

Sport Sponsorship as a Strategic Management Tool for Shared Value Creation: A Human-Centered Framework

Le sponsoring sportif comme outil de management stratégique pour la création de valeur partagée: un cadre centré sur l'humain

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Abstract:

Sport sponsorship is commonly evaluated as a communication and marketing asset, but this view captures only part of its strategic role. This article examines how sponsorship can create value for firms while also producing outcomes that matter to athletes, fans, employees, host communities, and other affected stakeholders. We use a structured integrative review of peer-reviewed research published mainly between 2019 and 2026, together with selected foundational studies on corporate social responsibility (CSR), stakeholder theory, sponsorship, and creating shared value. Across this literature, five mechanisms recur: strategic fit, perceived authenticity, stakeholder voice, engagement and co-creation, and credible outcome measurement. The review also shows that these mechanisms are vulnerable to perceived self-serving motives, inconsistency between CSR claims and wider corporate conduct, scandal, and short-term activation. On this basis, we develop the Human-Centered Shared Value Sponsorship (HCSV-S) framework. The framework treats sponsorship not simply as exposure, but as a governed relationship in which social and business value are expected to develop together and to be assessed over time. Eight research propositions and a managerial diagnostic matrix are proposed to support future empirical testing and more disciplined sponsorship design.

Keywords: Sport sponsorship; Shared value; Corporate social responsibility; Stakeholder engagement; Authenticity.

Résumé:

Le sponsoring sportif est généralement considéré comme un outil de communication et de marketing, mais cette conception ne couvre qu'une partie de son rôle stratégique. Cet article examine comment le sponsoring peut créer de la valeur pour les entreprises tout en générant des résultats importants pour les athlètes, les supporters, les employés, les communautés d'accueil et les autres parties prenantes concernées. Nous avons recours à une revue intégrative structurée des recherches évaluées par les pairs, publiées principalement entre 2019 et 2026, ainsi qu'à une sélection d'études fondamentales consacrées à la responsabilité sociale des entreprises (RSE), à la théorie des parties prenantes, au sponsoring et à la création de valeur partagée. Dans cette littérature, cinq mécanismes récurrents sont identifiés : l'adéquation stratégique, l'authenticité perçue, la prise en compte de la voix des parties prenantes, l'engagement et la co-crédation, ainsi que la mesure crédible des résultats. La revue montre également que ces mécanismes sont vulnérables aux motivations perçues comme intéressées, aux incohérences entre les déclarations de RSE et le comportement global de l'entreprise, aux scandales et aux actions d'activation à court terme. Sur cette base, nous développons le cadre du sponsoring à valeur partagée centré sur l'humain (HCSV-S). Ce cadre considère le sponsoring non pas simplement comme un moyen d'accroître la visibilité, mais comme une relation gouvernée dans laquelle la valeur sociale et la valeur économique sont appelées à se développer conjointement et à être évaluées dans le temps. Huit propositions de recherche ainsi qu'une matrice de diagnostic managérial sont proposées afin de soutenir les recherches empiriques futures et une conception plus rigoureuse du sponsoring.

Mots-clés: sponsoring sportif ; valeur partagée ; responsabilité sociale des entreprises ; engagement des parties prenantes ; durabilité.

1. Introduction

Sport sponsorship brings commercial activity into settings that already carry strong social meaning. Clubs, athletes, local events, and major tournaments are tied to identity, memory, and community in ways that ordinary advertising rarely is. That closeness gives sponsors access to attention and relationships, but it also raises expectations. Stakeholders can welcome a sponsor's contribution and still question whether its social claims are credible, whether the benefits are fairly distributed, and whether the commitment will last beyond the campaign.

The earlier sponsorship literature mainly examined awareness, image transfer, fit, and purchase intentions. This emphasis was understandable because sponsors needed evidence that rights fees and activation budgets could produce marketing returns. Yet the field has moved. Cornwell and Kwon (2020) show that sponsorship research has devoted substantial attention to audience response while giving less attention to management of the sponsorship process as an ecosystem. At the same time, research on CSR in sport has increasingly asked whether socially responsible initiatives create value not only for firms, but also for communities and other stakeholders. The result is a convergence between sponsorship, CSR, sustainability, engagement, and creating shared value.

This convergence matters because the relationship between sponsorship and CSR is not automatically positive. Demirel (2020) found that sport sponsorship can contribute to a socially responsible image, especially when consumers perceive fit between sponsor and team. Uhrich, Koenigstorfer, and Groeppel-Klein (2014) similarly showed that CSR-linked sponsorship can strengthen brand evaluations under particular conditions. More recent studies add important qualifications: sincerity, motive attribution, stakeholder involvement, credibility, and consistency all shape whether audiences view an initiative as authentic or strategic theatre. Kang and Matsuoka (2023), for example, show how overlap between responsible and irresponsible corporate domains can trigger negative inferences. Walzel et al. (2024) further highlight the managerial and ethical challenge of using sponsorship as sustainability communication without slipping into greenwashing or sportswashing.

The concept of creating shared value offers a promising way to organize these insights. Porter and Kramer (2011) argued that business and social value need not be treated as competing outcomes. In sport, the shared value idea is especially compelling because sport is both an economic platform and a social institution. Cook et al. (2023) show that major sport events and sponsors can create value for multiple actors when capabilities, consistency, cultivation, and long-term relationships are aligned. Hills, Walker, and Barry (2019) demonstrate that a sport-based health intervention can simultaneously generate social outcomes and business-related benefits. These studies shift the question from “Does sponsorship work?” to “For whom does it work, through what mechanisms, and under what conditions does the value last?”

This article addresses that broader question by revisiting the relationship between CSR and sport sponsorship from a strategic management perspective. Its focus is not only on what audiences think after exposure to a sponsorship, but also on how the relationship is designed, governed, experienced, and evaluated. Fans, athletes, employees, volunteers, community organizations, and host residents are therefore treated as stakeholders who can influence value creation rather than simply as audiences or beneficiaries.

Three objectives guide the article. First, it brings together recent evidence on CSR-linked sport sponsorship, shared value, authenticity, stakeholder engagement, and sponsorship risk. Second, it identifies where these streams remain conceptually disconnected, especially between audience-response research and research on governance, participation, and social outcomes. Third, it develops the Human-Centered Shared Value Sponsorship (HCSV-S) framework and a set of propositions for empirical testing. The argument is deliberately conditional: sponsorship is more likely to create durable shared value when strategic fit and authenticity are accompanied by meaningful stakeholder voice, participation, and transparent measurement over time.

2. From Corporate Responsibility to Shared Value in Sport

2.1 CSR as obligation, strategy, and relationship

The intellectual history of CSR contains a persistent tension between economic responsibility and broader social obligation. Early work by Davis (1960) and later syntheses by Carroll (1999) showed that corporate responsibility cannot be reduced to philanthropy. It includes economic viability, legal compliance, ethical conduct, and discretionary contributions to society. McWilliams and Siegel (2001) then positioned CSR within a strategic theory-of-the-firm perspective, emphasizing that responsible action can influence demand, differentiation, and organizational capabilities.

Evidence from the Algerian business context reinforces this strategic view. Fellague, Kherchi, and Haddou (2019), surveying 220 respondents across 45 firms, reported that CSR was often recognized but not yet embedded through formal strategy or systematic prioritization. This distinction between adopting CSR language and institutionalizing CSR practice is important for the present framework, because sponsorship can create durable value only when responsibility is anchored in organizational routines rather than episodic communication.

The strategic turn in CSR created both opportunity and suspicion. On the one hand, integrating social concerns into core strategy can move responsibility away from episodic donations and toward sustained organizational commitments. On the other hand, when CSR becomes too visibly instrumental, stakeholders may interpret the initiative as self-serving. This dilemma is particularly salient in sport because sponsors operate in highly emotional settings where audiences are often sensitive to authenticity and identity. A sponsorship may therefore generate goodwill, but it can also invite close scrutiny of the sponsor’s wider conduct.

Stakeholder theory provides a useful corrective to a narrow business-case interpretation. A stakeholder view asks who is affected, whose interests are heard, and how value is distributed. In sport, these questions extend beyond consumers to athletes, employees, volunteers, local residents, governing bodies, media, public authorities, and vulnerable groups reached through social programs. A human-centered approach does not reject business value; rather, it treats business value as more credible when it emerges alongside visible value for people and communities.

2.2 Sport sponsorship as an engagement platform

Traditionally, sponsorship has been defined as a commercial exchange in which a sponsor provides money, goods, services, or expertise in return for rights that can be exploited for communication and marketing objectives. That definition remains useful, but it understates what modern sponsorship has become. Sport sponsorship now operates across physical venues, broadcast, social media, athlete channels, digital communities, hospitality, retail, and public-space activation. It is less a single message than a platform for repeated interaction.

Cornwell (2019) argued for less emphasis on sponsorship as advertising and more emphasis on sponsorship-linked marketing as authentic engagement. This distinction is important. Advertising can be purchased without deep relational involvement; sponsorship usually requires coordination among the sponsor, sport property, athletes, fans, media, and other actors. The quality of these relationships affects the meaning that audiences attach to the sponsorship. Sponsorship fit, for example, is not merely a cognitive association. It can signal whether the partnership makes sense, whether the sponsor understands the community it has entered, and whether the relationship appears likely to persist.

Recent empirical work reinforces this relational interpretation. Koronios et al. (2022), using 2,752 questionnaires, found that sincerity, awareness, attitudes, and fan-related variables were important in explaining actual purchases, not only stated intentions. Behnam et al. (2023) showed that perceived CSR can support value-in-use through customer engagement, with co-production strengthening the relationship. These findings suggest that value is not delivered unilaterally by the sponsor; it is experienced and partly produced through participation.

2.3 Creating shared value through sport

Creating shared value (CSV) reframes the relationship between business performance and social progress. Rather than treating social investment as a cost added after commercial decisions, CSV asks whether organizations can design activities that improve competitive position while addressing meaningful social needs. The idea has attracted criticism when it is used too loosely, but it remains analytically useful when social and business outcomes are both specified and measured.

The shared-value logic also builds on an earlier stream of case-based work by the authors. Kherchi and Fellague (2015) examined shared value as a business model in the pharmaceutical sector; Kherchi, Fellague, and Haddou (2018) analyzed how Novo Nordisk combined social and economic value; and later studies extended this logic to Volvo and Nestlé (Kherchi, Fellague, & Haddou, 2019a, 2019b). Across these contexts, a recurring insight is that shared value becomes more credible when social needs are linked to core capabilities, value-chain relationships, and a durable business logic. The present article extends that reasoning into sport sponsorship, where the human and relational dimensions of value creation are especially visible.

Sport provides a fertile setting for shared value because its social reach is unusually broad. Health promotion, inclusion, youth development, environmental awareness, civic pride, education, and community cohesion can all be connected to sport. At the same time, sponsors and sport properties seek reputation, loyalty, market development, employee pride, relationship quality, and revenue. Hills et al. (2019) provide a concrete example: a sport-based health intervention generated business-related

outcomes alongside health and wellness outcomes, although the balance between them was not uniform. The important lesson is that shared value should not be assumed; it should be examined at the level of actual outcomes.

Cook et al. (2023) deepen this perspective by locating shared value in a major sport event ecosystem. Their interviews with senior practitioners indicated that capabilities, consistency, and cultivation help sponsors and event hosts create value across actors. The study is particularly relevant because it moves beyond a dyadic sponsor–event relationship. Host citizens, athletes, and consumers also participate in and receive value from the ecosystem. This broader perspective is consistent with the human-centered approach developed here.

3. Authenticity, Sincerity, and the Human Meaning of CSR-Linked Sponsorship

CSR-linked sponsorship works partly through interpretation. Stakeholders ask—often implicitly—why the sponsor is involved, whether the cause fits the sponsor’s conduct, and whether the program is likely to continue after the cameras leave. These judgments are not peripheral. They are central to whether a social initiative is treated as credible.

Experimental evidence has repeatedly shown the importance of motive attribution. Habitzreuter and Koenigstorfer (2021) found that environmental CSR-linked sponsorship can improve attitudes toward a sponsor when message orientation and audience regulatory focus fit, with perceived philanthropic motives playing a mediating role. Park, Ahn, and Kim (2024) found that CSR-linked sponsorship of sport events generated stronger purchase intention than comparable art-event sponsorship, with perceived sincerity mediating the effect. These findings illustrate a broader principle: people respond not only to what a company does, but to what they believe the action says about the company’s motives.

Authenticity becomes especially important when the social claim is close to areas where the company has been criticized. Kang and Matsuoka (2023) show that overlap between a company’s CSR domain and an area of corporate social irresponsibility can create a negative pathway through perceived firm-serving motives. In other words, CSR does not erase contradiction. If a sponsorship says “health” while the wider business model visibly creates health concerns, or says “environment” while operational practices move in the opposite direction, audiences may interpret the initiative as reputational defence rather than responsibility.

This is where a human-centered perspective adds analytical value. Authenticity is usually measured as a stakeholder perception, yet that perception is shaped by observable conduct. People are more likely to regard a program as credible when those affected have had a genuine opportunity to shape it, when partners and athletes can speak about it without sounding scripted, when benefits continue beyond a publicity window, and when the sponsor is prepared to acknowledge weak results as well as successes. In this sense, authenticity is not only a communication outcome; it is partly produced through the way the sponsorship is governed and experienced.

The same logic applies to sustainability communication. Walzel et al. (2024) identify credibility, authenticity, long-term orientation, governance, athlete involvement, and ecological implementation as characteristics of sustainable sport sponsorship. Their work also warns that excessive or inconsistent sustainability communication can trigger washing concerns. This risk has become more salient as sportwashing and greenwashing have entered public debate. The implication for sponsors is uncomfortable but constructive: visibility increases accountability. The more prominently a brand uses sport to communicate social responsibility, the more reasonable it becomes for stakeholders to compare the message with the company’s wider record.

3.1 What a human-centered perspective adds

The term human-centered is used here in a specific and limited sense. It does not replace stakeholder theory, co-creation, or CSR; rather, it changes the unit of attention within the sponsorship process. A stakeholder approach identifies whose interests matter. A co-creation approach explains how actors combine resources. The human-centered perspective developed in this article asks an additional set of questions: whose lived experience informs the definition of the social problem, who has a meaningful voice in design and implementation, how benefits and burdens are distributed, and whether reported outcomes correspond to changes that stakeholders themselves can recognize.

This distinction is important for strategic management. A sponsorship may be well matched, professionally activated, and commercially successful while still creating weak or uneven social value. The HCSV-S framework therefore treats stakeholder voice, fair participation, and transparent learning as governance mechanisms rather than as optional communication tactics. Their role is to connect strategic intent with stakeholder experience and, in turn, with the legitimacy and continuity of the partnership.

4. Research Gap and Guiding Questions

The literature provides evidence on most of the individual elements of the CSR-sponsorship relationship, but they are rarely considered as one strategic process. Sponsorship studies have examined fit, identification, attitudes, purchase intentions, and leveraging. CSR research has emphasized authenticity, motive attribution, and responsibility. Engagement and service research has addressed participation and co-creation, while shared-value research has focused on simultaneous social and business outcomes. A separate body of work examines scandal, inconsistency, greenwashing, and sportswashing risks. What remains underdeveloped is an explanation of how these mechanisms connect from sponsorship design through stakeholder experience to longer-term social and organizational outcomes.

The practical gap follows the same pattern. Sponsorship is still often managed as a campaign sequence: select a property or cause, activate the rights, generate visibility, and measure communication response. A shared-value logic requires managers to start earlier and stay longer. They need to identify a material issue, determine whether the sponsor and sport property have relevant capabilities, involve affected stakeholders, specify both social and business outcomes, and decide how those outcomes will be followed after the visible activation period. The framework developed here is intended to organize that broader managerial process.

The article is guided by three questions: (RQ1) Which mechanisms most consistently explain when CSR-linked sport sponsorship produces credible stakeholder responses? (RQ2) How can sponsorship create social and business value simultaneously without reducing CSR to a promotional instrument? (RQ3) Which governance and measurement conditions are required for shared value to persist beyond the immediate sponsorship activation period?

5. Methodology: Structured Integrative Review

This article uses a structured integrative review. The choice reflects the nature of the problem rather than a claim to systematic-review exhaustiveness. The literature relevant to the research questions cuts across CSR, sport sponsorship, stakeholder theory, shared value, sustainability communication, consumer behaviour, and engagement, and it includes conceptual papers as well as qualitative, experimental, survey-based, and mixed-method studies. An integrative design therefore allows findings from different traditions to be compared and used for theory building.

The contemporary search focused primarily on peer-reviewed work published from 2019 to 1 October 2026. Earlier studies were retained when they introduced concepts or relationships that remain central to the argument. Searches were conducted through scholarly publisher platforms and DOI-indexed

journal records, including Taylor & Francis, Elsevier/ScienceDirect, Emerald, Wiley, and Springer, and were supplemented by backward citation tracing from highly relevant studies. Search combinations included terms such as “CSR sport sponsorship,” “CSR-linked sport sponsorship,” “shared value sport,” “sport sponsorship authenticity,” “sport sponsorship sincerity,” “sport sustainability communication,” “sport stakeholder engagement,” and “sport sponsorship risk.” The search was iterative: terms and references were refined when recurring mechanisms appeared across otherwise separate research streams.

Study selection was based on relevance to the conceptual problem rather than on a single research design. A study was retained when it addressed sport sponsorship, CSR in sport, shared value through sport, or a directly relevant stakeholder or engagement mechanism; when it contributed theory or evidence on value creation, authenticity, sincerity, attitudes, behaviour, stakeholder participation, social or business outcomes, or sponsorship risk; and when the underlying method or conceptual contribution was sufficiently clear to support interpretation. Peer-reviewed journal articles were prioritized. Practitioner material and organizational examples were used only as illustrations, not as evidence equivalent to peer-reviewed research. Studies with no explanatory connection to CSR, sponsorship, or shared value in the sport context were not part of the core synthesis.

The synthesis proceeded in four stages. First, each core study was read for its context, design, focal mechanism, principal findings, and stated boundary conditions. Second, recurring explanations were grouped into five themes: strategic fit; authenticity and motive attribution; engagement and co-creation; social and business outcomes; and risk, contradiction, and consistency. Third, findings were compared across methods and contexts, with particular attention to tensions—for example, positive CSR-linked sponsorship effects were considered alongside evidence that inconsistency or corporate social irresponsibility can reverse those effects. Fourth, the resulting relationships were translated into the HCSV-S framework, eight research propositions, and a managerial diagnostic matrix. The purpose of this final stage was not to imply causal certainty, but to make the proposed relationships explicit enough to be tested.

The method has clear limits. It is not a PRISMA-style systematic review, does not claim bibliometric completeness, and does not produce pooled effect estimates. Because the search was iterative and theory-led, another review using database-specific search strings and formal screening counts could produce a broader corpus. The evidence base is also uneven: some relationships are supported by experiments, others by surveys, qualitative work, or conceptual studies. These limits should be kept in view when reading the framework. Its contribution is a transparent conceptual synthesis and a set of testable relationships, not a definitive estimate of effect size.

Table 1: Selected contemporary evidence informing the conceptual synthesis

Study	Design / context	Contribution to this article
Hills, Walker & Barry (2019)	Mixed-method, quasi-experimental sport-health intervention	Shared value can produce social and business outcomes simultaneously, although effects may differ in strength.
Demirel (2020)	Experiment + field study	Sport sponsorship can contribute to CSR perceptions; sponsorship fit and team identification shape consumer response.

Kim et al. (2020)	Scenario-based experiment	CSR-linked sponsorship can strengthen CSR and corporate ability associations and provide reputational resilience after service failures.
Cornwell & Kwon (2020)	Systematic review	Research overemphasizes audience response and underexamines sponsorship management as an ecosystem and process.
Habitzreuter & Koenigstorfer (2021)	Two experiments	Environmental CSR-linked sponsorship works partly through motive perceptions and regulatory fit.
Behnam et al. (2023)	Survey, SEM, n=483	Perceived CSR supports value-in-use through customer engagement; co-production strengthens the process.
Cook et al. (2023)	Semi-structured interviews with senior practitioners	Capabilities, consistency, cultivation, and enduring sponsor-event relationships support shared value across an ecosystem.
Koronios et al. (2022)	Survey/SEM, n=2,752	Sincerity and sponsor-related attitudes help explain actual purchase behaviour, not only intentions.
Kang & Matsuoka (2023)	Four experiments	CSR–corporate social irresponsibility overlap can create negative motive inferences and reduce sponsor evaluations.
Park, Ahn & Kim (2024)	Experiment	Sport-event CSR sponsorship generated stronger purchase intention than art-event sponsorship; perceived sincerity mediated the effect.
Walzel et al. (2024)	13 qualitative stakeholder interviews	Sustainable sponsorship depends on authenticity, governance, long-term orientation, athlete involvement, and ecological/social/economic consistency.

Mansouri et al. (2024)	Online survey/PLS-SEM, n=331	CSR influences football patronage intentions directly and through brand credibility and brand equity.
Carrillat, Mazodier & Eckert (2024)	Multiple experiments	Event-typical activation can enhance brand attitudes and choice, underscoring the importance of sponsorship leveraging design.
Walzel, Behrens & Reuland (2026)	2×2 experiment	CSR leveraging can strengthen sponsor attitudes and fit, but scandal conditions can reduce or cancel some benefits.
Arrigo & Vogler (2026)	Pre-registered SEM, n=432	CSR communication at Euro 2024 increased familiarity, attitudes, subjective norms, intended sustainable behaviour, and organizational reputation.

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the studies reviewed in this article.

6. Evidence Synthesis

6.1 Fit matters, but fit is not enough

A recurring finding across sponsorship research is that perceived fit helps stakeholders make sense of the relationship. When the sponsor, sport property, and social cause appear coherent, audiences need less cognitive effort to understand why the partnership exists. Demirel (2020) shows that fit can generate CSR perceptions, while Uhrich et al. (2014) demonstrate that CSR linkage can be particularly valuable when sponsor–event congruity is not already high. Fit, however, should not be mistaken for moral legitimacy. A perfectly matched sponsorship can still be criticized if the sponsor's conduct contradicts the social message.

For this reason, the HCSV-S framework treats fit as an entry condition rather than as evidence of success. Fit can make a partnership understandable and strategically coherent, but it does not establish authenticity or demonstrate that value has been created. Those judgments depend on the sponsor's conduct, stakeholder experience, and the outcomes that follow.

6.2 Authenticity and sincerity convert exposure into trust

Sport gives sponsors visibility; authenticity determines what that visibility means. The evidence on motive attribution, sincerity, and CSR perception suggests that audiences reward initiatives that appear values-driven and socially grounded. Park et al. (2024) identify perceived sincerity as a mechanism linking CSR-linked sport sponsorship to purchase intention. Habitzreuter and Koenigstorfer (2021) show that philanthropic motive perception shapes attitudes. Mansouri et al. (2024) further connect CSR with brand credibility, brand equity, and patronage intentions.

Authenticity therefore operates as a bridge between symbolic association and relational value. It is difficult to sustain through communication alone. It requires consistency between what the sponsor says, what it does in the partnership, and what it does elsewhere.

6.3 Engagement and co-creation explain why people stay involved

CSR-linked sponsorship is often assessed after exposure: recall, attitude, purchase intention, or reputation. Engagement research suggests a more active mechanism. Behnam et al. (2023) show that customer engagement mediates the relationship between perceived CSR and value-in-use, and that co-production strengthens the effect. This implies that stakeholders are more than receivers of a corporate message. When they participate—by volunteering, co-designing activities, sharing knowledge, joining community programs, or contributing feedback—they become part of the value-creation process.

Human-centered design strengthens this logic. A sponsorship that is created for a community but not with it risks misreading what the community values. Participation does not mean that every stakeholder controls every decision. It means that managers deliberately create channels through which lived experience can shape priorities, implementation, and evaluation.

6.4 Shared value requires two-sided measurement

One of the easiest ways to weaken shared value is to measure only the sponsor side. Media impressions, brand lift, hospitality use, and purchase intentions are legitimate indicators, but they cannot demonstrate social value. Conversely, counting beneficiaries or volunteer hours without examining organizational sustainability can produce programs that are socially appealing but difficult to maintain. Shared value requires measurement on both sides.

Cook et al. (2023) and Hills et al. (2019) support this balanced perspective. Arrigo and Vogler (2026) provide a particularly contemporary example: familiarity with Euro 2024 CSR initiatives was associated with attitudes and subjective norms related to sustainable transport, while also correlating positively with UEFA's reputation. Such designs make the idea of "win-win" empirically testable rather than rhetorical.

6.5 Risk, inconsistency, and scandal are part of the model—not exceptions to it

CSR-linked sponsorship is sometimes discussed as if responsibility automatically insulates a brand from risk. The evidence is more nuanced. Kim et al. (2020) show that CSR-linked sport sponsorship can create a halo or shielding effect in service-failure settings. Walzel, Behrens, and Reuland (2026) similarly show that CSR leverage can strengthen sponsor attitudes and fit, yet a negative doping incident can cancel part of the perceived fit advantage. CSR can build relational capital, but it does not make a sponsor invulnerable.

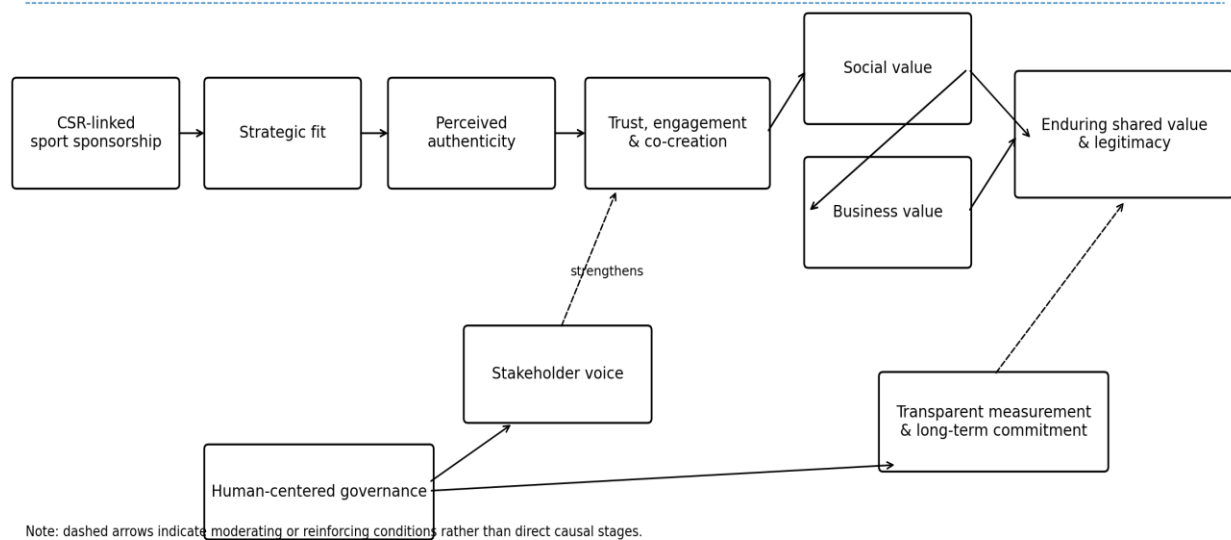
The strongest warning comes from inconsistency. Kang and Matsuoka (2023) demonstrate that high overlap between a sponsor's responsible claims and an area of corporate social irresponsibility can generate negative motive attributions. This insight should be central to managerial decision-making. The first question before sponsoring a cause should not be "Will audiences like this?" but "Are we entitled to make this claim, and can our wider conduct withstand comparison with it?"

7. The Human-Centered Shared Value Sponsorship (HCSV-S) Framework

Figure 1 organizes the synthesis as a strategic process. CSR-linked sport sponsorship provides the initial platform, but value is not assumed. Strategic fit is expected to support perceived authenticity; authenticity, in turn, should encourage trust, engagement, and co-creation. Stakeholder voice is treated as a participatory condition that can strengthen this pathway. Engagement is expected to contribute first to social value and, when outcomes are credibly attributed to a continuing partnership, to business value. Enduring shared value depends on both sides of this value equation and is reinforced by transparent measurement, long-term commitment, and human-centered governance. Perceived self-serving motives, CSR-CSI inconsistency, scandal exposure, and contextual misfit are treated as boundary conditions that can weaken the process.

Figure 1: Human-Centered Shared Value Sponsorship (HCSV-S) framework developed in this study.

Boundary conditions that can weaken the pathway: motives • CSR-CSI inconsistency • scandal exposure • cultural/contextual fit



Source: Authors' elaboration based on the literature reviewed in this study.

7.1 Core constructs

Table 2. Core constructs of the HCSV-S framework

Construct	Meaning in the HCSV-S framework
Strategic fit	Alignment among the sponsor, sport property, social issue, and capabilities required to make a credible contribution.
Perceived authenticity	Stakeholder belief that the initiative reflects genuine values, consistent conduct, and motives that are not purely self-serving.
Stakeholder voice	Mechanisms through which affected groups influence problem definition, program design, implementation, and learning.
Engagement and co-creation	Active participation that allows stakeholders and organizations to integrate resources and produce value together.
Social value	Observable improvement in outcomes such as health, inclusion, environmental behaviour, learning, access, or community capacity.
Business value	Legitimate organizational outcomes such as trust, reputation, relationship quality, loyalty, employee pride, patronage, and resilience.
Human-centered governance	Decision processes that protect dignity, fairness, transparency, and accountability across the sponsorship ecosystem.

Enduring shared value	Value that survives beyond the campaign window because the partnership builds capability, trust, routines, and measurable outcomes over time.
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Source: Authors' elaboration based on the literature reviewed in this study.

7.2 Research propositions

P1: Greater strategic fit among the sponsor, sport property, and social cause will be positively associated with perceived authenticity of the CSR-linked sponsorship.

P2: Higher perceived authenticity will be positively associated with stakeholder trust and with engagement in the sponsorship initiative.

P3: Stakeholder voice will strengthen the positive relationship between perceived authenticity and engagement because participation provides stakeholders with direct evidence about how the initiative is designed and governed.

P4: Engagement and co-creation will mediate the relationship between perceived authenticity and social value outcomes.

P5: Social value outcomes will be positively associated with business value when stakeholders attribute those outcomes to a credible and continuing sponsor–sport partnership.

P6: Sponsorships that produce both credible social value and business value will be associated with stronger long-term legitimacy and relationship continuity than sponsorships that produce business value alone.

P7: Perceived self-serving motives, CSR–CSI inconsistency, and sponsorship-related scandals will each weaken—and may cumulatively weaken—the pathway from strategic fit and authenticity to shared value.

P8: Transparent outcome measurement and long-term commitment will strengthen the persistence of shared value by supporting learning, accountability, and stakeholder trust over time.

8. Applying the Framework: Four Contemporary Sponsorship Situations

8.1 Major sport events and sustainable mobility

Arrigo and Vogler (2026) provide a useful application of the framework in the context of UEFA Euro 2024. The initiative focused on environmentally friendly mobility, a material issue for large events. Their results show a pathway from event exposure to familiarity with CSR initiatives, from familiarity to attitudes and subjective norms, and from those cognitions to intended behaviour. At the same time, familiarity was positively associated with UEFA's reputation. The case illustrates shared value because the social objective—more sustainable transport—is analytically linked to an organizational outcome—reputation.

From a human-centered perspective, the next research step is to ask whether intended behaviour becomes actual behaviour and whether transport solutions are equally accessible to different groups, including people with disabilities, families, low-income spectators, and local residents. Shared value should include ease, fairness, and lived experience, not only aggregate intention.

8.2 Health promotion through sport

Hills et al. (2019) illustrate the potential of sport-based health interventions to create both social and business value. The social side included physical activity and wellness-related outcomes, while the business side included affinity and patronage-related measures. Their findings also show why balanced

evaluation matters: not every health outcome moved as strongly as business outcomes. A human-centered reading does not treat this imbalance as failure; it treats it as information for redesign.

For sponsors, the managerial lesson is to resist the temptation to declare a program successful because brand outcomes improved. If the social mechanism is weak, the initiative may not deserve the shared value label. Continuous stakeholder feedback can help identify whether program content, access, duration, or delivery needs to change.

8.3 Football, credibility, and patronage

Mansouri et al. (2024) show that CSR can influence football fans' patronage intentions through brand credibility and brand equity. This is important because football relationships are not ordinary consumer relationships; they are identity-rich and often intergenerational. Responsible action can therefore reinforce a club's or sponsor's legitimacy when it resonates with the community's values.

Yet football also demonstrates the danger of instrumental CSR. Fans quickly recognize symbolic gestures that do not match governance, ticketing, labour, community, or environmental practices. The HCSV-S framework therefore places authenticity and stakeholder voice before loyalty outcomes. Loyalty that is extracted through emotional identification without reciprocal responsibility is not shared value.

8.4 Sponsorship risk, scandals, and reputational resilience

Walzel, Behrens, and Reuland (2026) show that CSR leveraging can function as a form of reputational insurance, but only to a point. When a sponsorship is affected by a negative doping incident, some of the fit-based advantage can disappear. This illustrates an important feature of sport: the sponsor does not control every actor who can affect sponsorship value.

The human-centered response to such risk is not to over-engineer reputation management. It is to build relationships that can absorb uncertainty. Transparent communication, fair treatment of athletes, credible governance, and a record of social contribution create a more defensible basis for trust than reactive messaging alone.

9. A Human-Centered Diagnostic Matrix for Managers

The following matrix translates the framework into practical questions. Its purpose is not to produce a score for public relations use; it is to force disciplined conversation before money is committed and before claims are made.

Table 3. Human-centered diagnostic matrix for CSR-linked sport sponsorship

Diagnostic dimension	Human-centered questions
Problem relevance	Is the social issue materially connected to the sport context or stakeholder needs? What evidence shows that the issue matters?
Capability fit	Do the sponsor and sport property possess resources, expertise, access, or relationships that can realistically improve the issue?
Stakeholder voice	Which affected groups were consulted? Were athletes, community partners, beneficiaries, and local residents able to influence design?
Authenticity	Is the initiative consistent with the sponsor's wider conduct? Could stakeholders reasonably

	accuse the company of contradiction or “washing”?
Participation	How can stakeholders move from spectators to contributors—through co-design, volunteering, feedback, learning, or community delivery?
Social outcomes	What will change for people or the environment? Which indicators capture actual outcomes rather than reach or publicity?
Business outcomes	Which legitimate organizational outcomes are expected—trust, reputation, employee pride, loyalty, resilience—and how will they be measured?
Distribution of value	Who benefits, who bears costs, and are vulnerable or less visible groups included?
Continuity	What remains after the event or sponsorship season? Is there a plan for capability transfer, follow-up, and long-term partnership?
Transparency	Will the sponsor report limitations, trade-offs, and weak results as well as successes?

Source: Authors’ elaboration.

10. Discussion

Taken together, the reviewed studies suggest that CSR-linked sponsorship should be understood as a sequence of contingent relationships rather than as a uniformly positive strategy. Fit can help audiences make sense of the partnership, but it does not protect the sponsor from questions about motive or conduct. Authenticity can support trust, but only when stakeholder experience does not contradict the claim. Engagement can deepen the relationship, but it is strategically meaningful only when participation contributes to observable outcomes. The HCSV-S framework brings these conditions into one process and makes their dependencies visible.

This process view also helps explain why the literature can report both favourable sponsorship effects and strong scepticism toward CSR claims. These findings need not be treated as contradictory. They often concern different stages or conditions of the same relationship. A sponsorship may improve attitudes after exposure and still lose legitimacy later if stakeholders encounter inconsistency, token participation, or weak social outcomes. The relevant managerial question is therefore not only whether the sponsorship works at one point in time, but whether the mechanisms that created the initial response remain credible as the relationship develops.

The framework also clarifies the role of sport’s emotional power. Emotion is often treated as a marketing advantage because it strengthens attention, identification, and memory. Yet emotional intensity also raises expectations. A company entering a deeply valued sporting community is not entering neutral media space; it is entering a social world with memories, loyalties, inequalities, hopes, and unwritten rules. Fans may welcome commercial support while simultaneously expecting respect for traditions, fairness, community identity, and the integrity of competition. Athletes may appreciate sponsorship while resisting programs that use their image without reflecting their values. Host communities may enjoy an event while questioning who receives the long-term benefits and who carries the costs. Human-

centered sponsorship takes these tensions seriously and treats listening as part of value creation rather than as a public-relations exercise.

The shared value lens is useful precisely because it requires sponsors to move beyond one-sided evaluation. Business value is not disqualified; it is expected. A sponsor that cannot sustain the commercial logic of a partnership may eventually withdraw, undermining social continuity. The challenge is therefore to make commercial value legitimate by tying it to genuine social value. Long-term trust is more defensible when stakeholders can point to something that improved—not only to a campaign they remember.

This argument is especially relevant in an era of sustainability claims and sportswashing debates. Visibility without accountability is increasingly unstable. Walzel et al. (2024) show that sustainable sponsorship requires managerial adaptation across social, economic, and ecological dimensions. The present framework extends that insight by placing stakeholder voice and human-centered governance at the core of legitimacy. A sponsorship becomes difficult to dismiss as “washing” when the affected people helped shape it, independent indicators demonstrate outcomes, and the sponsor’s conduct is consistent with the claim.

11. Theoretical Contributions

First, the article integrates five streams that are often treated separately—CSR-linked sponsorship, creating shared value, authenticity and motive attribution, engagement/co-creation, and sponsorship risk—and positions them as parts of a strategic process. This matters because sponsorship decisions involve resource commitment, inter-organizational coordination, stakeholder dependence, reputational exposure, and performance measurement, not only communication effects.

Second, the framework shifts attention from audience response alone toward the management of the sponsorship relationship. This responds to the shortage of process-oriented sponsorship research identified by Cornwell and Kwon (2020). In HCSV-S, design choices, stakeholder voice, governance, participation, and evaluation are not background activities; they are mechanisms that can influence whether value is created and whether the relationship remains legitimate.

Third, the framework refines the meaning of shared value in sport by requiring evidence of both social and business outcomes. Shared value is not defined by the sponsor’s intention to “do good,” nor by positive attitudes alone. It is defined by demonstrable value on both sides and by the durability of that value over time.

Fourth, the article gives authenticity a more explicitly behavioural and governance-based interpretation. Rather than treating authenticity only as a perception to be managed, the framework links that perception to stakeholder-visible conduct: consistency, meaningful voice, fair participation, and transparent learning. The human-centered contribution therefore lies less in adding another attitudinal variable and more in explaining how organizational practice can shape the conditions under which authenticity is earned.

12. Managerial Implications

The first managerial implication is simple: begin with the problem, not the property. A social cause should not be selected only because it is easy to communicate or fits the visual identity of an event. Managers need evidence that the issue matters to affected stakeholders and that the sponsor and sport property have capabilities—resources, access, expertise, or relationships—that can make a credible contribution.

Second, sponsors should create practical ways for stakeholders to influence the initiative before key decisions are fixed. Advisory groups, athlete workshops, community interviews, and beneficiary

feedback can all be useful, but only if they can change priorities, delivery, or evaluation. Consultation that has no consequence is unlikely to create the sense of voice assumed in the framework.

Third, sponsors should separate communication metrics from outcome metrics. Reach, impressions, recall, and content engagement describe communication performance. They do not demonstrate social value. Social outcome indicators should be selected according to the program—health behaviour, access, skills, environmental impact, inclusion, educational attainment, community capacity—while business outcomes can include credibility, trust, loyalty, employee pride, and relationship continuity.

Fourth, managers should conduct a contradiction audit before launching the initiative. The purpose is to identify areas where corporate behaviour could make the CSR claim appear inconsistent. This is particularly important when a company sponsors health, environment, youth, equality, or integrity initiatives. The audit should not be treated as a reason to avoid difficult causes; it should be treated as a reason to align wider practice with the promise being made.

Finally, managers should be cautious about claiming transformation too early. Social outcomes may take time, some interventions will work unevenly, and a credible evaluation may reveal disappointing results. Reporting those limitations can be more valuable than forcing a success narrative. A sponsorship that listens, adjusts, and remains accountable has a stronger basis for long-term trust than one that depends on visibility alone.

13. Limitations and Future Research

This article is an integrative conceptual review and therefore has limitations. It does not provide a bibliometrically exhaustive map of the field, formal screening counts, or pooled causal estimates. A future systematic review could test the breadth of the five mechanisms identified here using database-specific protocols and reproducible screening procedures. The HCSV-S framework itself also requires testing across sports, countries, event sizes, sponsor categories, and stakeholder groups. Cross-cultural research is especially important because expectations about corporate motives, community obligations, participation, and acceptable sponsor categories are unlikely to be uniform.

Future empirical research could test the full HCSV-S model using multi-source and longitudinal designs. Sponsors and sport properties could provide program data, while fans, athletes, employees, and community members report authenticity, voice, engagement, and experienced outcomes. Longitudinal work could assess whether shared value persists after sponsorship renewal or termination. Experimental studies could test how transparent reporting of mixed results affects authenticity. Research should also examine children and vulnerable audiences, digital fan communities, esports, athlete activism, and the governance of sustainability claims.

Finally, future research should treat negative outcomes as theoretically useful. Sponsorship programs sometimes displace local priorities, amplify inequality, or create reputational spillovers from scandals. Understanding value co-destruction is essential if shared value is to become more than an optimistic label.

14. Conclusion

Sport sponsorship can create value beyond exposure, but the evidence reviewed here suggests that such value is conditional. CSR-linked sponsorship can support attitudes, credibility, engagement, patronage, behavioural intentions, and reputational resilience, yet these outcomes depend on how stakeholders interpret the sponsor's motives and how they experience the partnership. Fit helps, but it is not sufficient. Consistency, participation, governance, and the quality of the outcomes matter as well.

The HCSV-S framework brings these conditions together around a human-centered principle: social value should be visible in the experience of the people affected by the sponsorship, while business value

should be legitimate enough to sustain the relationship. This does not place commercial objectives outside the model. It treats them as one side of a relationship in which stakeholder voice, credible conduct, and measurable outcomes also matter. The framework therefore connects familiar sponsorship constructs with questions of governance and value distribution that are often considered separately.

For researchers, the proposed relationships offer a basis for testing how fit, authenticity, voice, engagement, social outcomes, and business outcomes interact over time. For managers, the framework encourages a shift from asking only what a sponsorship communicates to asking what the partnership can credibly improve, who should have a voice in that process, and how both social and organizational value will be demonstrated. That shift is central to treating sport sponsorship as a strategic management relationship rather than only as a promotional asset.

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