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Sponsoring a Sport Event:  
Evaluating the Efficacy Through  
Social Media. The EuroVolley  
2015 Case Study

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*There are no words describing feelings that we get  
when we arrive on court to open our first set.  
Hearts are beating fast!*

*Heroes, maybe we are heroes,  
Without support and love from fans we're zeros.  
Yeah, heroes, sometimes they call us heroes;  
Our victories belong to those who cheer us!*

Heroes – Official EuroVolley 2015 Anthem

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## Introduction

Over the past two decades a body of literature has emerged about **corporate event sponsorship**, studying it as a distinct marketing communication vehicle that integrates a firm's marketing communication strategy. In particular, according to *IEG*, a commercial and creative consultant for organizations across sports and entertainment<sup>1</sup>, about 70% of all the market is taken by **sports** events and organizations.

At the same time, the use of **social media** as a tool for the flow of information has rapidly increased during the last five years, catching the attention of companies willing to advertise their involvement in any kind of sponsorship activities.

The combination of these two fields (sponsorship and social media) represents a **new branch** of the corresponding literature, which is therefore limited.

As a consequence, the aim of this thesis is to follow the path started by Delia and Armstrong (2015), the first researchers who **combined these two fields**, in empirically analyzing them and providing insights to professionals of the sport world and new basis for future research aimed to extend the existing literature. Therefore, this work comes as **exploratory**, given both the novelty of the subject and the understudied condition of the fields (sport sponsorship and social media) investigated.

This study includes an analysis of the buzz and sentiment (through **mentions**) on two of the most popular **social networking sites** (Facebook and Twitter) around the **sponsors** of a major sporting event,

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sponsorship.com/>



the men's Volleyball European Championship (**EuroVolley 2015**, held in October 2015 in Italy and Bulgaria).

An exploratory approach "serves as an avenue to pose a variety of research questions in an effort to obtain a better understanding of the topic of interest"<sup>2</sup> and, in particular, the current work's research questions are:

- Assessing if the **valence** (i.e. the positivity or negativity) of the messages mentioning EuroVolley 2015 sponsors is influenced by the **functional fit** (explained further on this document) (*RQ1*).
- Gauging if a sponsor company's **presence on social media** (Twitter and Facebook) influences the **effectiveness** of the sponsorship itself during EuroVolley 2015 (*RQ2*).

The choice to analyze this phenomenon (sponsorship effectiveness through social media) in relation to the **Volleyball world** has been due to various reasons. First, the personal interest for this sport has led to the decision of choosing an event related to it. Second, its being considered a "poor" sport in comparison with richer Soccer, Golf or Tennis (as mentioned before, the subject of Delia and Armstrong study) when thinking about media coverage, global popularity and the capacity of attracting sponsors have transformed Volleyball in the ideal environment on which proving the ability of this new approach, being the "Volleyball community" a more closed and persistent one in comparison with other sports fans.

The analyses run have produced positive results for the **confirmation** of the possibility of following the road of **social media** in the assessment of the **influence** of sponsor-sponsee fit and of sponsor companies

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<sup>2</sup> "Sponsoring the #FrenchOpen: An Examination of Social Media Buzz and Sentiment", E.B. Delia and C.G. Armstrong, *Journal of Sport Management*, March 2015, p.187.

categories, along with the finding that a **different functional categorization** of the sponsor can be the right avenue to follow in order to evaluate **sponsorship effectiveness** in empirical environments similar to the one analyzed in this study.

Before moving to the structure of this work, it should be highlighted that the possible **outcomes** and further **applications** (better treated in the *Conclusions* chapter) depend mostly on **how social media will change** in the future, given that the world, on Internet, is moving very fast, with new social networks typologies growing up in a short time, and on how **people** and **companies** will decide to **use them** in the future. Moreover, being this an exploratory research, results are strongly dependent on the event chosen and on the moment in which this has taken place.

This thesis is divided into **five sections**.

First, a **theoretical contextualization** of the existing literature is proposed, in order to understand where this work wants to be located and what its grounds are.

Second, the **methodology** used to run all the analyses is detailed and **research questions** are introduced.

Third, all the **data collected** and the **results** obtained through the quantitative analysis are presented, to see if the two research questions are verified or not.

Fourth, a **discussion** about the outcomes obtained, in light of the existing literature, is proposed, followed by directions for future research.

Fifth, **conclusions** are drawn and **limitations** displayed.

## 1. Theoretical Contextualization

The theoretical contextualization is divided into three parts.

Part 1 introduces one of the main elements of this thesis, the sponsorship, and explores the aspects useful to the present analysis: the use of sponsorship in sport events, since this is the “environment” on which this thesis focuses, and the “Congruence Effects”.

Part 2, instead, focuses on social media, and brings to light the motivations behind their adoption. Additionally, an infographic about the two social networks used is briefly explained.

Part 3 examines the combination of the elements discussed before in order to introduce the empirical analysis.

### 1.1 Sponsorship: a new way to improve one’s marketing aims

Over the past two decades a body of literature has emerged about **corporate event sponsorship**, studying it as a distinct marketing communication vehicle that integrates a firm’s marketing communication strategy.

This has been possible since *sponsorship* evolved from a passive form of marketing, traditionally linked to philanthropy and charity, to a key strategic business building initiative<sup>3</sup>, after having been seen as a derivative of tools belonging to the promotion mix, and specifically advertising or public relations.

The following paragraphs outline some of the aspects that characterize a sponsorship: definitions, differences from other communication tools, objectives and typologies, and trends; before focusing on the field of sport and the importance or less of the “congruence effects”, that can,

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<sup>3</sup> “Sponsorship in the Trenches: Case Study Evidence of Its Legitimate Place in the Promotional Mix”, B. Séguin and N. O’Reilly, *Sport Journal*, Winter 2007, p.7.

eventually, lead to the achievement of various objectives: sales-related or brand-related.

### **1.1.1 Definitions and differences from other communication tools**

Different definitions have been suggested, in order to delineate the sponsorship phenomenon, all of them sharing some traits, useful to understand what really characterizes a sponsorship relationship.

Tripodi (2001) affirmed that a sponsorship is “the provision of assistance by a *commercial organization*, in cash or kind, to a [...] property, in exchange for the rights to *be associated* with the [...] property for the purpose of *gaining commercial and economic advantage*”<sup>4</sup>.

Likewise, IEG (2000) defined it as “a cash and/or in kind *fee paid* to a property (typically a sports, entertainment, non-profit event or organization) in return for access to the *exploitable commercial potential associated with* that property”<sup>5</sup>.

These definitions place emphasis on the peculiar characteristics of a sponsorship, represented by traits that can be met in both, i.e. the **association** with a “property”; the **economic advantage**, or potential, that can derive from this pairing and the **nature of the sponsor’s support** (cash or kind).

Conversely, they differ because of some other traits cited, which help create an all-around rationale of a sponsorship relationship: Tripodi specifies what is the *role of the sponsor*, that should be a “commercial organization” offering a “provision of assistance”, while IEG points out the *nature of the sponsee*, typically belonging to “sports, entertainment, non-

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<sup>4</sup> “Sponsorship – A Confirmed Weapon in the Promotional Armoury”, J.A. Tripodi, *International Journal of Sports Marketing & Sponsorship*, March 2001, p.96.

<sup>5</sup> “IEG Sponsorship Report”, Insights Evaluation Guidance, January 2000.

profit event(s) or organization(s)", which receives a "fee". Hence, a quite more specific term compared to the "provision of assistance" outlined by the first scholar, even if, as stated before, the typology of the possible support stays the same.

Sahnoun (1986) gave a brilliant definition of sponsorship, enclosing its true aim: improving the opinion of a company in the mind of the broad audience, without being too overwhelming. "Le sponsoring *est en somme l'art de faire parler de soi, en parlant d'autre chose que de soi*"<sup>6</sup> (a sponsorship is the art of self-talk, while talking about something different than itself).

The image arisen from these definitions makes easily noticeable how sponsorship stands apart from advertising and public relations, of which it was considered to be only a tool, as stated before.

The differences with traditional advertising all stand in the **message communicated**: the *content* and *way* through which it is conveyed.

In advertising, both the content and the means (but also the moments) of communication are fixed by the "paying organization", while in sponsorship the "sponsor provides financial or material support for what are often independent organizations, individuals or activities"<sup>7</sup>, whose communication is less controllable.

Moreover, even if the message is delivered indirectly (through the sponsored institution), it results to be more personal (e.g. to the people attending the event).

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<sup>6</sup> "Le Sponsoring: Mode d'Emploi", P. Sahnoun, *January 1986*, p.14.

<sup>7</sup> "Strategic Sport Marketing", D. Shilbury, H. Westerbeek, S. Quick and D. Funk, *Sport Management Series*, Winter 2009, p.249.

On the contrary, public relations and sponsorship sometimes share the goals, when related to goodwill and awareness, but they diverge in the way the *association* between the “paying organization” and the “property” is established, since in sponsorship the company has to pay in order to be associated with the sponsored activity, and, as traditional advertising, in the way through which communication takes place, i.e. through an “independent organization”<sup>8</sup>.

### 1.1.2 Sponsorship Objectives and Typologies

The aim of this paragraph is to briefly explained **objectives** and **typologies** of sponsorship.

They will be treated together because, according to Thompson and Speed (2007), typologies depend in close manner on the objectives of the sponsorship itself and, consequently, on the efficient use of the **available resources**<sup>9</sup>.

The authors deeply analyzed the different “ideal types” that the combination of objectives and resources can create, in order to have a useful tool for an *a priori* classification of the different sponsorships, but knowing that these types are “extreme, abstract cases that might conceivably exist in real cases but should not be expected. Hence they do not represent categories, since all empirical examples are expected to deviate from the ideal”<sup>10</sup>.

The process they have followed to define these “ideal types” consist in four principal steps:

1. Identification of the **targets**, which form the first dimension needed to classify resources. The outcome is: *consumer* and *non-consumer*. Since

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> “Typology of Sponsorship Activity”, P. Thomson and R. Speed, *Winter 2007*, p.2.

<sup>10</sup> *Ivi*, p.5.

the focus of this thesis are the consumers, the following steps will deal only with this category.

2. Designation of the **objectives**, in accordance with the possible targets found (here the consumers), which form the second dimension needed to classify resources.
3. Classification of the **resources** that, according to the authors, affect the performance of a sponsorship.
4. Construction of the "**ideal types**" of a sponsorship.

Moving directly to Step 2, since Step 1 has been briefly treated in the numbered list, the first *grouping of the objectives*<sup>11</sup> sought in a sponsorship with consumers as a target is between **brand-related** and **sales-related** goals.

The former objective category mainly comprises an increase in the brand awareness and an impact upon firm attitudes and perceptions.

The latter, instead, embraces a stimulation of product trial and an enhancement of sales.

Step 3, as stated before, consist in *classifying the available resources*, according to the target considered and the objective set, with the aim to get the most out of the value of the resource used.

Before turning to the specific cases, Thomson and Speed propose an initial partition<sup>12</sup> between *primary sponsorship resources*, that are the ones whose effect is achievable "as a result of the event occurring, and where no further investment by the sponsor is required"; and *secondary sponsorship resources*, that are the ones "provided to the sponsor [and that] require additional investment to achieve their effect".

Considering consumers as target, the authors utilize two subcategories: **attendees** and **non-attendees**.

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<sup>11</sup> Ivi, p.8.

<sup>12</sup> Ivi, p.9.

Therefore, for *attendees*<sup>13</sup>, the resources useful are the one that can be located at the event venue, e.g. signage rights, logos on equipment or product use in the event.

Conversely, the resources advantageous for *non-attendees*<sup>14</sup> are mainly those that can be employed away from the event, e.g. right of sponsor status, TV advertising or merchandising rights; but also, as for the previous one, those that can be placed at the event, to the extent that the event itself and all the resources used (signage, logos, etc.) receive **media coverage**.

Focusing on the objective, for *sales-related*<sup>15</sup> ones, the resources with the highest value are those that give direct access to consumers at the sales point, e.g. distribution of free samples, seating or hospitality.

Finally, to achieve *brand-related goals*<sup>16</sup>, the resources should link, in a clear way and in the mind of the consumer, the event and the sponsor company; e.g. equipment usage, TV advertising slots, event footage or endorsements.

With all the dimensions clarified, we can now move to Step 4, in order to illustrate the “ideal types” defined by Thomson and Speed.

Keeping on taking into consideration only consumers-targeted sponsorships, six typologies emerge from the combination of **target audience** (attendees or non-attendees), **objectives** (brand awareness, image or use) and the “ideal set of **sponsorship resources** for pursuit of this objective[s]” (primary or secondary)<sup>17</sup>:

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<sup>13</sup> Ivi, p.13.

<sup>14</sup> Ivi, p.14.

<sup>15</sup> Ivi, p.15.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ivi, p.18.



- a. *Attendee – Awareness Sponsorship* and *Non-Attendee – Awareness Sponsorship*<sup>18</sup>. The creation of brand awareness involves enabling consumers to **recall the brand** (i.e. clearly link the company to its category), or to **recognize** it (i.e. link the firm to its brand identifiers). In this case, the primary resources useful are the same for both target audience, while the secondary ones vary: rights to distribute samples and product information (*attendees*); sponsor status and rights for publicity and advertising (*non-attendees*).
- b. *Attendee - Image Sponsorship*. This typology refers to sponsorships where the aim is to change the image of the sponsoring company amongst the attendees. Hence, the firm needs to establish a connection with the event. In this case the value in image building of simple primary resources (e.g. naming rights and use of the product during the event) is entirely dependent from the degree to which, “through message, location or dominance, a valuable association can be made”<sup>19</sup>. Secondary resources, instead, are the same as for typology (a).
- c. *Non-Attendee - Image Sponsorship*. This typology deals with the same objective as the typology (b), but, since the target are *Non-Attendees*, the primary resources that can be used for attendees should be coupled with TV and media coverage. Secondary resources are more extensive, and include “media advertising access, endorsements and access to event footage”<sup>20</sup>.
- d. *Attendee - Use Sponsorship*. This typology relates to the change in consumers’ behaviour towards the company on site, through triggering

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<sup>18</sup> The names used are the original ones outlined by the authors.

<sup>19</sup> *Ivi*, p.22.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*.

product trial. No primary resources can be used with this typology, since all of them require additional investments in order to be applied, so only secondary resources are valuable. These are: rights for exclusive sale, distribution of product sample and of product information and the right to use event identifiers in on-site sales point material.

- e. *Non-Attendee - Use Sponsorship*. As for typologies (c) and (b), this one share the same goal as typology (d), but is applied off-site. This kind of sponsorship's target may be consumers who "view the opportunity to attend the event as an incentive to purchase a product"<sup>21</sup>. As a consequence, seating and hospitality are the key primary resources valuable, while merchandising can be considered a proper secondary resource to encourage purchase.

### **1.1.3 Actual Trends in Sponsorship**

The differences drafted in Paragraph 1.1.1 with advertising and public relations have led sponsorship to spread among companies and to be more used for the purpose of reaching sales-related goals, being considered, nowadays, "potentially as the dominant promotional tool in a marketing communications program"<sup>22</sup>.

This trend can be confirmed by the ongoing steady growth of the total sponsorship spending that in 2015 is expected to reach the amount of \$57.5 billion, with an annual growth rate of 4.1%, as it has been in 2014<sup>23</sup>.

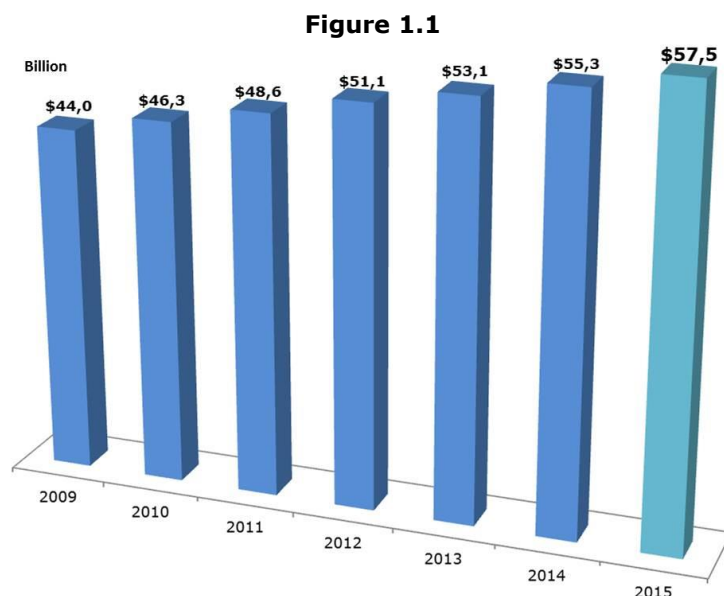
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<sup>21</sup> *Ivi*, p.24.

<sup>22</sup> D. Shilbury et al, *op.cit*, p.249.

<sup>23</sup> "Sponsorship Spending Report", IEG, *January 2015*, p.2.

Figure 1.1 shows the progresses made by the sponsorship since 2009, when the total spending was about a 25% lower than the current projection.



**Adapted from IEG data of the Total Global Sponsorship Spending (IEG 2015)**

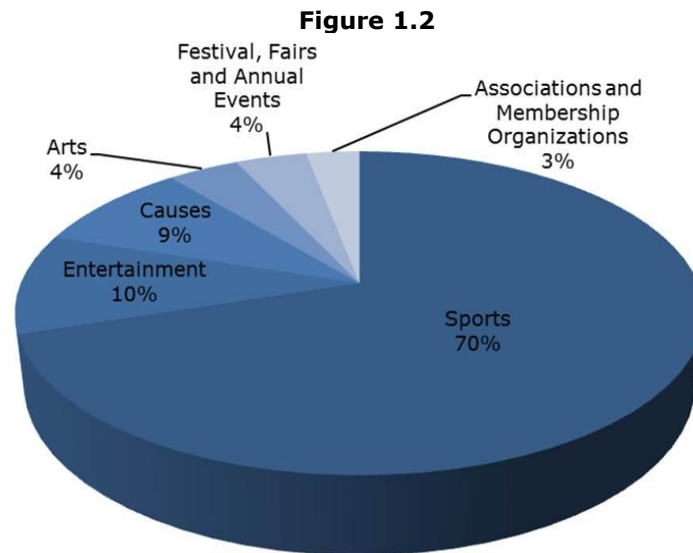
The same winds that have propelled the industry in the last years are continuing to blow, granting to the sectors of sports, entertainment and cause, first and foremost, the certainty of having a sufficient, and efficient, market of sponsors.

At the same time, this enormous growth has brought an increase in the competition for “sponsorship dollars”, with many smaller organizations (whether in sports or entertainment or causes) striving to attract funds, resources or services through sponsorship.

Figure 1.2 shows the forecast, for 2015, of the market share of the diverse sectors in the North America, the biggest market for sponsorship, with **sport** doing the lion’s share, since it is the only one able to maintain a growth in the last years (+8.7% from 2013)<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> Ivi, p.3.



**Adapted from IEG projection of the Shares of North American Sponsorship Market (IEG 2015)**

Sport sponsorship, the matter of this thesis, will receive a focus in the next paragraph.

#### **1.1.4 Sponsorship in Sport Events: an increasing business**

Sponsorship of sporting teams and events, as suggested by the data, has become an increasingly attractive form of corporate communication, especially for those companies that seek to exploit sponsorship as a way of *differentiating* their *products* and *services*.

Even if it retains the general characteristics illustrated in the first part of this chapter, sport sponsorship aroused interest in the scholars, inasmuch sport is one of the environment in which a strong *social identity*<sup>25</sup> can be created by the participants in the sporting event, the viewers or the fans of the team/athlete.

As a consequence, the possibility of using this social identity, by a company, becomes quite important because it has been proved that “when an individual identifies with an employing firm, they become

<sup>25</sup> “A social identity is that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership”. (“Human Groups and Social Categories”, H. Tajfel, *Cambridge University Press*, May 1981, p.255)

personally vested in its performance, leading to actions that promote its chances of success”<sup>26</sup>. This is one of the final aims of a sponsorship, to make the attitude of the target audience change positively toward the brand.

Moreover, sport sponsorship, unlike the other marketing tools that can be used, favours a more direct and intimate communication between the sponsor and its target market, and the **sport product** turned out to have some advantages also compared to sponsorship in other fields like entertainment and causes.

First, sport has the potential to *deliver a clear message*, since it is universally engaging and it can extend to all elements of life, from geography to sociocultural factors. This brings to the possibility, for the sponsoring brand, to “cross difficult cultural and language borders in communication”<sup>27</sup> and, therefore, be easy to understand by everyone coming in touch with the event or team sponsored.

Second, the strong interest and the universal appeal that a sport can raise make it possible, for the sponsoring company, to *lower the sponsorship-costs*, thanks to the free publicity achievable through to the high level of media exposure that a sporting event generally has.

Of course, this advantage depends on the kind of event sponsored: a major event or team will have a higher probability of becoming of media interest, while a smaller one will have to fight more in order to be broadcast or to catch free publicity by general media, in addition to the specialized ones.

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<sup>26</sup> “Understanding Consumer Response to Sponsorship Information: A Resource-Matching Approach”, G.D. Deitz, S.W. Myers and M.R. Stafford, *Psychology & Marketing*, April 2012, p.226-239.

<sup>27</sup> D. Shilbury et al., *op.cit.*, p.251.

Last, a sport event or organization enables a sponsor to *create distinct market segments*, thanks to the variety available among them. Consequently, a company can decide to sponsor different events or teams in different sports, in order to reach a diversified target audience.

Some authors argue that sport sponsorship, unlike advertising, is able to stand out from the clutter, creating a *clear interconnection* between the sponsor and the sponsee.

Even if the advantages are many, there are some disadvantages that should be taken into account before entering a sponsorship relationship with a sport entity.

The first is linked to the sponsor's sphere, and it is the *ambush-marketing*, where non-sponsors try to take advantage from the efforts made by the real-sponsors, by trying to create an association with the sport organization or event<sup>28</sup>.

Second and third are outside the sponsor's control: *media coverage*, that the paying company cannot wholly manage; and the *achievements of the team* or athlete sponsored, that directly influence the "public holds" on the sponsor.

### **1.1.5 Congruence Effect: is this really important for efficacy?**

The aim of this paragraph is to explain the "*Congruence Effects*" generally sought in sponsorships and to understand if congruency is really what is needed to create **good memories** of the sponsor in the mind of the consumers of the sponsored product or event.

Subsequently, ways through which an **incongruent sponsor** can mitigate the negative effects derived from low fit will be introduced and described.

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

**Congruence** or **fit** between the sponsor and the sponsee has largely been considered as one of the most critical factors of sponsorship effectiveness<sup>29</sup>. As a matter of fact, conceptualizations of this fit are often couched in theories of **brand image transfer**: since a brand image is the idea that the customer has of a particular brand, the creation of links between two distinct entities allows an individual's knowledge of one entity to be transferred to the linked one<sup>30</sup>, whether positive or negative. This process is similar to the one of meaning transfer between a *celebrity-endorser* (event or activity here) and the *product endorsed* (sponsoring brand).

Sponsorship is one of the medium through which a good "match-up" can be created, considering that three images are displayed to an interested consumer approaching a sponsorship: the one of the *sponsor* (firm or company), the one of the *sponsee* (product, event or institution) and the *association* between them. Typically, the sponsored subject retains some images, that can be values or fame, which the company sponsoring it wishes to transfer to its own brand and products, and sponsorship has been shown to empower the transfer of those positive images in the mind of consumers through that association<sup>31</sup>.

Therefore, congruence or fit represents the **perceived similarity** between a sponsor company and the sponsored institution or activity, while the "Congruence Effects" exemplify the principally positive outcomes pointed through a sponsorship and the association generated.

These constructive effects, that can be abridged with the enhancement of credibility, the growth of positive attitudes toward the brand, the

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<sup>29</sup> "Improving Incongruent Sponsorships through Articulation of the Sponsorship and Audience Participation", C. Coppetti, D. Wentzelb, T. Tomczakb and S. Henkel, *Journal of Marketing Communications*, February 2009, p.17-34.

<sup>30</sup> E.B. Delia and C.G. Armstrong, *op.cit.*

<sup>31</sup> "Leveraging Sponsorship: The Activation Ratio", N. O'Reilly, D. Lafrance Horning, *Sport Management Review*, January 2013, p.424-437.

reinforcement of brand recall and, eventually, an increase in the purchase intention and, as a consequence, the boost of sales, have been the subject of many theoretical studies during the last decades, bringing the scholars to affirm that a higher match between the sponsor and the sponsee leads to more favourable responses and attitudes toward the firm by the consumers and to a greater probability of succeeding with the sponsorship.

Researchers<sup>32</sup>, from late nineties, have examined congruence in order to define some **specific categories** and levels of “match-up” but, since a clear and well-established definition of fit has never been proposed in the sponsorship literature, every scholar has tried to make headway, taking a cue from the celebrity endorsement theories and proposing her own categories of study.

Below I will describe the different factors, on which the congruence or incongruence is based, raised from the principal analysis.

Johar and Pham (1999) based their research on the **function** of the brand or the **category** of the product/service of the sponsoring company. They affirm that sponsor identification appears to be biased towards two categories of brands: the one *related semantically* to the event or institution and the *prominent* ones.

The former refers to brands which products belong to the same category of use of the ones employed during the event or activity; therefore, consumers may find it easy to “generate an intuitive explanation of why there should be a semantic fit between events and sponsors”<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> “Relatedness, Prominence, and Constructive Sponsor Identification”, G.V. Johar, M.T. Pham, *Journal of Marketing Research*, August 1999, p.299-312. “Building Brand Image Through Event Sponsorship: The Role of Image Transfer”, K. Gwinner and J. Eaton, *Journal of Advertising*, December 1999, p.47-57. “Sponsorship and Congruity Theory: A Theoretical Framework for Explaining Consumer Attitude and Recall of Event Sponsorship”, E. Jagre, J.J. Watson and J.G. Watson, *Advances in Consumer Research*, January 2001, p. p439-445. “The Effects of Consumer Knowledge on Responses to Event Sponsorships”, D.P. Roy and T.B. Cornwell, *Psychology and Marketing*, March 2004, p.184-207.

<sup>33</sup> G.V. Johar, M.T. Pham, *op.cit.*, p.310.



The latter, conversely, refers to brands that are already famous at the time of the sponsorship; thus, since this kind of firms are more recognizable and accessible in memory by the viewers, they are also perceived as “more plausible sponsors of events that require significant resources”<sup>34</sup>.

In this thesis this distinction will be used, in order to categorize the sponsors of the event analyzed.

Gwinner and Eaton (1999) designed their study according to McDonald’s (1991) **product relevance** to the sponsored activity or institution, which might occur *directly* or *indirectly*.

They stated that the potential relatedness between sponsor and sponsee can be a *functional-based similarity* or an *image-based similarity*.

The functional-based occurs when “the sponsored brand is actually used by the participants during the event”<sup>35</sup> (the direct method from McDonald).

The image-based has been described as manifesting when the “image of the event is related to the image of the brand”<sup>36</sup>, as the indirect method.

Jagre, Watson and Watson (2001) built their definition of congruence according to the **relationship** between the peculiar elements composing a sponsorship: the *target audience*, the *company* and its *products*, and the *sponsored activity*.

The first type is the one that emerges between the first two elements, and it occurs when “the sponsoring company’s target audience attends the event”<sup>37</sup>; so, it is the fit between the broad audience of the event and the “company’s customers of interest”.

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> K. Gwinner and J. Eaton, *op.cit.*, p.49.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> E. Jagre et al., *op.cit.*, p.441.

The second type pertains to the link that can be shaped between the last two elements, and it is referred to the fit between “the sponsoring company’s brand, product or service, and its perceived closeness with an event, based on consumers’ perceptions and expectations”<sup>38</sup>.

Lastly, Roy and Cornwell (2004) focused on the **nature of the link** that can be established between the sponsor and the sponsee, when is analyzed the case of the corporate event sponsorship. They recognize two different classes of link: *logical* association, that resembles the classification made by Gwinner and Eaton, and *strategic* association, that, conversely, resembles the first category found by Jagre et al.

As a matter of fact, a logical association can be molded when a “sponsor’s product is used in conjunction with the event”<sup>39</sup>; while a strategic association can be achieved by “matching the event audience and target market for the sponsoring brand”<sup>40</sup>, as Jagre et al. bear.

The authors, however, increment the definition of this link by adding that the match among the audiences should be operated with “the use of demographic and/or psychographic variables”<sup>41</sup>.

So far I have discussed about the congruence, or fit, or “match-up” between a sponsor and a sponsee, and about the importance it is believed to play for a successful sponsorship. However, in some cases firms that decide to support an institution or activity may not have a logical or innate link to causes, events and sports in general and may, therefore, end up sponsoring properties that are not a natural match<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> D.P. Roy and T.B. Cornwell, *op.cit.*, p.189.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> C. Coppetti et al., *op.cit.*

As a consequence, this decision of sponsoring a “product” so different from its own core business strikes as being doomed to fail from the beginning.

In this regard, some scholars focused on analyzing what actions **incongruent sponsors** can implement in order to mitigate the negative effects of low-fit and to enhance the probability of succeeding, finding that, in some cases, having a high “incongruence” can be a plus when pursuing final success.

Coppetti et al. (2009), implementing some empirical investigations from 2006, outlined two techniques useful to incongruent sponsors to help boosting positive responses from consumers.

Namely, these techniques are: *articulation of the sponsorship relationship* and *active participation of the event audience*.

The former technique can take place when the presence of “non-salient associations” between the company and the event are emphasized through the communication strategy. In this case articulation of the relationship can lead to the creation of the relatedness, explicitly hinging the “basis and the meaning of the sponsorship relationship”<sup>43</sup>.

Moreover, articulation, by way of the formation of additional ties between the sponsor and the sponsee, can bring two more positive results: growth in the **recall by memory of the brand** and a **smoothed image transfer** from the sponsee to the sponsor company leading, ultimately, to the fulfillment of other sponsorship goals: **increase in sales** or **improvement of the awareness** of the firm.

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

The latter technique can be adopted since events enable firms to interact directly and intensively with the visitors. Companies, thus, have the possibility to create an “attractive and memorable sponsorship experience”<sup>44</sup> that allows participants to get more involved with the brand itself and, as a consequence, to **lower the detachment** previously perceived between the firm and the event.

The positive results coming from the use of this technique includes also the **facilitation of the image transfer**, due to the fact that consumers, engaging in a catchy experience, are more prone to award the sponsoring brand with the “affect” they feel for the event or activity. As the first technique explained, this growing affection can influence the attainment of rising **purchase intention**.

To put it in a nutshell, Figure 1.3 shows a conceptual framework, introduced by Jagre et al. in 2001, that well-explains the “Congruence Effects”, taking into account three different types or levels of fit: *consistent* (high-fit), *moderately inconsistent* (medium-fit) and *extremely inconsistent* (low-fit).

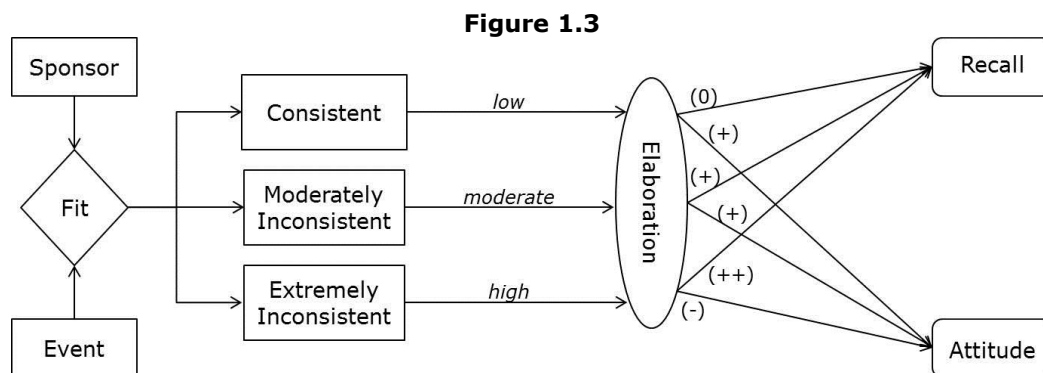
The power of the effects, represented by the symbols in the brackets, confirms that, in some cases and according to the main goal of the sponsorship (that can be a sales-related one or image-related), being *incongruent*, thus having a low-fit with the event or institution sponsored, is a plus for the sponsor company, because the novelty of the new relationship, in the mind of the participants, results in the largest intensification of elaboration and, therefore, generates a greater increase of **recall of the sponsor**<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> E. Jagre et al., *op.cit.*

The arguments given above, then, prove that a *consistent congruence* between sponsor and sponsee is not strictly necessary in order to achieve a success with the sponsorship, and the solutions previously proposed (*articulation of the sponsorship* and *audience participation*) can even implement the possible positive results achievable by being incongruent, whether moderately or extremely.

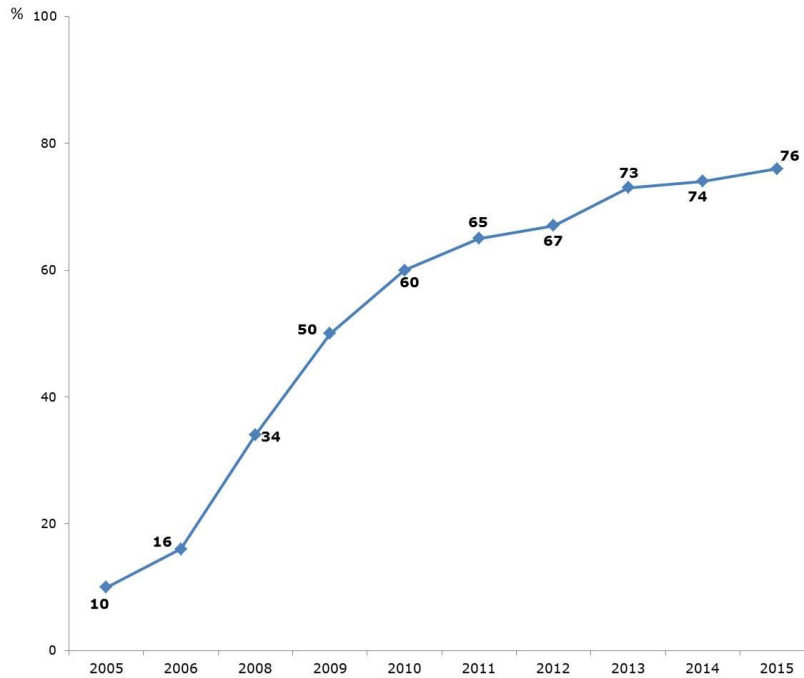


**Adapted from the Conceptual Model of the Effects of FIT between Sponsor and Event (Jagre, Watson and Watson 2001)**

## **1.2 Social Media: a chance to enhance the interaction between people**

Social media, in the last five years more than before (as it can be seen in Figure 1.4), have become an increasingly important tool for the **flow** of every kind of **information**, from personal (the most recent case is Parisians mobilization during the night of the 13<sup>th</sup> of November 2015 with the hashtag “#PorteOuverte”, in order to help people in need, or the worldwide “#PrayForParis” to show solidarity) to public (like spread of news or gossip via social networks) and, thus, for the interaction between people, whether acquaintances or simply “followers”.

**Figure 1.4**



**Adapted from Pew Research Center analysis of the % of Americans Using at Least One Social Network (Pew Research Center 2015)**

This social change has been possible thanks to the continuous development of new technologies, that has brought to consumers devices ideally suited to remain always connected with the outside world. The consumer uptake of these technologies has contributed to create an "*always on*" *communications environment*, that is "transforming relations of time, space, transmission and reception, [and is] giving rise to an **accelerated information order** in which immediacy, instantaneity and immanence are constitutive of social experience"<sup>46</sup>.

As a consequence, firms and influential people in all fields have started to use these social platforms for manifold purposes, recognizing their power in the ongoing fight to stay afloat in the mind of the consumers or fans.

The following paragraphs delineate some of the aspects that characterize social media: features, online influence, the use of them in the sport field and the problems that this use may give rise; before focusing on the two

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<sup>46</sup> "Those absent from the stadium are always right: accelerated culture, sport media, and theory at the speed of light", S. Redhead, *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, November 2007, p.226-241.

social media that have been used for the empirical analysis run in this thesis: Twitter and Facebook.

### 1.2.1 Definition and main features of social media

Taking a step backwards, it is important to be clear about which base these new social media platforms lie on and what they are before trying to see how companies and celebrities are using them.

*Tweeting or posting on a wall* sit within a range of “media activities and technologies that can be housed under the heading of **telemediated practices** and experiences”<sup>47</sup> and, at the same time, assume a preference, by the users, for **telepresence**.

The first feature mentioned, own of social networks, is *telemediatization*, introduced by Tomlinson in 2007, which describes the “proliferation of communications technologies and media systems within the **quotidian rhythms of social life**, a phenomenon that has altered the *everyday flow of experience*”<sup>48</sup>.

This recalls the “always on” communications environment strengthened by the new technologies, but created from the users’ need of being constantly ahead of the game.

The second feature, the *telepresence*, instead, directly refers to the actions taken by the user, encasing all the “techniques” used in order to interact and introducing a “real-time presence at a distance” of different social actors. As a matter of fact, it refers, in the words of Tomlinson, to the “possibility, and increasingly for many, the preference, of **keeping in touch without** actually, [and] literally, **being in touch**”<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> “The Acceleration of Media Sport Culture”, B. Hutchins, *Information, Communication & Society*, Winter 2011, p.237-257.

<sup>48</sup> “The Culture of Speed: The Coming of Immediacy”, J. Tomlinson. 2007, p.94.

<sup>49</sup> *Ivi*, p.111.

This quality, accordingly, can be found not only in social networks, but also in “traditional” media systems like websites, bulletin boards, chat rooms or game spaces, from which it has evolved.

Another quality that needs to be taken into consideration is that, differently from just a decade ago, where people could communicate primarily with their family and, generally, with people they knew in person; now social media have created an environment where, potentially, each person can, first, communicate with the whole world, despite social status, popularity and cultural distance; second, build her own “online influence” (concept that will be explained in the next paragraph) thanks to her continuous presence on the web; third, as a consequence of the second one, become a “VIP of the web” according to her personal ability of creating buzz among her followers.

### **1.2.2 Online Influence: a vital element for the nowadays society**

This growing transformation of social relations has hit specially the communication among people who are strangers or with entities previously considered of a different level or unattainable, like firms and famous people.

Granted that celebrities still remain humans and that behind a firm lays someone who cares for the health of the company, nevertheless social media turn to be very fine marketing tools, used by companies and superstars in order to build and promote their image (and their products), to increase their brand awareness, to enable an instantaneous communication with the fans and to, at least attempt to, control the news agenda. Incidentally, the notion of **online influence** (at which, in this



new world order, every action taken on the web aimed at) nowadays plays a vital role in how a society functions and how businesses operate<sup>50</sup>.

Online influence refers to “the power or capacity of causing an effect in indirect or intangible ways”<sup>51</sup> and, holding steady this definition, I endorse wholeheartedly the opinion expressed by Cha et al. (2010) that, online, only a minority of users, the *influentials*, excel in persuading others and, according to what has been aforesaid, the majority of these influentials are celebrities (actors, journalists, politicians but also sportspeople – on whose field this study will focus during the empirical analysis), facilitated in reaching a broad audience with their tweets and messages.

Consequently, **online influence** needs to be measured through different systems, in order to have an all-around view. Cha et al. (2010) have introduced, in their empirical analysis – where only Twitter is used, three very easy-to-use and prompt criteria: *indegree*, *retweets* and *mentions*. All of them have been used in the empirical analysis in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the actions undertaken by the sponsors during the event considered.

**Indegree** is the most immediate measure and represents the number of people who follow a user. As it is conceivable, this broad concept can change, a little, according to the social network considered (taking into consideration the most famous ones, for Twitter, Facebook – these two have been used in this thesis for the empirical analysis – and Instagram the action undertaken by the users is to literally follow another user on the web, while with LinkedIn, as the name suggests, a single user can “link” with other users, and in this way starting following them). However,

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<sup>50</sup> “Measuring User Influence in Twitter: The Million Follower Fallacy”, M. Cha, H. Haddadi, F. Benevenuto and K.P. Gummadi, *Social Media Analysis, Spring 2010*, p.10.

<sup>51</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

it displays a good indication of the popularity of a user, but alone reveals little about its influence. As a matter of fact, the term “million follower fallacy”<sup>52</sup> has been coined in order to highlight how some users follow other simply for etiquette, and many of them do not even read all the broadcast messages. It is clear, then, that having an active, albeit small, audience is better than having a lot of inactive fans.

**Retweets** (in the case of Twitter, **reposts** in Facebook terms) appertain to the number of times other users “forward” someone’s tweet/post. As for *Indegree*, *Retweets* are more suitable for some social networks than others (e.g. Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn), while with Instagram, for example, this action can directly be done by users only through the usage of other applications (e.g. Repost<sup>53</sup> or Regram<sup>54</sup>). This measure is highly dependent on the topic on which the user focuses on, since it suggests the content value of one’s tweets/posts<sup>55</sup>. This meaning is particularly useful when dealing with ordinary users, who can gain influence by focusing on a single topic and “posting creative and insightful tweets [or posts] that are perceived as valuable by others”<sup>56</sup>.

Both of these metrics can be seen as part of the evaluation of the **engagement** of the consumers (or fans) with a brand (or celebrity), that is the ultimate goal sought by companies entering the online world, because it implies a higher order connection to the brand.

Finally, **mentions** refer to the number of times other users mention someone’s name. This criterion, as the one above, depends on the topic treated, even if to a lesser extent, especially when considering accounts of

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<sup>52</sup> “The Million Followers Fallacy”, A. Avnit, *Pravda Media*, August 2009.

<sup>53</sup> <http://repostapp.com/>

<sup>54</sup> <http://regram.me/>

<sup>55</sup> Cha et al., *op.cit.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

firms or celebrities. The monitoring of the number of mentions linked to an entity brings to the measurement of “**buzz**”, that is the “volume of references in the social media space”<sup>57</sup>.

### 1.2.3 Sport: the new trend on social media

Moving on to the core field of this essay, **sport** has become one of the most talked-about topic on every social media and sportspeople have gained the status of “real” celebrities also thanks to their use of tweets and posts in order to communicate spontaneously with all their (and of the team) fans, friends and observers, “bypassing the gate-keeping functions of journalists, publicists and sports officials”<sup>58</sup>.

This new central role granted to sport is helping low-profile athletes and sports to easily reach the spotlight, once only guaranteed to top athletes or major sports. As mentioned before, this popularity can be achieved through the possibility to reach a broader audience with their online contents (messages, photos, videos, etc.). This new situation is also forcing sport organizations, journalists and publicists to *rethink the interaction* between a sport and the digital media, since social platforms’ modality is extending more and more to visual representation, far beyond the simply text-based communication.

The ever growing intensification of digital content production and transmission has started altering the supply chain of media sport, which vary from the analogue broadcast era where a limited set of producers possessed the infrastructure needed to reach mass audiences, and only at scheduled times<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>57</sup> “New Challenges in Sponsorship Evaluation Actors, New Media, and the Context of Praxis”, T. Meenaghan, D. McLoughlin and A. McCormack, *Psychology & Marketing*, May 2013, p.452.

<sup>58</sup> B. Hutchins, *op.cit.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

As a matter of fact, now athletes are able to tweet or post before, after and even during the sport event, increasing the buzz and sentiment about themselves, their team and the event; but the use of social media for personal expression in the end clash with the **public status** assigned to *any* comment that appears on a profile.

As aforementioned, social media turn out to be a Janus-faced communication tool, for example for journalists, who can use them to have an instantaneous insight into athletes' thoughts.

#### **1.2.4 Sport and Social Media: possible problems**

Before briefly examining **Twitter** and **Facebook**, the two social media used in the empirical analysis, I will summarize the possible problems the use of this kind of mean can create, in a sport context, introduced by Hutchins (2011):

- i. Players can deliberately or not give away sensitive information about injuries or tactics;
- ii. Players can post embarrassing or offensive messages;
- iii. During the course of a match the provision of regular messages can encroach upon the activities of existing media rights-holders;
- iv. Legal or illegal sports betting markets can use, intentionally or not, information contained in messages.

#### **1.2.5 Twitter: an in-depth look inside the tweeting world**

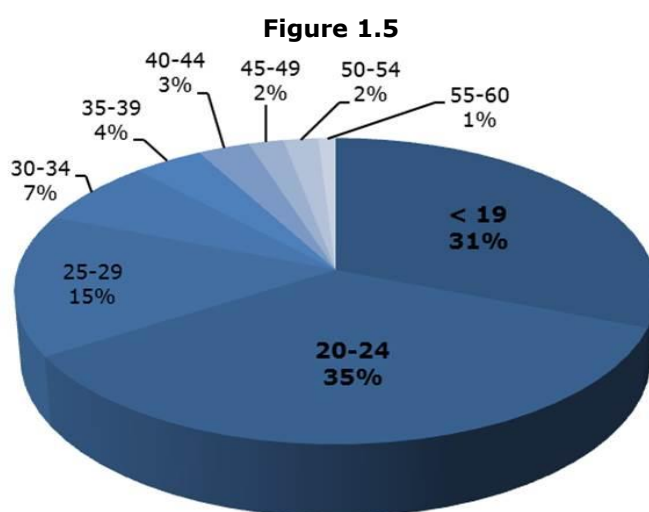
**Twitter** is an online free service of social networking and microblogging created in 2006 by Jack Dorsey (with his Obvious Corporation), that provides the users, through the homonymous platform, a personal page or

profile, updatable via text messages with a maximum length of 140 characters<sup>60</sup>.

At September 2015 it accounts for **320 million active users** worldwide and **1 billion monthly unique visits** to websites with embedded tweets<sup>61</sup>.

This explosive growth has been experienced in the past few years, with Twitter attracting celebrity users and media, and receiving a still growing blog coverage.

As it can be noticed in Figure 1.5, Twitter appears as a social media for young people, since about 65% of its users are **under the age of 25**; but it should be taken into account that only a 1% of its users discloses its age<sup>62</sup>.



**Adapted from Sysomos data on Twitter Users by Age Group (Sysomos 2014)**

Moreover, its public seems to be a conscious one, since the 92.4% follow less than a hundred people, and only a 0.94% follows more than a thousand one. At the same time, 93.6% of users have less than a hundred

<sup>60</sup> At the moment this thesis has been writing the maximum length is still 140 characters, but the founders are considering the possibility of moving to longer messages (10k characters).

<sup>61</sup> <https://about.twitter.com/company>

<sup>62</sup> "Inside Twitter: An In-Depth Look Inside the Twitter World", Sysomos, April 2014, p.3.

followers, while 0.68% have more than a thousand followers (all of them turn out to be firms or celebrities accounts), and with a very tiny percentage having more than a million followers.

Even if the aim for which this social network has been created is to share information with friends and family first, only 1.13% of active users are “always on”, updating their status more than ten times per day<sup>63</sup>. Sysomos has also found that, the more followers a user is able to attract, the more tweets he will publish.

As a matter of fact, a small group of Twitter users (**5%**) account for the bulk of activity (**75%**) and, by the same token, more than a half of Twitter users (50.4%) are “inactive users”<sup>64</sup>, i.e. they have not updated their status in the last seven days. This can be explained with the flourishing notoriety the social media has gained in the last years among celebrities, since most of the common people seem to use Twitter in order to follow the activity of their favourite movie-stars or sportspeople or politicians and so on.

### **1.2.6 Facebook: an infographic of the most used social network**

**Facebook** is an online social networking service launched in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook Inc.) and his College roommates Chris Hughes, Andrew McCollum, Dustin Moskovitz and Eduardo Saverin.

As Twitter, it provides the user with a profile, after registering to the website, where they can add other users as “friends”, exchange messages, post status updates and receive notifications when others update their profiles.

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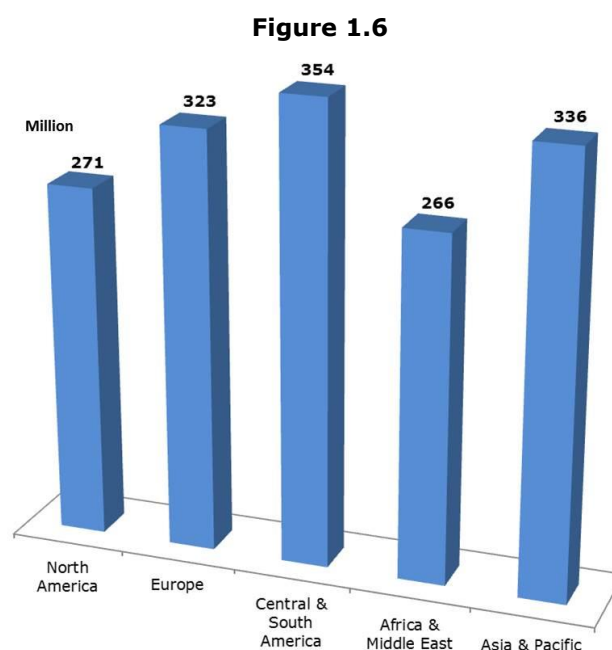
<sup>63</sup> Ivi, p.8.

<sup>64</sup> Ivi, p.10.

Unlike the social network of the tweeting bird, Facebook gives the users the possibility of setting up and joining **groups** (that can be “private”, so that a new user can join it only if his request has been accepted by an already member of it; or “public”, where everyone can freely join it) to share common interests with others, organized by place of work, school, favourite actor or team and other characteristics.

Even if, as said before, Twitter has proven its worth in the past five years, Facebook remains the most used social network, with **1.55 billion active users** as of September 2015<sup>65</sup>.

Of these 1.55 billion users, the majority resides in Central and South America, as it can be seen in Figure 1.6, with Europe (that includes Russia) and Asia & Pacific at a short distance.



**Adapted from Gigya data on Facebook Users by Continent (Gigya 2015)**

Unlike Twitter, Facebook seems to be a platform for people of every age, since only the **30%** of its users are under the age of 29, and the **29%** has an age between 30 and 49<sup>66</sup>.

<sup>65</sup> <http://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/>

<sup>66</sup> “Facebook Demographics”, Pew Research Center, April 2015. Personal reworking.

Another big difference with the competitor is that Facebook appears to be appealing also for people with 65 and more years, with an **18%** of its users pertaining to this category<sup>67</sup>.

Facebook, in 2007, introduced a new element called "**Facebook Pages**", which are user profiles for brands (companies, organizations, and celebrities). Facebook Pages have the look and feel of personal accounts but offer additional features such as the ability to quickly send public messages to thousands of fans<sup>68</sup>.

As of December 2015, the most popular page is not a brand or celebrity one, but a page of a service "Facebook for Every Phone", with more than 510 million fans; but, overall, even if the most popular category is non-profits pages, **celebrities** and **products** pages are those with more possibilities to exceed the threshold of one million fans<sup>69</sup>.

### **1.3 Social Media and Sponsorship: a new winning combination**

Now that the main topics of this thesis have been outlined, it is time to delineate why them can be combined, in order to answer to the research question, explained in the *Introduction*: evaluate the effectiveness of a sponsorship, in a sporting event, through the use of social media by the audience of this event (live or not) and by the sponsors themselves.

As already stated, sponsorship, during the last decades, has become a more relevant and necessary marketing tool than ever before, since **sponsorship platforms** have finally disclosed their inner ability of being

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> "Inside Facebook Pages", Sysomos, November 2009, p.1.

<sup>69</sup> *Ivi*, p.4.



an “instantaneous way of raising the profile of one’s brand”<sup>70</sup>. For too long, marketers and brands have failed to recognize that sponsoring an event, a team, or an athlete should be considered an honour, and that the space in which they are moving is the one of the **passionate followers**, to which attending a sporting event became an “act of faith”.

At the same time, these passionate followers could eventually be the **active consumers** enabled, by the advent of social media, to talk among themselves blocking out the firms in the process.

As a consequence, although new media might be different from traditional media in the way they are used and perceived by the consumers and brands themselves, the way through which these two entities interact involves essentially the same stages, despite the fact it can happen in a neutral environment for both of them (the online world created by social networks)<sup>71</sup>.

Therefore, from a company’s point of view, to avoid remaining a voice from the pack, **effective activation** (“the marketing activities that a company conducts to promote its sponsorship, over and above the rights fee paid to the sponsored property”<sup>72</sup>) should be the principal goal, being this the only way to “remove [the] invisible barrier [created] and enable brand and consumer to come together as fans, with one dialogue shared by all”<sup>73</sup>. To do this, an enterprise that decides to sponsor a sport event must ensure the audience that its activities (online and in the real world) are authentic, true to the essence of its brand, and, at the end, the natural consequence of this “good behaviour” will be an involvement of the firm in the conversation among fans, since it would be perceived as part of their world, a member of it that shares their same passion.

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<sup>70</sup> “Achieving value from sponsorship in a new world order”, K. Jackson, *Journal of Sponsorship*, December 2009, p.216.

<sup>71</sup> T. Meenaghan et al., *op.cit.*

<sup>72</sup> “IEG Sponsorship Report”, Insights Evaluation Guidance, January 2010.

<sup>73</sup> K. Jackson, *op.cit.*

The **activation** is important, for the efficacy of the sponsorship, since many scholars have found out that, without adequate promotion, the value of the sponsorship itself can turn null, due to the fact that no recognition would be brought to the sponsored property and, in doing this, a sponsor can, consequently, only hope for their target to make the necessary connection by only seeing their branding on-site<sup>74</sup>.

As a matter of fact, O'Reilly and Horning (2013) present three key reasons why activation can help bettering the effectiveness of a sponsorship:

- a. "Activation programs can be creatively designed to *breakthrough heavy promotional clutter*".
- b. "Activation is known to be an effective way to *combat ambush marketing*".
- c. "In order to truly differentiate itself, a firm must activate its sponsored rights in a manner that *cannot be easily copied by competitors*".

To achieve this objectives, a sponsor company can choose among many methods: traditional advertising and public relations (the most popular forms used until 2011); hospitality; on-site sampling; sales promotions; use of digital, mobile and social media (that represent the emerging trend since the last years)<sup>75</sup>.

On balance, the aim of this work is to find out how, in an international sporting event (that will be introduced in the next chapter), sponsors (local or global companies) have behaved in order to be accepted in the community of fans.

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<sup>74</sup> N. O'Reilly and D. Lafrance Horning, *op.cit.*

<sup>75</sup> "Decision-makers survey: Sponsors favor activation budgets in 2011", Insights Evaluation Guidance, *January 2011*.

## 2. Method

This chapter is dedicated to the presentation of the methodology used in the empirical analysis run in order to answer to the research questions presented in the *Introduction*.

The analysis has been based on the work led by Delia and Armstrong upon the French Open 2013<sup>76</sup>, which represents the first empirical attempt in the field of sponsorship and social media.

As stated in the *Introduction*, being this a completely new and understudied topic, an exploratory approach has been adopted; this serves as an “avenue to pose a variety of research questions in an effort to obtain a better understanding of the topic of interest”<sup>77</sup>.

As a consequence, *Method* is divided into three main parts, in order to cover all the different aspects that need to be treated.

Part 1 deals with the research context (EuroVolley 2015) that constitutes the empirical environment in which research questions (summed up later in this paragraph) have been tested. Research questions proposed again below:

**RQ1:** Does the *total number of mentions* of EuroVolley sponsors vary by *functional fit*?

**RQ2:** Does a sponsor company's *presence on social media* (Twitter and Facebook total number of followers) relate to its total number of *mentions* during the EuroVolley?

In addition to this, a paragraph is allotted to the various sponsors of the event taken into consideration and to the activities they have handled on

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<sup>76</sup> “#Sponsoring the #FrenchOpen: An Examination of Social Media Buzz and Sentiment”, E.B. Delia and C.G. Armstrong, *Journal of Sport Management*, March 2015.

<sup>77</sup> “Controversies in Mixed Methods Research”, J.W. Creswell, *Sage Handbook of qualitative research*, 2011.

the web and offline during the period of the championship in order to reach their target audience.

In Part 2 sample and criteria for collected data are illustrated, before moving to Part 3, where are clarified the criteria for coding and analyzing those data: a focus on the “functional fit”, useful to answer the first research question.

## 2.1 EuroVolley 2015: the empirical environment

I have decided to use the men’s **European Volleyball Championship 2015** as a case study to examine sponsor-related conversations on social media during the championship itself.

As mentioned in the *Theoretical Contextualization*, **Twitter** and **Facebook** have been chosen, among all the existing social networks, to the fact that the European Volleyball Confederation (CEV), the authority responsible for the organization of every European competition in volleyball<sup>78</sup>, chose these two as part of the official communication tools, creating a new account on Twitter (@EuroVolley2015), a public profile on Facebook (EuroVolley) and an official hashtag (#EuroVolleyM) that can be used on both, besides a dedicated website and updating its account (@CEV) and public profile (CEV - Confédération Européenne de Volleyball)<sup>79</sup>.

The European Volleyball Championship is a sport competition for national teams, held biannually since 1948. It comprises two major phases: the *Qualification* phase and the *Final Round*.

The **Qualification** phase starts a year before the Finals, and 38 National Federations can entered it in order to reach the Final Round, where only 9 of them will compete, together with the organizers (for the 2015 edition

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<sup>78</sup> <http://www.cev.lu/CEV-Area/cev.aspx>

<sup>79</sup> <http://www.cev.lu/Competition-Area/Competition.aspx?ID=700&PID=-1>

Italy and Bulgaria set up the Championship jointly) and the 5 highest placed teams in the standing from the previous edition.

The **Final Round** lasts only ten days (in 2015 from 9<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> October) and receives complete media coverage all around the world. For this two reasons, and for the fact that, being a major volleyball tournament, it attracts not only a large, international audience of attendees and viewers, but also a mix of domestically (i.e. Italian and French above all) and internationally headquartered sponsor companies, the empirical analysis covers just this final phase.

As a matter of fact, the next chapter is about all the sponsors present at EuroVolley 2015<sup>80</sup> and in which ways they have tried to reach a broader audience possible during the event.

### **2.1.1 Sponsors and Activities on Social Media during the Event**

EuroVolley 2015 offers three typologies of sponsorship: *Official Partners*, *Gold Sponsors* and *Official Suppliers*.

In addition to these, I have decided to include the main sponsors of the four finalists, for different reasons, all of them related: first, two of them are the organizers; second, the championship has been set up by National Federations, that are primarily participants and not external third parties; consequently, and third, their “local sponsors” (the ones that patronized the Nationals) turned to be event sponsors too, at least at the eyes of the general audience (both attendees and viewers).

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<sup>80</sup> From now on, EuroVolley 2015 refers to the Final Round of the entire championship.

Moreover, differently from other sportive events, like the French Open, subject of the study made by Delia and Armstrong, the total number of partners (counting together the three official categories) is relatively small: just six, of which two are the organizing federations.

Below a detailed classification.

The **Official Partners** are only “governmental bodies”: *CEV* (the European Confederation), the *Italian Volleyball Federation* (Federvolley) and the *Bulgarian Volleyball Federation* (BVF). Even if they are partners of the event, I have decided not to consider them in the analysis since Federations, in this specific case, have objectives completely different from company sponsors. Consequently, the analysis can turn to be distorted if they are treated like every other sponsor.

Only two **Gold Sponsors** were present: *Champion*, an American manufacturer of clothing, specialized in sportswear, which is also an official partner of CEV<sup>81</sup>; and *Mikasa*, a Japanese sports equipment company, that is also the official supplier for FIVB match balls and national championships<sup>82</sup>.

The last category, the **Official Suppliers**, includes just one company: *Gerflor Group*, a French group that “creates, manufactures and markets innovative, decorative and eco-responsible solutions for flooring and interior finishes”<sup>83</sup> and that, like Mikasa, is also the official supplier for every FIVB competition.

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<sup>81</sup> <http://www.hanes.com/champion>

<sup>82</sup> <http://www.mikasasports.co.jp/e/>

<sup>83</sup> <http://www.gerflorgroup.com/english/menu-corporate-2010-gauc/presentation.html>

As specified at the beginning of this paragraph, I have decided to incorporate the main sponsors of the four finalists (i.e. France, Slovenia, Italy and Bulgaria), who, from now on, will be called **Finalists Sponsors** to differentiate from the others.

Adding these, the variety of industries represented by the sponsors increases, with many of them operating on a global scale.

Starting with the organizers, the sponsors of the **Italian Team** encompass: *Kinder+Sport* (Italy), *CRAI* (Italy), *Unendo Energia* (Italy), *Get Sport Media* (Italy) *Rai* (Italy) and *Asics* (Japan); while the **Bulgarian Team** is sponsored by: *EfBet* (Malta) and *Lidl* (Germany).

Moving to the other two finalists, **France** is patronized by: *L'Équipe* (France), *Erréa* (Italy), *French Volleyball Federation* (France, FFVB), *Generali* (Italy) and *Gerflor Group*; whereas **Slovenian** sponsors, the majority of which are local, inversely from the other Finalists, include: *Telekom Slovenije* (Slovenia), *Slovenian Volleyball Federation* (Slovenia, OZS) and *Mikasa* (for sportswear).

As with sponsorship at most sporting events, some EuroVolley sponsors use the partnership with the event itself or with the two organizers in order to promote their brand via product giveaways (e.g. paper fans to cheer, distribution of t-shirts) or providing behind-the-scenes support for the event with their own products (e.g. Mikasa and Gerflor).

To go more in deep in the understanding of the use of social media by the sponsors during the period of the Finals, I will briefly described the most visible and welcomed initiatives they carried forward on the web.

**#VolleyHeroes:** the official EuroVolley Facebook page and Twitter account, launched, at the beginning of October, the hashtag

"#VolleyHeroes", dedicated to all the volley fans who wanted to share their best moments during the Finals. This activity helped boosting the buzz about the European Championship, inasmuch teams and athletes started sharing pictures, videos or messages on social network platforms accompanied by this hashtag.

**#MikasaTeamUniform:** Mikasa launched this hashtag in 2014, when it started to sponsor some Italian A2 Series volleyball teams. It replicated during the European championship in order to be linked, in the mind of the passionate followers, to Team Slovenia, the only participants whose uniform were manufactured by the Japanese company. Moreover, on their website, a section has been created under the name "Mikasa Team Uniform" where customers can purchase the game kit of the teams patronized by the firm.

**#S3:** Kinder+Sport, the Ferrero Group's CSR project created to promote active lifestyles and to encourage the practice of sport among young people around the world<sup>84</sup>, inaugurated the "S3 Project" ("Sport, Squadra e Salute" in Italian, so "Sport, Team and Health"), to bolster 3vs3 volley in schools in order to let students learn important values like work in team and be healthy. Together with the project the hashtag "#S3" has been launched to let fans share thoughts, images or videos about these values and the volleyball in general. Moreover, other two offline initiatives have been generated: Team Italy wears tricolour shoelaces with a plate on them that bears the S3 logo; and, in the Italian arenas host of the championship matches, t-shirts with Kinder+Sport logo were distributed to the attendees by the mascot.

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<sup>84</sup> <http://www.kinderpiusport.it/it>



**#EfBet:** the main sponsor of the Bulgarian Volleyball Team has launched a contest on its facebook page linked to the cardboard cutouts of the Bulgarian players they have placed around the Armeec Arena in Sofia and in Varna, the two cities hosts of the matches played in Bulgaria. People should share on EfBet Facebook page a picture of themselves with these cardboard cutouts and, at the end of the week, t-shirts of the National Team and autographed balls were given as prize for the best pictures.

## 2.2 Sample and Data Collection

The social media platforms examined were Facebook and Twitter, with users' messages and subsequent retweets/reposts and mentions operating as the units of measurement.

Before the start of the Final Round of the European Volleyball Championship, on DiscoverText, "a platform to collect, clean, and analyze text and social data streams"<sup>85</sup>, a live feed was scheduled in order to collect all the textual information containing the hashtag "#EuroVolleyM" (the official one) and the general "EuroVolley2015" (the name of the Twitter account and the Facebook page that some people used as an hashtag too) for the period of the championship.

Considering Twitter, DiscoverText does not collect every tweet mentioning a particular search term, but rather a small sample of the population of tweets<sup>86</sup>. Instead, with Facebook, since the messages published on a user's profile are "private" and only "friends" can read them on their wall, DiscoverText allow the importation of messages published on pages' wall (e.g. EuroVolley 2015, Mikasa Italia, Kinder+Sport and EfBet) or with the level of privacy set as "Public".

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<sup>85</sup> <http://discovertext.com/>

<sup>86</sup> E.B. Delia and C.G. Armstrong, *op.cit.*

Once the empirical data have been collected and archived, the software lets the user to group related messages into “buckets”, before beginning content analysis and the creation of dataset.

Data collection began on the first day of the Final Round, October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015, and ended on the last day, October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015. Messages were collected to archives through a scheduled live feed updated every hour for all the 10 days.

I collect data into more archives, to distinguish, firstly, the messages originated on Twitter and the messages from Facebook; and secondly, the two possibilities to mention the championship: “#EuroVolleyM” and “EuroVolley2015”. At the end of the Finals, the archives contained about 50,000 messages, with the one raised from the official hashtag including the majority of them (41,760 messages).

Since the messages derive from two different social media platforms, after a check among the different archives to avoid including in the final bucket two or more times the same message, I have merged them in the bucket, retaining also retweets and reposts, being important and quite useful to the examination of the sponsors’ buzz generation via social networks.

Of the total amount of messages, only 39,671 resulted being adequate to the analysis, the others being duplications (especially on Twitter) or related to the wrong topic (on Facebook, due to the fact that DiscoverText retains all the messages on a page in a determined period of time, without giving the possibility to search for specific terms previously).

## 2.3 Criteria for Analyzing Data

In this paragraph the criteria thanks to which the data have been analyzed are introduced, with a focus on the **Functional Fit**, or Congruence, that has already been treated in the *Theoretical Contextualization* and that is the comparison element for the first RQ.

### 2.3.1 Functional Fit

Repeating the definition given in the *Theoretical Contextualization*, “congruence or **fit** represents the **perceived similarity** between a sponsor company and the sponsored institution or activity”; therefore, before starting analyzing data to look for sponsors’ mentions and, after that, for latent content, the level of fit between the firms sponsoring the event and EuroVolley 2015 needed to be established.

The first step taken has been to categorize sponsors by function:

- Federation (*CEV, BVF, Federvolley, FFVB, OZS*);
- Volleyball Apparel and Equipment (*Mikasa, Champion, Erréa, Gerflor, Asics*);
- Food and Beverage (*Kinder+Sport, CRAI, Lidl*);
- Entertainment (*EfBet, Get Sport Media*);
- Media (*L’Équipe, Rai*);
- Financial Services (*Generali*);
- Technology (*Unendo Energia, Telekom Slovenije*).

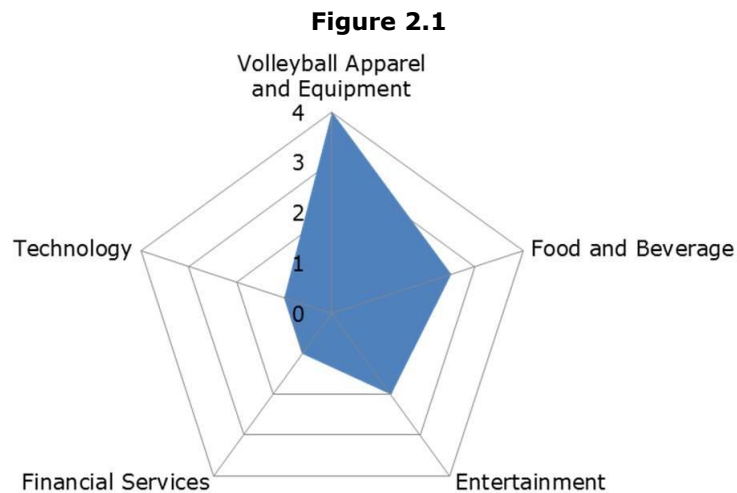
A note should be done about the categories. As stated before, the Federations have been excluded from the analysis since the motivations behind their involvement in the event are completely different from the one of other sponsor companies. For the same reason, also Media Partners (i.e. *L’Équipe* and *Rai*) have been excluded, since being the official broadcaster (for *Rai*) or the official newspaper (for *L’Équipe*) does not lead

the two brands to increase their effort in order to be perceived as linked to the event or the team sponsored. As a matter of fact, in both cases, negative messages all reproached the low commitment perceived by viewers or fans of the two Media Partners.

The second step taken is to group them in level of fit, defined subjectively, since the nature of this study did not allow a determination of it through an external evaluation (e.g. using questionnaires submitted to customers). Specifically, the analysis brought on in this thesis did not contemplate a direct engagement of potential or actual customers of the European Volleyball Championship's sponsors, so an alternative approach has been adopted to determine the different grades of congruence of every category of sponsor.

The scale used goes from "Weak" to "Very Strong", passing through "Average" and "Strong". To define final results the relevance for the event of each company has been evaluated. Final grading can be seen in Figure 2.1, and is: Volleyball Apparel and Equipment (very strong = 4); Food and Beverage and Entertainment (average = 2); Financial Services and Technology (weak = 1).

It should be underlined that *Kinder+Sport*, categorized in *Food and Beverage* due to the fact that is a project led by Ferrero, an Italian company specialized in confectionery products present all over the world, it has received an higher congruence grade (strong = 3) than *Lidl* and *CRAI* because of the nature of the project itself, outlined before in this chapter.



**Personal elaboration of the Functional Fit of EuroVolley 2015 Sponsors**

The Functional Fit has been then added to the data file as a variable for subsequent analysis.

### 2.3.2 Coding and Analysis

When creating the ultimate database, messages were selected to be retained according to different criteria.

Firstly, wrong messages have been searched. As mentioned in the paragraph about *Sample and data collection*, Facebook and Twitter presented different motivations for messages to be discarded: for Facebook the majority of them were about a **different topic** than European Championship, since DiscoverText allows only the incorporation of every text published on the page analyzed in the period of time defined by the coder; with Twitter, instead, mostly of the discarded messages were **duplications** of already incorporated messages, since the live feed was set to search for two different elements: the official hashtag and the event name, and some messages included both.

After that, a subsequent check has been done on the language of the messages. I have decided to save messages in **five different languages**: the four of the finalists (French, Slovenian, Italian and

Bulgarian), since a surface analysis have shown that these were the most used languages; plus English, the official language adopted by the CEV on their page/account and on the page/account of the event.

With the database validated, all the messages retained have been analyzed in two phases. *Phase 1* implied a search for key words (i.e. sponsors names) and *Phase 2* consisted of a codification of the messages for latent content (i.e. valence).

More in deep, in Phase 1 **manifest content** was the focus, in order to find mentions of any of the European Championship sponsor. For sponsors whose name comprises more than one word, like *Unendo Energia* or *Get Sport Media*, different combinations were looked for: the entire name combined (e.g. UnendoEnergia); the words separated (e.g. Unendo Energia); the official hashtag created by the firm (e.g. UEI or GSM).

In the case of **Entertainment**, when they present different accounts/pages (e.g. "EfBet", "EfBet.com" or "EfBetGaming"), a first investigation let me notice that people tended to use all of them interchangeably, without considering the real recipient of the message, so all of them have been included, when mentioned. A particular case is the one of *Get Sport Media*, an event organizer in the sport field and a sports marketing consultant, because no official Twitter account exist of the agency itself, but the founder and owner utilizes her own one for corporate communication, including the official hashtag (#GetSportMedia or #GSM) in every message published. Therefore, in this case the query on DiscoverText was for both the hashtags and the personal account.

In Phase 2 of coding, as aforesaid, the coder analyzed the messages mentioning any sponsor for latent content, to establish the valence of

each post. I have decided to have a valence with only two values (i.e. positive or negative), and to codify all the messages with neither a positive or negative tonality (so that can be considered “neutral”) with the “positive” valence, because mere mentions are still useful in creating buzz around the sponsoring companies.

This codification has, then, been used to create two variables for subsequent quantitative analysis: “Percentage of Positive Messages” and “Percentage of Negative Messages”.

Below some examples of the coded messages.

### **Positive Messages:**

- *Kinder+Sport*: “Kinder comme sponsor officiel... Sympa!”.
- *Mikasa*: “Complimenti a @MIKASA\_IT che con il suo abbigliamento ha accompagnato la @SloVolley in semifinale”.
- *L'Équipe*: “Les #Bleus en UNE de @lequipe! Le @MAVUC est fière de ça!”.
- *Rai*: “Mamma che nazionale! @RaiDue 16.35 Italia/Slovenia i marziani siamo noi”.

### **Negative Messages:**

- *Kinder+Sport*: “Propongo cambio di sponsor da Kinder+Sport a Maina+Gioia”.
- *L'Équipe*: “Et sinon @lequipe vous vous êtes décidé à mettre le #volleyball en une? Ou encore juste bandeau”.
- *Rai*: “Rai Due e semifinale di volley non sono un binomio che porta bene, per ora”.
- *CEV*: “Hey @CEVolleyball: why do you have this challenge-system if the refs are so bad that they see something that never happened?”

Besides using DiscoverText to analyze the messages, I have created a dataset in SPSS 21.0 to store variables for quantitative analysis.

Variables included:

- Total Number of Mentions per Sponsor;
- Mentions per Sponsor per Day;
- Sponsor Company Number of Twitter Followers;
- Sponsor Company Number of Facebook Followers;
- Sponsor Category;
- Functional Fit;
- Percentage of Positive Messages;
- Percentage of Negative Messages.

Correlation analysis has been run among the different variables, in order to see if any of them were significant correlated, especially looking at the total number of mentions by the functional fit and Twitter/Facebook followers by the total number of mentions during the European Championship.

To run multivariate linear regression models to answer both the RQ the variable **Sponsor Category** has been recode into four different dummy variables (one for category with *Technology* as reference).



### 3. Data

In this section all the analyses<sup>87</sup> that have been run to obtain some significant results for the answering of the two Research Questions will be shown. The chapter presents three main parts, explained below.

First, all the **preliminary analyses** and main results are explained (Paragraph 3.1).

Second, the testing of the **RQ1** (does the *total number of mentions* of EuroVolley sponsors vary by *functional fit*?), through a regression model, and results are shown (Paragraph 3.2).

Last, **RQ2** (does a sponsor company's presence on social media [Twitter and Facebook total number of followers] relate to its total number of mentions during the EuroVolley?) is tested, again through a regression model (Paragraph 3.3).

Before advancing to the statistical analysis, it needs to be clarified that, after a visual check on the values of the different variables included in the dataset, *valence*, in this specific case, turns to be a not significant variable from a statistical point of view, since **99.75%** of all the messages were labeled as positive, with *Kinder+Sport* accounting for all the negative-labeled messages, two out of 106 mentions of the single sponsor.

Consequently, both the variables created through the valence have been excluded by the statistical analysis. Instead, the non-statistical interpretation of these values will be explained in the next chapter (*Discussion*).

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<sup>87</sup> All the analyses have been performed using SPSS 21.0.

### 3.1 Preliminary Analyses

As mentioned above, the first preliminary analysis run has been a *Correlation Analysis*, to control if any of the variables used is significantly related to the others. This analysis needs to be done before running a *Linear Regression Model* (used to verify both the RQ), in order to check the *Multicollinearity Assumption* (are the coefficients of the variables useful to explain the model?).

Figure 3.1 represents the output table, which shows the **Pearson Correlation Coefficient** for every combination of variables.

Since only numerical variables can be used to look for correlation, so some of the variables created could not be entered in the analysis.

Namingly, *Sponsor Category* because is a categorical-nominal variable; *Functional Fit* because is a categorical-ordinal variable; all the dummy variables created for the different sponsor categories because, as the original one, are categorical variables, but dichotomous.

**Figure 3.1**  
Correlations

		Total Number of the Mentions	Message per Day	Twitter Followers	Facebook Followers	Percentage of Positive Messages	Percentage of Negative Messages
Total Number of the Mentions	Pearson Correlation	1	1,000	,039	-,175	,247	,178
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000	,908	,568	,416	,561
	N	13	13	11	13	13	13
Message per Day	Pearson Correlation	1,000**	1	,055	-,156	,245	,190
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000		,873	,611	,420	,534
	N	13	13	11	13	13	13
Twitter Followers	Pearson Correlation	,039	,055	1	,822**	,094	-,133
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,908	,873		,002	,784	,698
	N	11	11	11	11	11	11
Facebook Followers	Pearson Correlation	-,175	-,156	,822**	1	,116	,145
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,568	,611	,002		,705	,637
	N	13	13	11	13	13	13
Percentage of Positive Messages	Pearson Correlation	,247	,245	,094	,116	1	,063
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,416	,420	,784	,705		,837
	N	13	13	11	13	13	13
Percentage of Negative Messages	Pearson Correlation	,178	,190	-,133	,145	,063	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,561	,534	,698	,637	,837	
	N	13	13	11	13	13	13

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

**Correlation Matrix (SPSS 21.0)**

As it can be seen in the table, only two combinations of variables resulted correlated.

The two combinations correlated are:

- *Total Number of the Mentions – Messages per Day*. It is not surprising to see this positive correlation since the variable “Messages per Day” is a linear function of “Total Number of the Mentions”: the latter divided per the 10 days of the championship. As a matter of fact, it presents a sig. equal to 0 (so always lower than  $\alpha$ ) and a Pearson’s coefficient equal to 1, the maximum value reachable by this coefficient (that represents the maximum correlation available, in absolute value).
- *Twitter Followers – Facebook Followers*. This correlation is a little bit more a surprise, since looking at the real values of the two variables related to every sponsor it was easily noticeable that on Facebook they have more success (the number of followers for every company is always higher than Twitter ones), but a positive correlation was not necessarily predictable. A reason behind this result can be found in the fact that always more people tend to have accounts on more than one social network, so, holding constant their interests, if they follow a company on one social media platform, the probability for them to follow the same company on any other social networks is really high. From the company side, if they have a social media strategy it is highly probable that they proceed with it on all the social media platforms on which they are present.

Finally, both the variables linked to the valence have been entered in this test in order to have a confirmation of their lack of statistical influence.

We can conclude by saying that, since no combination of covariates results having any kind of correlation (with the exception of the two cases described before), the *Multicollinearity Assumption* is respected, so further analyses can be run to test the research questions of this thesis and, therefore, if used together, the different variables could provide different pieces of information in order to verify the possible dependence between the total number of mentions per sponsor and the functional fit (RQ1) or the presence of each sponsor on social media (RQ2).

Another preliminary analysis run is a *Test for Normality* for the subpopulations of sponsor categories, in order to see if all of them have a normal distribution. As a consequence, *Homoscedasticity* has been tested too.

Among the various possibilities, the **Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test** has been chosen to verify normality of the distributions.

Hereinafter the hypothesis of the *Test for Normality*:

$H_0$ : the sample population is normally distributed

$H_1$ : the sample population is not normally distributed

Figure 3.2 shows the results of the test, with the four subpopulations considered (*Financial Services* consists in only one case so, as the footnote said, it has been omitted). The most representative of the subpopulations is the one made by the technical sponsors (*Volleyball Apparel and Equipment*) since it is the most populated one (5/13 sponsors belong to this category).

Since the significance of it is 0.200, it is always higher than the  $\alpha$  established (generally is chosen an  $\alpha$  equal to 0.05), so we can conclude

that there are not enough evidences to reject the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ); hence, data collected in the dataset came from normally distributed population.

**Figure 3.2**  
**Tests of Normality<sup>c</sup>**

Sponsor Category		Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Total Number of the Mentions	Volleyball Apparel and Equipment	,189	5	,200*	,971	5	,882
	Food and Beverage	,379	3	.	,766	3	,035
	Entertainment	,260	2	.			
	Technology	,260	2	.			

\*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

c. Total Number of the Mentions is constant when Sponsor Category = Financial Services. It has been omitted.

**Kolmogorov-Smirnov Normality Test Output (SPSS 21.0)**

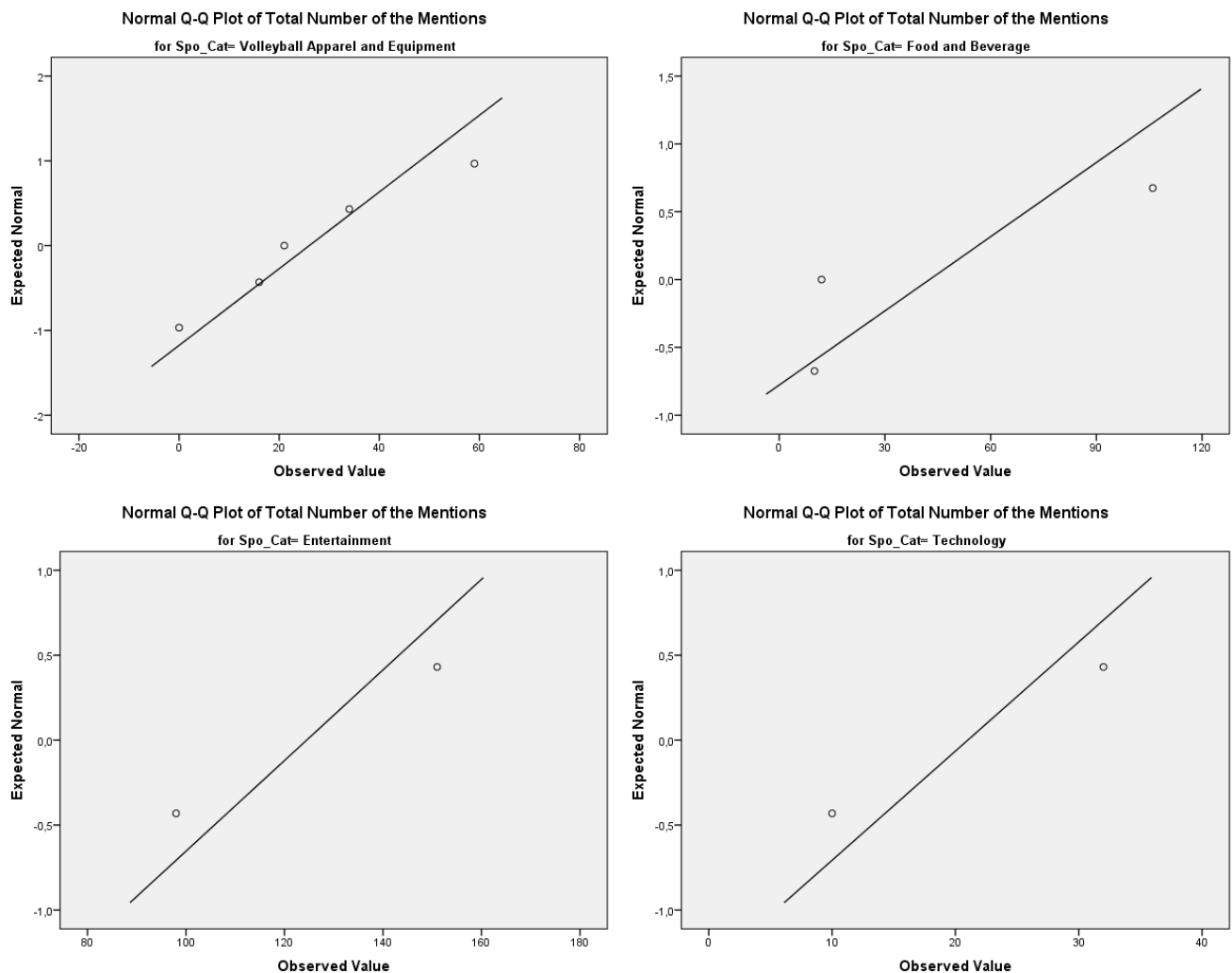
Figure 3.3 presents the **Scatter Plot** of every subpopulation, a visual representation of the distribution that confirms that the categories can be well represented by a normal distribution.

These graphs are useful to verify the *Homoscedasticity* too, since, taking again as representative the *Volleyball Apparel and Equipment* population, the difference between the real value taken by the different cases in the sequence (represented by the dots in the graph) and the theoretical value (represented by the line) is small.

These results (the *Normality* of the distributions and the *Homoscedasticity*) are confirmations of the fact that additional analyses (specially a *Linear Regression Model*) can be run.

Further on in this document the testing of both the Research Questions are presented.

**Figure 3.3**



**Scatter Plot for the subpopulations of Sponsor Categories (SPSS 21.0)**

### 3.2 Research Question 1

RQ1 wants to explore the possible relationship between the total number of the mentions obtained by each sponsor company and their fit with the event taken into consideration (European Volleyball Championship).

To create a valid model useful for the *Linear Regression* only the *Sponsor-Event Fit* variable has been entered, in order to avoid possible distorted results caused by the introduction of other covariates.

Accordingly, the hypotheses for RQ1 are as follow:

H<sub>0</sub>: Functional Fit (Sponsor-Event Fit) does not influence the Total Number of Mentions

H<sub>1</sub>: Functional Fit (Sponsor-Event Fit) influences the Total Number of Mentions

And the model tested has the following mathematical equation:

$$Y(\text{Total Number of Mentions [per Sponsor]}) = b_0 + b_1 (\text{Functional Fit})$$

Below the output tables useful to verify the hypothesis expressed, are presented.

Figure 3.4 shows the output of the *Analysis of Variance*, useful to verify if the coefficients of the covariate present a value of 0 (null hypothesis).

Significance (p-value) is equal to 0.199, so it is always higher than  $\alpha$  and, consequently, we cannot reject the null hypothesis and say that the model has explanatory power.

**Figure 3.4**  
**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	9647,310	1	9647,310	1,869	.199 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	56772,690	11	5161,154		
	Total	66420,000	12			

a. Dependent Variable: Total Number of the Mentions

b. Predictors: (Constant), Sponsor-Event Fit

**AnOVa Output (SPSS 21.0)**

Since the Y variable depends on only one covariate (*Sponsor-Event Fit*) the significance shown in the AnOVa table is the same for the entire model and for the covariate considered, so that, in this particular case and with these sponsor companies, the *Functional Fit* does not influence the *Total Number of Mentions*.

Looking at the raw data it could already be noticed how the values vary widely within the same level of fit (e.g. for the "Average" level we have *CRAI* with just 10 mentions and *Get Sport Media* with 98), so this result led to a change in the research question, and a step forward in the analysis brought on by Delia and Armstrong (2015) with the French Open: create a different kind of categorization of the sponsor companies, between "Main Sponsor" (that has more interests in the success of the sponsorship, but also more visibility, lying on the uniform of the National Teams, in this case) and "Other".

A new variable has been, then, introduced in the dataset, with 5 out of 13 sponsors resulting as "Main" (one for team plus the one of the event): *Mikasa* (EuroVolley 2015); *Generali* (France); *Telekom Slovenije* (Slovenia); *Kinder+Sport* (Italy) and *EfBet* (Bulgaria).

The hypotheses for RQ1 have been, consequently, changed as follow:

H<sub>0</sub>: Type of Sponsor does not influence the Total Number of Mentions

H<sub>1</sub>: Type of Sponsor influences the Total Number of Mentions

*Type of Sponsor* has been used to run another regression with the *Total Number of Mentions*, to verify the new hypothesis.

Figure 3.5 shows the values assumed by the coefficients ( $b_p$ ) and if the variables included are helpful in explaining the dependent variable Y.

Our variable of interest, *Type of Sponsor*, this time is significant for an  $\alpha$ -level of 0.05, presenting a p-value equal to 0.031, and the effect on the dependent variable is positive, being  $b_1$  equal to 87.750. So when the sponsor considered is a "Main" one, the mean of the total mentions it can obtain increases by around 88, and the new hypothesis of the RQ1 is verified.



**Figure 3.5**  
**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	28,250	22,035		1,282	,226
Type of Sponsor	87,750	35,530	,597	2,470	,031

a. Dependent Variable: Total Number of the Mentions

**Coefficients Output (SPSS 21.0)**

To put it in a nutshell, before moving on to the second research question, it can be affirmed that the functional fit, in this particular case (EuroVolley 2015) and with these sponsors, does not influence the total number of mentions, but being the main sponsor does. The implications of these results will be deeply analyzed in the *Discussion* chapter.

### 3.3 Research Question 2

RQ2 wants to explore the possible relationship between the total number of the mentions obtained by each sponsor company and their presence on social media (Twitter and Facebook total number of followers).

Since, as mentioned in the Preliminary Analysis, *Twitter Followers* and *Facebook Followers* are correlated, in order to avoid having redundancy in the model, only one of them has been kept and the choice fell on *Facebook Followers*, because all of the sponsor companies have a Facebook page, while not all of them have a Twitter account (*CRAI* and *Lidl Bulgaria* do not have one).

Hence, the hypotheses for RQ2 are as follow:

H<sub>0</sub>: Sponsor company presence on social media (Facebook Followers) does not influence the Total Number of Mentions

H<sub>1</sub>: Sponsor company presence on social media (Facebook Followers) influences the Total Number of Mentions

The model tested, therefore, presents the following mathematical equation:

$$Y(\text{Total Number of Mentions [per Sponsor]}) = b_0 + b_1 (\text{Facebook Followers})$$

Also in this case the model used is a simple *Univariate Linear Regression*, since the only independent variable is *Facebook Followers*.

As for the regression run with the *Sponsor-Event Fit* variable, the output of the *Analysis of Variance* (Figure 3.6) shows both the goodness of the entire model and the significance of our covariate. Significance (p-value), this time, is equal to 0.568, so it is always higher than  $\alpha$  and, consequently, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected, so that it cannot be verified if the model has explanatory power.

**Figure 3.6**  
**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2030,199	1	2030,199	,347	,568 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	64389,801	11	5853,618		
	Total	66420,000	12			

a. Dependent Variable: Total Number of the Mentions

b. Predictors: (Constant), Facebook Followers

**AnOVa Output (SPSS 21.0)**

Having obtained these negative results, to control every possibility, the same analysis has been run substituting the covariate with the *Twitter Followers* variable, but the results remain the same.

The significance in the AnOVa test is equal to 0.908, a value even higher than the one obtained before, but leading to the same conclusion: the overall model does not have explanatory power.

We can conclude by saying that, in this case and with these sponsors, the presence on social media of the companies does not influence their total number of mentions. Consequently, the reasons behind the differences present should be searched in other variables.

Further on this document, discussion about these results are proposed, in order to understand why, in this particular event, people have relied on some specific sponsors rather than others, proven that being a “follower” of a specific company does not imply being involved in all of its activities. On the other hand, these negative outcome can be the results of the little effort many of the sponsors have brought on the social media in order to let potential/actual customers, fans and curious know about the involvement in this kind of event.

## 4. Discussion

This chapter will be devoted to the discussion of the results previously exhibited, in light of the existing literature and, in particular, of the results obtained by Delia and Armstrong (2015), on which this study has been based.

Although cautionary in nature, and limited by the low number of sponsors available for this event, the general results strengthen the possibility of following the road of social media in the assessment of the influence of sponsor-sponsee functional fit and of sponsor companies categories, along with the finding that a functional categorization of the sponsor that differs from the traditional one can be the right avenue to follow in order to evaluate sponsorship effectiveness in empirical environments similar to the one analyzed in this study.

### 4.1 Frequency of Sponsor Companies Mentions

Sponsor mentions frequencies are shown in Figure 4.1. Of the 39,761 messages collected, only 806 (2% of the total) mentioned at least one of the EuroVolley 2015 sponsors. Even if the percentage of the mentions is very low, comparing to the conversations that have raised during the event, it is higher than the percentage seen with French Open, where only the 0.39% of the total tweets (they only used Twitter in the collection of data) contain a sponsor mention. However, it should be considered that the content of mentions and the frequency of mentions can change rapidly<sup>88</sup>.

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<sup>88</sup> Meenaghan et al., *op.cit.*, p.455.

**Figure 4.1**

	<b>Total Mentions</b>	<b>Company Generated</b>	<b>Replies/Retweets of Company Generated*</b>
<b>Volleyball Apparel and Equipment</b>			
Mikasa	34	2	6
Champion	0	n/a	n/a
Erréa	59	10	47
Gerflor	21	8	45
Asics	16	0	0
<b>Food and Beverage</b>			
Kinder+Sport	106	16	76
CRAI	10	2	3
Lidl Bulgaria	12	10	46
<b>Entertainment</b>			
EfBet	151	138	2
Get Sport Media	98	60	69
<b>Financial Services</b>			
Generali	257	131	309
<b>Technology</b>			
Unendo Energia	10	9	1
Telekom Slovenije	32	6	28
<b>Total Mentions Collected</b>	806	-	-
<b>Total Messages Collected</b>	39.671	-	-
<b>Percent of Total</b>	2%	-	-

\* This value represents also the replies on Facebook, that DiscoverText did not count when collecting data.

#### **Personal elaboration of the Mentions of EuroVolley 2015 Sponsors**

This difference may be given by the fact that the number of sponsors in the Volleyball European Championship is lower than the French Open (13 vs 22), consequently it is more probable that all the sponsors have received a higher visibility during the event, and that the two sports considered (Volleyball and Tennis) are followed in very different way from the global audience: Tennis is far more popular than Volleyball, as a study brought on by *MostPopularSports.net* shows, with Tennis ranked 4<sup>th</sup> for popularity in the world and Volleyball 8<sup>th</sup><sup>89</sup>. Moreover, Tennis is a richer sport than Volleyball, as a list of the ten most paid sports created by *TopEndSports.com*, on the base of Forbes data, confirms, with Tennis at the 7<sup>th</sup> place and Volleyball out of the ranking<sup>90</sup>, so Tennis can appeal more sponsor companies than Volleyball.

<sup>89</sup> <http://mostpopularsports.net/in-the-world>

<sup>90</sup> <http://www.topendsports.com/world/lists/earnings/athletes-paid-sports.htm>

Going in deep in the numbers, *Generali* is the company with the highest mentions (257) but, at the same time, it has one of the highest company generated rate, with 51% of the messages being created by the official accounts of the firm itself. This decision, of being constantly present on social media during the event, has turned to be the right one, considered that the response from the web users has been the highest too: 309 replies or retweets of the company generated messages, so, every message written by the company has generated, on average, two replies from the users.

To conclude, as Delia and Armstrong already stated, if we consider the implications for the “use of social media as a tool to gauge sponsorship effectiveness”<sup>91</sup>, the low number of sponsor-related messages during an international sporting event, with an almost global media coverage, may indicate that a qualitative approach in the assessment of sponsorship through social media might be advantageous, since this results can, eventually, harm sponsor companies media strategy, that may need to be reconsidered, in order to better stimulate the conversations (and the buzz) on the web.

## **4.2 Sponsor Valence**

As explained in the *Data* chapter, valence appeared to be not significant for the analysis, since nearly all the messages have positive content, and the only negative message (retweeted one time) maintains a funny tone.

This result, even if it needs to be interpreted with caution, may, hence, indicate a successful performance obtained by every company, due to the

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<sup>91</sup> Delia and Armstrong, *op.cit.*, p.192.

general positive attitude that can be deduced analyzing the content of the messages, and confirmed by Meenaghan et al. (2013).

Again, this positive difference from the study run on the French Open (where the percentage of negative messages was still low, just 10%, but higher than the 0.25% observed with EuroVolley 2015) can be explained considering the audience composition of the two events: with the French Open the audience was global and composed by fans of the tennis players, tennis enthusiasts but also, and primarily, by curious, attracted by the spectacularity of the event (and some tweets used as examples in the study confirms this). Instead, the Volleyball European Championship, involving only European players and being not globally broadcasted, attracts a lower number of people, concentrated in European countries and, in general, keen on Volleyball (as a matter of fact, the majority of the messages not included in the final dataset were about technicalities, rules and players skills).

Consequently, for future researches willing to use social media in order to assess sponsorship effectiveness, it may be useful taking into consideration the audience composition and the nature of the event itself, since sportive tournaments renowned and followed all over the world attracts a higher number of people, but accompanied by a higher variance in culture, knowledge of the sport and of the sponsors of that particular event; while a smaller event attracts less people but with a deeper knowledge of the sport and, likely, the activities linked to the event.

Moreover, as Jackson (2009) stated in his work, firms that want to enter in a sponsorship relationship with a sporting event/team need to consider the space of who they will invade, so to be seen as a natural part of it by

the audience (attendees or not depends on the objectives of the sponsorship itself).

### **4.3 Sponsor Social Media Presence**

Moving to the relation between the success of a sponsorship, represented here by the number of mentions obtained by a sponsor company on the two social networks considered, and the presence of the brand on the same social media platforms, the result does not stray far from the original study.

In both cases, even if, as said before, the results of the quantitative analysis of the sponsor-related conversation on social media during EuroVolley 2015 should be interpreted with caution, the correlation between these two elements is low or null, suggesting that brands do not need to be worried about having a low number of followers and, consequently, limiting the possible effort in activate a sponsorship of an event on social media.

As a matter of fact, it has been proven that, in general, when people follows or likes a company or a product on social networks it is to express a mere interest, and not to be fully informed or updated about the activities brought on by the brand itself or linked to the product, considering also that only the 15% of the users on social media are active users<sup>92</sup>.

However, the negative outcome could also be depended on the fact that some of the sponsors did not really activate in order to let their

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<sup>92</sup> Sysomos, *op.cit.*, p.2.



followers/fans know about their involvement in this event through the sponsorship.

A case study that needs to be mentioned is the one of *Champion*, the American manufacturer of sportswear that is one of the two Gold Sponsors of the event. Even if it appeared on the first page of the leaflet mentioning its being a "Gold Sponsor and Official CEV partner thru 2015"<sup>93</sup>, during the whole tournament, both on- and off-line it did not make any effort to show its connection to the event and the confederation too. Instead, in order to create buzz around itself, it could have exploited simply its brand name (Champion means "someone or something [such as a team] that has won a contest or competition especially in sports"<sup>94</sup>) through the creation, for example, of an online contest with the use of the hashtag "#Champion", considering that a lot of messages already mention this word when speak about the real winner of the Championship or who they want to win.

This circumstance is emblematic of the "serendipitous opportunities that may present themselves to sponsor companies or sport organizations through active monitoring of social networking sites"<sup>95</sup>. Social media, indeed, may offer firms new and unusual ways to discover potential sponsorship or endorsement engagements.

#### **4.4 Functional Fit**

When considering the possible relationship between functional fit and the total number of mentions (it already differs from Delia and Armstrong study in which, in EuroVolley 2015 case, *Valence* cannot be used as

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<sup>93</sup> Official Programme leaflet of EuroVolley 2015.

<sup>94</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

<sup>95</sup> Delia and Armstrong, *op.cit.*, p.193.

dependent variable, as explained in the *Data* chapter), this thesis allows to add to the growing body of sponsorship congruence literature a new brick for understanding the use of sponsor-event fit.

As stated in the *Theoretical Contextualization*, not always a consistent congruence between sponsor and sponsee is useful to achieve a success with the sponsorship (Jagre et al., 2001), and this finding is confirmed by the statistical results obtained with this analysis: according to the type of event analyzed and the sponsors considered, functional fit does not influence the possible effectiveness of a sponsorship, a confirmation of Delia and Armstrong findings.

For future analyses of the same kind of the one used here and in the French Open study, it can be useful to look for other kind of congruence, and not just functional, since different events can bring to different results in the potential influence of the match-up used.

#### **4.4.1 “Main” vs “Other” Sponsors**

Perhaps the most interesting finding of the quantitative assessment, which goes beyond the overall drought of sponsor mentions during the Volleyball European Championship, was the relative success of the sponsors considered “Main” for the four finalists’ team and the event itself.

From the analysis of latent content of the messages stored in the dataset, it came to the surface that, in this specific case and with these companies as sponsors, regardless their level of functional fit, sponsoring brands labeled as “Main” are the ones that have created more buzz during the event, but, on the other hand, have also put more effort in activating effectively on social media, becoming a natural part, as said before, in the conversations generated by the fans.

As a consequence, users and fans, overcoming the “invisible barrier” outlined by Jackson (2009), have started trust them enough to go on their Facebook page or Twitter account in order to know information about broadcast times or matches results, instead of using the event official page/account or the official website.

As illustrated in the *Theoretical Contextualization*, effective activation plays an important role for the sponsor companies to be remembered, after the event, and to be perceived as authentic towards the event itself. Differently from Delia and Armstrong study, with EuroVolley 2015 the majority of the sponsors have interacted with users on social media, obtaining positive buzz in return. As clarified before, the only negative case is *Champion*, which is also the only one that has received no mentions at all.

Below two cases of positive activation, useful to strengthen the outcomes of the statistical analysis: *Generali* (main sponsor of Team France, winner of the tournament), and *EfBet* (main sponsor of Team Bulgaria).

- **Generali:** the Italian assurance company has been able to effectively activate its sponsorship remaining always updated during the event. Moreover, being the main sponsor of France (in the *Data* chapter the implications of being main have already be explained), it had received more visibility during the event, due simply to the fact that France has played more matches than the others teams (which have been eliminated during the championship), and exploiting the resulting cheerfulness surrounding French fans. It needs to be noted that the firm did not have set on any particular activity to be talked about, but just the performance of the sponsored team has helped increasing the

general buzz around it and the consequent positive attitude toward it, despite its functional fit was “Weak”.

- **EfBet:** the activity launched by the betting company has already been described in the chapter about *Method*, and the fact that, as *Generali*, it has received the second highest number of mentions (151) suggests that the company has been able to create a positive tie with the event in the mind of its target audience, composed mostly by the fans of Team Bulgaria (the Facebook page and the Twitter account is run in Bulgarian without translation) and to enter the community of passionate followers, introducing itself as a fan too (it can be easily noticed by the tone of the company generated messages), in spite of, again, the “Weak” congruence.

To put it in a nutshell, recent results led to consider beneficial for sponsors to leverage on “community” aspect of social media platforms in an effort to “create meaningful relationships with consumers, which could possibly encourage loyalty and revenue generation”<sup>96</sup>, and, as a consequence, sponsorship literature should open to the use of this new wave to examine the effects of sponsorship activation on social media, considering also recent sponsors activities in concurrence with sporting event (e.g. “#CheersToSochi”: *McDonald’s* during 2014 Winter Olympic Games<sup>97</sup>; “#VolleyHeroes”: *CEV* during EuroVolley 2015), launched to allow consumers to engage with athletes or team participating in the event.

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<sup>96</sup> Delia and Armstrong, *op.cit.*, p.195.

<sup>97</sup> <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/olympics/2014/01/16/mcdonalds-cheers-to-sochi-social-media-campaign-athletes-fans/4504381/>

## Conclusions and Limitations

Sponsorship of sporting events, as explained before in this study, has become an increasingly attractive form of corporate communication, so to arise interest in the scholars during the last decade. However, only traditional research methods (e.g. surveys, focus groups, individual interviews) have been employed in order to comprehend the winds behind this new trend and how to gauge its possible effectiveness.

Hence, the underlying purpose of this thesis was to make a step forward on the route taken by Delia and Armstrong in understanding how the monitoring of **social media activity** can be a useful measure of **sponsorship effectiveness**, in order to create a new value for professionals (primarily in the field of sport) and scholars.

To do this, an international event (the men's *Volleyball European Championship*), that presents features and audience composition different from the French Open, subject of the original study, has been chosen and buzz and sentiment on social media of its sponsoring companies have been assessed.

The findings of the exploratory method used in this thesis allowed to confirm the usefulness of social media as a tool for research into sponsorship effectiveness. **Functional fit**, in this case and with these sponsors, does not seem to be significant in the explanation of the **effectiveness** of the sponsorship considered, which marks a point in favor of the scholars that assert that congruence should not be the main focus of companies, when deciding to sponsor a team/event<sup>98</sup>.

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<sup>98</sup> Representatives of this wing of the literature are Coppetti, Wentzelb, Tomczakb and Henkel.

Moreover, a step forward in the literature has been made through the discovery that the analysis of the mentions of the sponsors labeled as **main** versus “other” can be a right way to understand the effectiveness of sponsorship. This categorization has been overlooked so far in general and more specifically in the context of social media.

Since social networks are taking an always greater part in the life of consumers, scholars and professionals are keeping on looking for new ways to better understand the possible outcomes and implications of sponsorship. Therefore future researchers willing to evaluate sponsorship should consider using social media platforms as a valuable tool.

Moving to the **limitations**, although this research adds to the study run by Delia and Armstrong, it also shares the same limitations: *Social Media Employed; Demographic Profile of Social Networks Users; Event Type; Limited Number of Sponsor Mentions; Functional Fit of Sponsors; Assessment of Buzz and Sentiment.*

**Social Media Employed.** Only two of the existing social networks have been used (Facebook and Twitter) to analyze conversations raised during EuroVolley 2015. Proven that other social media are reaching the spotlight (i.e. for this kind of study *Instagram* above all), future researchers should take into consideration including other social media platforms, for a more comprehensive assessment of the research’s goals.

**Demographic Profile of Social Networks Users.** From Sysomos data (2014) emerges that, on average, about 47% of social media users are under the age of 29. In this thesis it has not been possible to study the true demographic distribution of the users that have interacted during the event, but future research should consider this aspect.

**Event Type.** In the current thesis EuroVolley 2015 has been chosen as empirical environment, but, despite its being an international tournament, its media coverage and audience size pale when compared to mega-events like the Olympic Games. Therefore, future researchers may consider exploiting these size events to have a broader view on social media influence on sponsorship, especially when global sponsors, having a worldwide audience in terms of social networks, are involved.

**Limited Number of Sponsor Mentions.** Even if the total number of messages collected was good for this type of analysis (39,671), only 806 contained a sponsor mention.

**Functional Fit of Sponsors.** Even if in this study two different kind of congruence indicators have been used, it could be useful in future studies to consider more proxies of fit and the combination of two (or more) of them.

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