategic philanthropy, is sustained by its original premise of concerning the betterment of society (McAlister and Ferrell, 2002; Ryan and Fahy, 2012). By implication, if such enterprises are not driven by fully defined business motivations, then the formality of the sponsorship relationship may be more casual than anticipated or may omit actions such as leveraging and activation or evaluation; processes deemed in the literature to be otherwise crucial in a fully-fledged sponsorship. However, important to note is that this is not to devalue the more relaxed approach as, if mixed with some necessary formal elements, sponsorship may actually be more effective when creating value (Athanasopoulou and Sarli, 2015; Morgan et al., 2014).

Initiation. The establishing of agreements gained minimal coverage across the included studies (n=3). Aligning to broader research stating the sports property commonly solicits a relationship (Cornwell, 2017), grassroot sponsorship requests largely stemmed from the sponsee as opposed to sponsor. Here, relationships were typically forged via the use of personal networks inside a commercial organisation, emphasising the importance of sport properties needing individuals with sizeable connections and influence or a friend who owns a business. Indeed, in the voluntary sector more broadly, for example, board members are often recruited because of their useful contacts which can facilitate the securing of resources and fundraising (Cornforth and Edwards, 1999).

When requesting sponsorship, sponsees were found to employ a mixture of techniques ranging from ‘off the street requests’ to the creation of sponsorship proposals and/ or employing external agencies to acquire sponsorship on their behalf (Lamont and Dowell, 2008; Pegoraro et al., 2009; Slack and Bentz, 1996). With more recent studies concerning the formation of sponsorship relationships making no reference to chance or informal requests, there are hints of a shift by sport properties wherein they realise a professional approach may heighten the likelihood of procuring an agreement. Indeed, within the United Kingdom, SNAP Sponsorship is one example external agency growing in popularity, seeing them act as an intermediary in matching grassroots sport properties with corporate entities (SNAP Sponsorship, n.d.). Grassroots sport may therefore be following in the footsteps of elite sport entities who frequently outsource sponsorship activities to external companies when they fail to possess the necessary strategic resource (Dietl et al., 2017). Having such agencies creates implications for relationship building in that outsourcing may create a loss of autonomy for the sponsee and limit learning opportunities (Lee and Walsh, 2011; Walker et al., 2009). Authentic partnerships based on genuine shared values may also make way for deals more artificial in motive (i.e., the sponsor merely giving an image of CSR and the sponsee gaining more favourable economic terms), and thus potentially jeopardise the opportunity for longer-term partnerships. Regardless, it becomes clear sponsorship consists of a network of players who can hold sway in how sponsorship is approached (Cornwell et al., 2024; Hindmarsh et al., 2024).

Objectives. Seven articles explored issues associated with sponsorship objectives. Of these, five studies were from a sponsor’s perspective, one from a sponsee standpoint (Kim et al., 2018), and one from a dual outlook (Lamont and Dowell, 2008). The greater focus on sponsors epitomises the entire review and broader sponsorship literature whereby research documenting a sponsee and/ or dual perspective is scarce because much of the work in this area situates

around a single stakeholder view that is chiefly attached to the sponsor (e.g., Toscani and Prendergast 2018a, 2018b). For sponsors, CSR (Batty et al., 2016; Lamont and Dowell, 2008; Miragaia et al., 2017; Pegoraro et al., 2009; Slack and Bentz, 1996) and strengthening company image and reputation (Kim et al., 2010; Pegoraro et al., 2009; Slack and Bentz, 1996) were the most acknowledged objectives. As Pegoraro et al. (2009, p. 140) suggest, engaging in discretionary CSR practices “can be a powerful marketing tool that can build and shape a corporation’s reputation and provide for differentiation in a crowded marketplace, thereby providing a competitive advantage”. Though, such advantages of CSR – it is argued – are only fully realised when consumers show increased commitment to promote the brand, with self-congruity (i.e., fit between how the consumer perceives themselves and a sponsor’s image), the happiness of consumers (i.e., consumers are thankful to the sponsor), and shared sponsor-sponsee values each being vital conditions in achieving CSR-related sponsorship (Hindmarsh et al., 2024). Nevertheless, arguments of more traditional objectives (e.g., increase awareness and purchase intention) could potentially be futile in grassroots sport, and sponsors are recommended therefore to instead recognise gratitude as a prime objective (i.e., sponsorship used in a way that makes individuals wish to repay the sponsors actions through increased purchase intentions) (Kim et al., 2010).

Contrastingly, and from a sponsee view, fewer objectives were listed, with monetary gain and offsetting shortfalls in funding being commonly identified objectives (Kim et al., 2018; Lamont and Dowell, 2008). Where this is the case, sponsees may not realise the breadth of ways that sponsorship can be utilised and/ or seem more short-term focused, possessing a transactional view of sponsorship. For instance, corporate and market (i.e., increased sports entity exposure), and other operational objectives (i.e., enhance credibility with stakeholders) are just some alternative long-term goals sponsees could covet.

Sponsorship proposal and/ or packages. Extending on the theme of initiating sponsorship, three articles discussed sponsorship proposals. The paucity of commentary on this element is noteworthy given commercial entities are frequently presented with proposals and only fully consider those which catch their attention (Sport New Zealand, 2012). Proposals were often presented through either handing over documents or conducting verbal presentations (Lamont and Dowell, 2008; Slack and Bentz, 1996). Important here when soliciting was a need for sport properties to: (a) move beyond the forging of generic proposals to ones tailored to meet the objectives sponsors covet, and (b) be imaginative and innovative in the construction of their packages through how they would leverage and add value to the agreement for the sponsor (Miloch and Lambrecht, 2006). A further issue aligned to this theme (as well as *selection and decision-making*) is that commentary on the setting of the sponsorship asking price is an element largely avoided in the study of grassroots sport sponsorship. The thrust of sponsorship literature argues that assets need to be appropriately priced and not over-estimated to assist in a favourable decision (Zinger and O'Reilly, 2010). In this sense, research by the sponsee becomes central in constructing proposals as it can initially identify whether a sponsor-sponsee fit exists, provides further information to be used to tailor the proposal, and provide a benchmark to pricing deals to appropriately increase the chance of a positive outcome.

Selection and decision-making. A body of literature concerning pre-sponsorship practices centred on how to determine the most appropriate organisation to partner with (n=7). Apart from Slack and Bentz (1996) who noted that decisions on sponsorship predominantly fell on a single person (i.e., business owner), research has largely overlooked the level of management accountable for decision making. In tandem with, and extending on the earlier theme of *initiation*, because sponsees exploit their personal connections when offering sponsorship, the element of decision-making arises in how voluntary organisations reach a verdict on the

recruitment of board members – shown to be, in part, due to an individual’s useful connections which can be tapped into by the organisation (Cornforth and Edwards, 1999).

Literature tended to list the criteria sponsors and sponsees adopted, or instead, could employ when either reviewing or constructing proposals. This focus is expected as sport properties who realise the various determinants affecting selection enhances the likelihood of creating a successful proposal as they can create a document more closely tailored to the prospective sponsor’s requirements (Greenhalgh and Greenwell, 2013). Whereas some sponsees were selected because of personal connections or managerial interests (Slack and Bentz, 1996), to reaffirm the judiciousness of recruiting individuals with sizeable connections, other sponsors were more strategic, and considered whether a strong fit between them and the sports entity existed (Andreini et al., 2014; Kelly et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2010; Sung and Lee 2016). Congruent sponsorships are those capturing “how entities “go together”, share schema, or hold similarities based on mission, products, markets, technologies, attributes, brand concepts, or any other key association” (Simmons and Becker-Olsen, 2006, p. 155). Relationships exhibiting congruence can furnish positive attitudinal and behavioural outcomes through, for example, heightened consumer recall, recognition, and memory of sponsor; improved company image; and brand trust, and loyalty (e.g., Cornwell et al., 2006; Koo and lee, 2019; Mazodier and Merunka 2012; Rifon et al., 2004).

Guaranteeing a strong match is fundamental as those relationships that consumers perceive ill-fitted present similar effects as to not engaging in sponsorship at all (Prendergast et al., 2010), or, more significantly, may harm brand clarity for each party (i.e., what consumers typically expect from the respective brand) (Pappu and Cornwell, 2014). For example, the rise of the public health agenda creates issues for those involved in sponsorship and this concern of brand damage is epitomised in respect of sponsee choices whereby Kelly et al. (2010) noted several

VSCs devised exclusion criterion for sponsor selection based on if the potential sponsor was within an alcohol, tobacco, or gambling related industry. Further, sponsors perceived as unhealthy (i.e., food and drink companies) face criticism for using grassroots sport to market products to the community, while, for sport properties, declining such relationships to maintain their image and values risks their financial feasibility (Batty et al., 2016). Such dilemmas appear to go against elite sport sponsorship that seems relatively open to all industries regardless of any ethical objections that may be presented (Ireland, 2023).

Planning. Discussion surrounding the planning of sponsorship was explored within seven articles. This is unsurprising given the need for both parties to take a strategic approach to ensure a long-standing partnership (Pegoraro et al., 2009). The way sponsorship strategies ought to be formed and the processes behind this gained some attention within this theme. Here, Kim et al. (2010; 2018) referred to the concept of gratitude in how sponsorship could be viewed as an act of benevolence to create a positive response from those it supports (i.e., sponsee and participants/ players), and how it ought to be blended into a tailored strategy focusing on the targeted consumer. However, and despite its noted importance, Slack and Bentz (1996) observed grassroots sponsorships were rarely the result of long-term planning and were often unstructured, matching other works suggesting companies become involved in sport sponsorship with minimal thought as to its undertaking (e.g., Farrelly et al., 1997). Yet the neglect of strategy formulation both individually and as a collective could present severe managerial implications. For example, for Doherty and Murray (2007), planning enables organisations to clarify and readdress the balance of power which could otherwise allow one organisation to exert this power for their own benefit and leave the other unsatisfied. In this sense, planning must thus become a collaborative process that sees both parties collectively

design plans that fit their needs, adds value to the relationship, and conveys to consumers their values (Choi et al., 20011; O'Reilly et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2016).

During Sponsorship Agreement Practices.

During sponsorship practices concerns tasks executed once the deal has been procured and the sponsee has secured the agreed financial or in-kind provision from the sponsor. Contrasting to the *pre-sponsorship* sub-theme which yielded six core practices, the *during sponsorship* theme identified two: leveraging and activation, and evaluation.

Leveraging and activation. Broad sponsorship research notes that simply agreeing on sponsorship does not guarantee the achievement of the outcomes set between parties and may equate to no more than philanthropy (Papadimitriou and Apostolopoulou, 2009). Out of all practices identified across both pre- and during-sponsorship themes, this theme received the greatest level of attention (n=12). In the grassroots context specifically, sponsors who were title/ major sponsors and highly visible because of their leveraging and activation evidenced greater levels of unaided recall and recognition from consumers compared to those who did not engage in any activities and were minor level sponsors (Miloch and Lambrecht, 2006; O'Reilly et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2016). This reinforces a larger body of research highlighting that as involvement in leveraging and activation increases so too does consumer awareness of the relationship (e.g., Herrmann et al., 2016; Mazodier and Quester, 2014; Walraven et al., 2014). Though research argues characteristics such as level/ tier of sponsorship (i.e., major vs minor) and the length of agreement positively impacts recall and recognition (O'Reilly et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2016; Walraven et al., 2014), it is instead the leveraging and activation of sponsorship which largely determines relationship success (O'Reilly et al., 2019; O'Reilly and Horning, 2013). This is exemplified to the extent that, and particularly in respect of minor

sponsors, “without exceptional leverage, sponsors simply get lost” inside a cluttered marketplace (Smith et al., 2016, p.89).

The terms of leveraging and activation are often used interchangeably in sponsorship literature (O’Reilly and Horning, 2013). Whilst leveraging concerns all marketing communication away from the initial investment, activation reflects the activities delivered and allows for active consumer participation with those inside the relationship (Weeks et al., 2008). Intriguing therefore was that although differentiation exists, certain studies utilised the term activation when describing activities that were non-activational and saw the consumer as a passive receiver of the communications (i.e., signage) (e.g., Choi et al., 2011; Eddy and Cork, 2019).

Nevertheless, research in this theme concentrated on strategies recommended to be carried out and/ or undertaken to effectively leverage or activate (n=8). Strategies employed or advised varied from on-site promotional material (e.g., Eagleman and Krohn, 2012; Pegoraro et al., 2009) to online/ web presence (e.g., Andreini et al., 2014). Alternatively, other studies were less explicit emphasising the need to ground such initiatives in accordance with gratitude for CSEs, for example (e.g., Kim et al., 2010, 2018). The literature suggests that practitioners must become more imaginative and proactive when attempting to add value to their agreement through leveraging and activation in the face of a cluttered marketplace (Miloch and Lambrecht, 2006). Here, irrespective of strategy employed, a key component in maximising leveraging and activation comes in the development of a suitable approach that begins with the choice of property that can forge a strong congruent fit before subsequently seeing this fit being articulated to consumers (Madrigal and King, 2021; O’Reilly and Horning, 2013). By linking the concepts of congruence with leveraging and activation, the positive outcomes noted earlier of improved consumer awareness and credibility may be easier to achieve, or more pronounced.

However, not all involved in grassroots sport sponsorship perform this activity well as Lamont and Dowell (2008) argue leveraging techniques by both sponsee and sponsor were restrictive. Research elsewhere has called for each entity to assist the other better in the execution of leveraging and activation to boost the value added to the relationship and convey this value to stakeholders (Andreini et al., 2014; Choi et al., 2011; Eddy and Cork, 2019). Leveraging and activation are said to be hindered by creativity and resources (O'Reilly and Horning, 2013). Financially speaking, research away from grassroots shows that expenditure on leveraging and activation can range from a ratio of 1:1 to 8:1 as a proportion of the price of the sponsorship itself (O'Reilly and Horning, 2013). This could cause issues to each party given that many organisations who engage in community sport sponsorship are somewhat constrained financially (O'Gorman et al., 2018), whilst many are limited in carrying out effective marketing campaigns (Gallagher et al., 2012). Mackellar (2015) further contributes to our understanding of the factors influencing leveraging by identifying six determinants of a small business' engagement with CSEs, those being: (i) event cooperation; (ii) dependency on tourism; (iii) size of business; (iv) promotional strategy; (v) strategic direction; and (vi) skills, knowledge, and inertia (i.e., resistance to undertaking tasks different to those which the business is used to).

Evaluation. Demonstrating another gap in literature, only three studies referenced elements associated with evaluation. Throughout these articles, the measuring of sponsorship success was either rarely executed (Pegoraro et al., 2009) or largely rudimentary (Lamont and Dowell, 2008; Slack and Bentz, 1996). The most frequent methods of evaluation, when undertaken, consisted of measuring the businesses bottom-line through impact on sales (Lamont and Dowell, 2008; Slack and Bentz, 1996) or a conversation whereby both parties came together

and fed back on what was delivered against the objectives and/ or discussed the positives and negatives of the deal (Lamont and Dowell, 2008; Pegoraro et al., 2009).

One reason for this shortfall in assessing sponsorship, as Stotlar (2004, p.61) argues, is because “evaluation has not been solidified in theory or practice”. Others highlight the non-performance of evaluation because of, but not limited to, the challenges in isolating the impacts of sponsorship from other activities (O’Reilly and Madill, 2009), entering agreements without clearly defined objectives (O’Reilly and Madill, 2012), or is perceived as an expensive activity that is onerous in its undertaking (Chadwick and Thwiate, 2005). In the context of community sport, the nominal monetary value of the sponsorship investment (Lamont and Dowell, 2008) as well as some commercial entities’ involvement being driven by more philanthropic motives may impact on the implementation of evaluative techniques. Regardless, evaluation is crucial within sport sponsorship and is deserving of greater thought from practitioners as it not only may form part of the renewal agreement (Lamont and Dowell, 2008), but also provide learning opportunities for future deals.

Conclusion, Limitations and Future Research

Research into the sponsorship of grassroots sport has been found to be limited and under-developed (Cornwell and Kwon, 2020). On this basis, a scoping review was undertaken to map academic research relating to management practices in grassroots sport sponsorship to assess for key themes and trends, and to reveal relevant gaps meriting further scholarly attention. This scoping review returned 18 articles that were viewed relevant to the study, and which were subsequently explored.

To summarise the findings, the descriptive analysis found that, although nominal, the rate and volume of published work in grassroots sport sponsorship has increased over the period captured by this review, indicating its relevance as a growing area of academic interest. However, such coverage is still far from the attention elite sport sponsorship garners. Specifically, work is being investigated namely in marketing and management journals and in economically leading countries (chiefly in North American and Australasia), while being positioned against CSEs and, to a lesser degree, VSCs.

Thematically, the review yielded eight sub-themes subsumed within two major themes: pre-sponsorship and during sponsorship practices (see Figure 2 and Table III). *Pre-sponsorship* practices were found to principally concern sponsorship objectives, the selection and decision-making process to locate a suitable partner, and the planning of sponsorship. In terms of the *during sponsorship* practice theme, leveraging and activation drew the largest proportion of research interest whilst evaluation received the least attention.

Conspicuously, limited theoretical framing or discussion was evident within the literature reviewed. What theory was found tended to align with the *selection and decision-making* theme and was characterised by (potential) sponsors weighing up the costs to benefits of engaging in sponsorship – implicitly borne of a social exchange theory perspective (e.g., Slack and Bentz, 1996). This is curious given theory is crucial to any discipline as the “ability to explain phenomena is based in theory”, and theory advances understanding (Cunningham, 2013; Doherty, 2013 p. 5). Limited theoretical framing is not unique to grassroots sport sponsorship research though, with other reviews and works in sport management, marketing, and sponsorship having claimed such bodies of work to be largely atheoretical (lacking application or development of theory, e.g., Cunningham, 2013; Fechner et al., 2023). It is therefore important that research into grassroots sport sponsorship management more readily engages

with, applies, and seeks to develop theory in an effort to build new knowledge and enhance academic and practical understanding in and of this field of study.

Following on, there has been a tendency for studies to research and present a singular perspective of sponsorship. However, much of the literature connected to or concerning grassroots sport sponsorship is infused with references to contacts, networks, partnerships, and relationships. Scholarship in this area can thus broaden its theoretical repertoire by taking inspiration from more ‘mainstream’ fields of sponsorship inquiry wherein relationships and network-based approaches have gained precedence, and which facilitate, for example, insight into the relations and interactions underpinning (or undermining) the establishment and co-development of successful and enduring sponsorships between interdependent parties (Chanavat et al., 2016; Cornwell et al., 2024; Ryan and Fahy, 2012).

To our knowledge, no other reviews of grassroots sport sponsorship research exist. Therefore, this study not only adds to the previous reviews on (sport) sponsorship, but also offers an original contribution to this specific setting. The principal limitation of this review is that it does not draw on articles beyond 2020 - thus reducing its currency. Notably, this cut-off point for the review coincided with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and the significant adverse and wide-reaching impacts that this meant for grassroots sport organisations and businesses of all shapes and sizes, alike. With the financial implications of the pandemic casting a long shadow, many grassroots sport organisations are having trouble either procuring or retaining sponsorship whilst companies – local businesses in particular – are more parsimonious with their expenditure (ICSport, 2020; Staley et al., 2021). Future research therefore may also want to consider how intentions to sponsor, expected return on investment, and sponsorship management practices and relationships have modified since the pandemic.

Charting Future Research Directions

We now draw the article to a close by outlining several opportunities for future research informed by this review and summarised in Table VI, focusing first on *pre-sponsorship* practices.

[Insert Table IV found at bottom of manuscript]

Beginning with the practice of *planning*, research focusing on how parties plan strategies to communicate their sponsor-sponsee fit to consumers would hold promise given that when congruence is effectively articulated it has been shown to create favourable outcomes and produce a high value relationship (O'Reilly et al., 2019). Second, research into identifying the *objective(s)* each entity covets the most out of the plethora of reported objectives, and exploring the factors leading to this decision would be prudent. This would not only ensure that practitioners do not waste time and use their (limited) resources focusing on strategies that fail to satisfy the agreement, but also help to ensure that a suitable match between sponsor and sponsee is forged from the outset and that the appropriate measures of sponsorship success are put in place.

Third, the *selection and decision-making* theme shows that current studies focus on inclusion criteria, and so future research should explore what factors commonly exclude an entity from sponsorship opportunities. Doing so would allow organisations wishing to engage in partnerships to better reflect on how they can make their organisation more attractive, thus improving the likelihood of sponsorship. To further enhance the chance of sponsorship, the exploration of who explicitly reaches a decision on grassroots sport sponsorship would also be

wise given a single person is often entrusted with this responsibility (i.e., Slack and Bentz, 1996).

Fourth, the *motivations* behind sponsorship deals have received scant attention in the literature compared to sponsorship objectives, the selection process, and planning, but more than studies surrounding sponsorship initiation and the creation and communicating of a proposal or package. Research continues to report philanthropy-related motives as influential drivers as to why companies enter partnerships (i.e., Smith et al., 2016). Less is known about what bearing different motives to sponsor have on the dynamics of the relationship and its management (e.g. the extent and form of commitment, communication, and evaluation) over the sponsorship lifecycle. Drivers of sponsorship such as philanthropy need to be examined in more depth and delineated from related concepts such as CSR and altruism to support grassroots sport entities tailor proposals and packages that align with the nuanced motives of potential sponsors. Efforts to understand if those making sponsorship decisions are guided by an affinity to a specific club, a specific sport, a specific area, a specific person, or whether they are motivated predominantly by a sense of social responsibility or altruism would also be apt in this context. Discerning sponsor motivations with greater precision would facilitate the co-production of objectives and provide sport properties with a solid basis by which to plan and structure the management and evaluation of a bespoke sponsorship arrangement, and in turn, strengthening the foundations for an enduring sponsor-sponsee relationship.

Fifth, in respect of the *initiation* theme, research investigating the role networks serve in the opening of sponsorship relationships is warranted as studies pointed to these as the origin of the sponsorship link (i.e., Lamont and Dowell, 2008; Pegoraro et al., 2009). This would facilitate practitioner understanding of how to make best use of contacts to act as an entry point for agreements. In line with this, given opportunities to exploit external agencies has now

emerged within the grassroots sponsorship setting (i.e., SNAP Sponsorship), exploring the factors which draw properties to use the services of such intermediaries as well as the ramifications of this on the relationship would be a further avenue for exploration.

Sixth, on the theme of *sponsorship proposals and packages*, how organisations come to create a package in terms of the assets for purchase and at what price these are sold is a key part of the proposal stage, but an area of extant research often overlooked (i.e., Cornwell and Kwon, 2020). Researching this area would be welcome because it would inform practitioners on how to calculate the price of an asset appropriately, enabling them to ensure the deal is valued suitably and allow the sponsee to justify how they have reached this valuation. Examining how sponsees package their assets, indeed even if they do, and what each package includes seems a further notable area of study given it becomes clear that the varying levels of sponsorship which can be offered will variously impact outcomes and should thus be incorporated into a proposal.

Moving into the *during sponsorship* theme, *leveraging and activation* received the most attention in the literature. A useful research opportunity in relation to this sponsorship practice lies in examining the necessary level of leveraging and activation investment compared to the actual sponsorship fee required to effectively enrich the deal given research highlights sizable disparity in this ratio can exist (i.e., O'Reilly and Horning, 2013). In exploring this, practitioners would be better positioned to know how much should be spent on this activity, and, in theory, reduce the risk of over/ under-spending which could impair the development of a mutually beneficial relationship.

In relation to *evaluation*, as stressed by Cornwell and Kwon (2020, p. 618) “in no other area is there a larger gap between academic inquiry and business need”. Techniques to measure a partnership’s success have been shown to be either largely rudimentary or not well-executed

(i.e., Lamont and Dowell, 2008; Pegoraro et al., 2009) for a variety of reasons. With the emergence of external agencies matching entities together within the grassroots sport sponsorship field, an interesting proposition would be to understand whether opportunity exists in outsourcing sponsorship evaluation, what such processes may look like, and the sponsorship impacts they could result in. In doing so, practitioners may have more sophisticated evaluative methods to assess sponsorship agreements that can subsequently serve as a decision-making tool when coming to sponsorship renewal.

Given the overall scarcity of study associated to grassroots sport sponsorship management practices, a strong case for empirical exploration investigating each of the eight practices highlighted in this review as part of a full process can be made. Crucially, with only three studies (Lamont and Dowell, 2008; Pegoraro et al., 2009; Slack and Bentz, 1996) reflecting on the full gamut of management practices engaged in by those involved in grassroots sport sponsorship, this opens further opportunity to explore sponsorship enactment from the beginning to end of term deal. Exploring sponsorship as a composite process would complement the often-disaggregated coverage presented in the literature of the various practices comprising it, and which can therefore fail to give a full sense of how one action impacts another.

Finally, and importantly, while pre- and during-sponsorship practices have been explored – albeit to a small degree – no work reports on practices post sponsorship agreement. Studies into how and why parties come to renew or terminate sponsor-sponsee deals, and the (residual) effects on new sponsorship relationships from old partnerships would be insightful. This review further found that the sponsor-sponsee fit is fundamental to the relationship. Research exploring other drivers that forge relationships or that focus on both parties' perceptions of

794 sponsorship practices should be central in future study to create a more balanced knowledge-
795 base between the sponsor and sponsee.

796
797 To conclude, while this is not an exhaustive set of topics to explore by any means, it is hoped
798 the sample of theme-driven research questions offers a useful starting point. The paper is
799 envisaged as one acting as a springboard for further study in an area which, although under-
800 explored, is one of increasing in importance due to the necessity for community sport
801 organisations to pursue more diverse revenue streams to sustain them while used by sponsors
802 to fulfil a plethora of objectives.

803 804 **References**

805
806 *denotes a source included in the scoping review.

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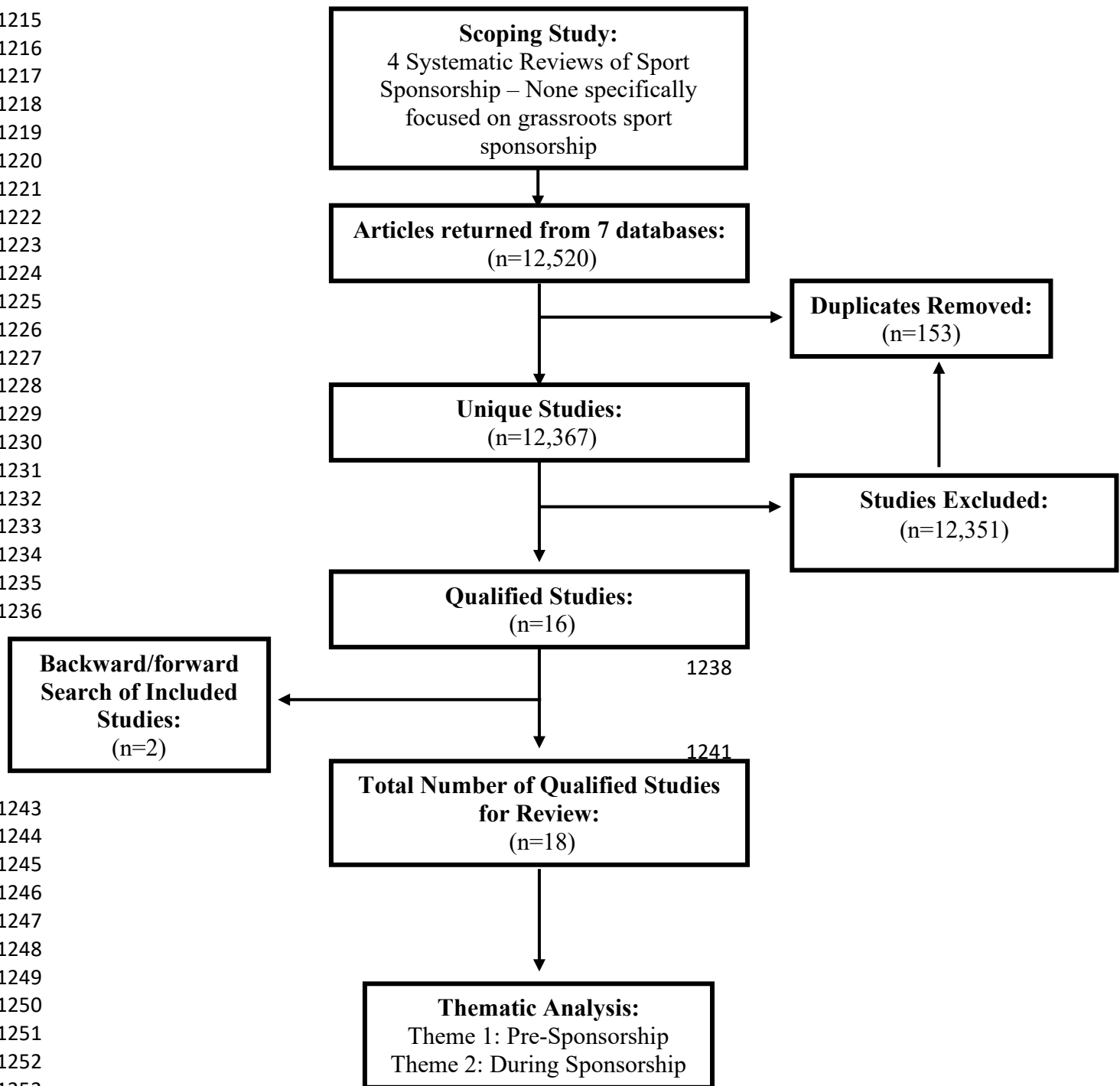
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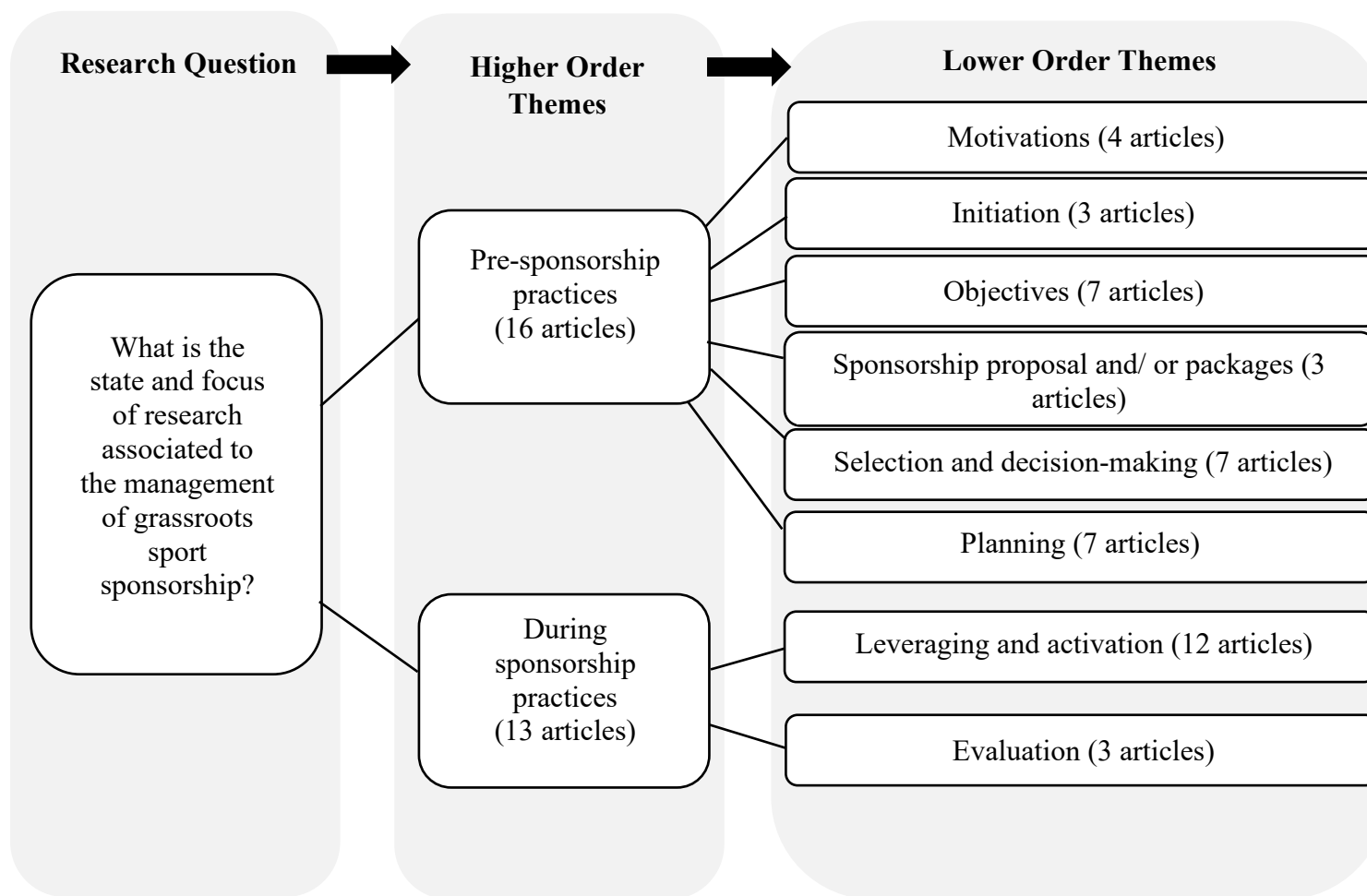
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Figure 1: Flowchart of search process.



1259 Figure 2: Summary of review focus and resultant theme generation.

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Table I: Search terms adopted

“Sponsorship” AND “Sport” AND “Grassroots” OR “non-profit” OR “non-professional”
OR “not-for-profit” OR “community” OR “regional” OR “amateur” OR “local” OR
“voluntary”

1302 Table II: Summary of reviewed papers.

Author and Year	Journal	Aims/ Purpose	Method	Findings/ Results/ Outcomes	Link to scoping framework
Slack and Bentz (1996)	Managing Leisure	Explore the decisions of small firms towards sponsoring VSCs and CSEs, investigating the role partnerships play in providing strategic resource.	Qualitative, semi-structured interviews (n=11).	Decisions either proactive (i.e., covet sponsorship for competitive advantage) or reactive. Established through ‘off the street requests’. Frequently cited rationale for sponsorship engagement concerned CSR. Proposal often submitted to business in form of a letter. Decision to sponsor largely informal with a single decision-maker wherein motives to sponsor reflected decision-makers preference. Sponsorships rarely resulted from long-term planning and were often unstructured. Evaluation through counting vouchers distributed to	Motivations Initiation Objectives Sponsorship proposal and/or packages Selection and decision-making Planning Evaluation

				individuals associated to the sponsee.	
Miloch and Lambrecht (2006)	Sport Marketing Quarterly	Assess consumer awareness of (niche) CSE sponsorship by examining spectator recall, recognition, and purchase intentions.	Quantitative, self-administered questionnaire (n=492).	Recommendation to develop proposals and packages tailored to meet a sponsors' specific needs. Leveraging and activating the sponsorship positively impacted on consumer recall and recognition.	Sponsorship proposal and/or packages Leveraging and activation
Lamont and Dowell (2008)	Journal of Vacation Marketing	Construct a sponsorship process model through investigating practices associated to instigation of deal, objectives coveted, leveraging, and evaluation.	An exploratory qualitative multiple case study research design (n=5 CSEs), consisting of semi-structured interviews (n=10).	Constructed an eight-stage model illustrating the actions and interplay between regional CSEs and sponsors.	Motivations Initiation Objectives Sponsorship proposal and/or packages Leveraging and activation

					Evaluation
Pegoraro et al. (2009)	Journal of Sponsorship	Examine the use of gender-related grassroots sport sponsorship in an organisations CSR programme.	An exploratory qualitative multiple case study approach (n=9), implementing interviews (n=7).	Personal networks utilised to locate sponsors. Limited discussion concerning objectives of sponsor and sponsee. Recommend sponsee to construct a strategic approach. Sponsor leveraged and activated through expositions to promote their products. Sponsorship evaluation largely non-existent.	Initiation Objectives Planning Leverage and activation Evaluation
Kelly et al. (2010)	Health Promotion International	Explore food and beverage sponsorship of children's sport.	Quantitative, semi-structured telephone questionnaire (n=108).	Small minority of VSCs listed exclusion criterion wherein alcohol, tobacco, or gambling businesses were prohibited.	Selection and decision-making

Kim et al. (2010)	International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship	Investigate the potential participant sport holds for sponsors and, from this, construct a framework derived through consumer gratitude.	Quantitative, cross-sectional survey (n=272).	Gratitude a strong driver towards purchase intentions. Gratitude delineated as a core objective to consider when formulating sponsorship strategies and leveraging activities.	Objectives Selection and decision-making Planning Leveraging and activation
Choi et al. (2011)	International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship	Explore how the inter-relationship between satisfaction within CSE sponsorship, goodwill, and fan identity impacts consumer purchase intent.	Quantitative, self-administered questionnaire (n=351).	Sponsors recommended to place impetus on planning and delivering on-site activation, seeing CSE and sponsor work in tandem to leverage relationship.	Planning Leveraging and activation
Eagleman and Krohn (2012)	Sport Marketing Quarterly	Explore participants of a road race series recognition, attitudes, and purchase intentions towards sponsorship.	Quantitative, online questionnaire (n=168).	Participant involvement favourably affected purchase intentions of a sponsors' service/product. Sponsors with on-site presence gained higher levels of recognition.	Leveraging and activation
Andreini et al. (2014)	Management Decision	Assess how commitment and attitude impact the success of online sponsorship.	Quantitative, online survey (n=272).	Fit between the sponsor and community favourably affected consumer attitude and purchase intentions. Community websites recommended to move past traditional forms of on-site	Selection and decision-making Leveraging and activation

				activation (i.e., static banners) to other methods that could enhance purchase intent.	
Kelly et al. (2014)	Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport	Assess and juxtapose the time children spend exposed to sport with trends of food and beverage sponsorship to gauge the exposure to this form of marketing.	Secondary data based on research from Kelly et al. (2010).	Sponsorship choice not based merely on the sport's popularity but other factors including demographics, congruent-fit, and alignment with elite level sport sponsorship.	Selection and decision-making
Mackellar (2015)	European Sport Management Quarterly	Explore local business engagement with CSEs related to sponsorship leveraging.	Qualitative case study research (n=3) implementing interviews/ <i>insitu</i> conversations (n=112).	Businesses engaged in sponsorship for wider community benefits. Business engagement in CSEs related to six factors: (i) level of co-operation; (ii) dependency on tourism; (iii) size of business; (iv) promotional strategy; (v) strategic direction; and (vi) skills, knowledge and experience in event leveraging.	Motivations Leveraging and activation
Batty et al. (2016)	Journal of Sport and Social Issues	Review the nature of CSR food and beverage sponsorship deals.	Qualitative case study research (n=4) implementing semi-structured interviews (n=14).	Companies viewed CSE sponsorship as a defence mechanism to mitigate disapproval of products. However, sponsors instead encountered further condemnation. With the public health agenda surrounding obesity and	Objectives Selection and decision-making

				cardiovascular disease, a greater need from sponsors and sponsees to consider partnerships being forged existed.	
Smith et al. (2016)	Journal of Convention and Event Tourism	Analyse participant recall of CSE sponsors.	Mixed methods, consisting of yearly online survey (n=988) and interviews.	Companies often covet sponsorship for brand-development and commercial rationales instead of philanthropy. Recommendation of sponsor and sponsee to work together to formulate a strategy addressing needs of each organisation. Leveraging and activation was a core factor improving consumer recall. Sponsors may lack intent to leverage and activate as they may sponsor for philanthropic purposes.	Motivations Planning Leveraging and activation
Sung and Lee (2016)	International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship	Examine the association between involvement, attitude and perceived sponsor-event fit.	Quantitative questionnaire (n=650).	Sponsors need ensure they show a strong sponsor-sponsee fit.	Selection and decision-making

Miragaia et al. (2017)	International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics	Explore why businesses engage with CSE sponsorship.	Quantitative questionnaire (n=80).	Companies sponsored CSEs for four reasons: (i) increase loyalty from customers and to motivate employees (ii) CSR; (iii) reputation and social networks; and (iv) innovation and opportunity.	Objectives
Kim et al. (2018)	European Sport Management Quarterly	Assess gratitude as a key component of the sponsorship model.	Quantitative questionnaire (n=317).	Sponsees seek financial, media, and/ or in-kind resources from sponsorship, while being more difficult to pinpoint with regards to sponsors. Gratitude shows significant impact towards consumer purchase intentions, and, resultantly, sponsors recommended to consider this in their planning and leveraging and activation strategies.	Objectives Planning Leveraging and activation
Eddy and Cork (2019)	International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship	Measure participant's sponsorship awareness and assess a framework created to predict consumer behavioural intentions.	Quantitative questionnaire (n=95).	Participants sponsor recall and recognition was tenuous. Sponsors perceived as aiding the organisation or community saw increased purchase intent; thus, more effective leveraging suggested. Framework created depicted a moderate-poor fit.	Leveraging and activation

O'Reilly et al. (2019)	Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal	Investigate consumer assessments of a title sponsorship of a CSE.	A case study approach, consisting of multiple data collection points including: (a) an annual consumer survey over six years (annual responses ranged from 630-1,220), (b) a yearly survey of CSE organisers (n= circa 400 annually) and grant recipients (n= circa 80 annually), and (c) analysis several secondary sources.	The title sponsor received positive evaluations from consumers. The title sponsor enhanced consumer opinions of the CSE and the cause. Consumer perceptions of the title sponsor were less favourable than the organisation who delivered the CSE. The CSE title sponsor reduced consumer awareness levels of other partners.	Planning Leveraging and activation
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Table III: Thematic analysis of grassroots sponsorship literature

Theme(s)	Reference(s)
Pre-sponsorship	
Motivations	Lamont and Dowell (2008); Mackellar (2015); Slack and Bentz (1996); Smith et al. (2016)
Initiation	Lamont and Dowell (2008); Pegoraro et al. (2009); Slack and Bentz (1996)
Objectives	Batty et al. (2016); Kim et al. (2010, 2018); Lamont and Dowell (2008); Miragaia et al. (2017); Pegoraro et al. (2009); Slack and Bentz (1996)
Sponsorship proposal and/ or packages	Lamont and Dowell (2008); Miloch and Lambrecht (2006); Slack and Bentz (1996)
Selection and decision-making	Andreini et al. (2014); Batty et al. (2016); Kelly et al. (2010, 2014); Kim et al. (2010); Slack and Bentz (1996); Sung and Lee (2016)
Planning	Choi et al. (2011); Kim et al. (2010, 2018); O'Reilly et al. (2019); Pegoraro et al. (2009); Slack and Bentz (1996); Smith et al. (2016)
During sponsorship	
Leveraging and activation	Andreini et al. (2014); Choi et al. (2011); Eagleman and Krohn (2012); Eddy and Cork (2019); Kim et al., (2010, 2018); Lamont and Dowell (2008); Mackellar (2015); Miloch and Lambrecht (2006); O'Reilly et al. (2019); Pegoraro et al. (2009); Smith et al. (2016)
Evaluation	Lamont and Dowell (2008); Pegoraro et al. (2009); Slack and Bentz (1996)

Table IV: Prospective theme-based research questions

Theme	Prospective Research Questions
Motivations	• How do different motivations impact on how the relationship is approached? • What are the antecedents that contribute to a company engaging with grassroots sport for philanthropic purposes?
Initiation	• What role does the development of networks play in establishing initial sponsorship contact? • What contributes to properties using external agencies to establish contact with prospective partners, and what are the impacts this creates on the relationship as it moves over time?
Objectives	• What objective is most coveted when engaging in sponsorship for both sponsee and sponsor?
Sponsorship proposal and/or packages	• How are sponsorship assets priced by sponsees? • How do sponsees package their assets for sponsorship within the proposal?
Selection and decision-making	• What exclusion criteria do a sponsor or sponsee adopt when considering a partnership? • Who is accountable for the decision to engage in a grassroots sport sponsorship relationship, and how is this determined?
Planning	• How do each party come together to approach the way in which they are to demonstrate the congruent fit they perceive exists in an authentic manner to consumers?
Leveraging and activation	• What is the required sponsorship fee: leverage and activation spend ratio to successfully add value to the relationship?
Evaluation	• Could external agencies be employed to measure the success of sponsorship, and what affect would this have on the management of the sponsor-sponsee relationship?