UNIVERSITY OF MEDIA, ARTS AND COMMUNICATION (UniMAC)

INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM

CLOSING THE SPONSORSHIP GAP: EXPLORING WHY SPONSORSHIP SEEKERS FAIL AND HOW TO WIN MARKETING MANAGERS OVER. A STUDY OF THE TELECOMMUNICATION INDUSTRY IN GHANA.

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DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

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BY

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DECLARATIONS

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, Kwame Intsiful Hagan, declare that this thesis, except for quotations and references to published works, which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my original work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for any other degree elsewhere. I bear responsibility for any shortcomings.

………………………………………… **DATE:** 03 – 12 - 2025

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SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned supervisor, declare that I supervised the preparation and presentation of this work in accordance with the guidelines for the supervision of Master's theses as laid down by the University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC).

………………………………………… **DATE:** 03/12/2025

DR. NOEL NUTSUGAH

(Supervisor)

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my family, whose support, encouragement, and belief in my abilities have sustained me throughout these academic pursuits.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the factors that influence sponsorship decision-making in Ghana's telecommunications sector, focusing on why sponsorship seekers often fail and how they can successfully engage marketing managers. The study is underpinned by Congruency Theory, which posits that alignment between a sponsor and a sponsored entity enhances perceived fit and effectiveness, and by Carroll's CSR Theory, which emphasises the importance of ethical, legal, economic, and philanthropic responsibilities in corporate decision-making. Using a qualitative approach, twelve marketing and communication professionals from MTN, AirtelTigo, and Telecel Ghana were purposively selected and interviewed. The study examined the criteria used to evaluate sponsorship proposals, the reasons for proposal rejections, and the attributes of successful submissions. The findings reveal that sponsorship decisions are guided by strategic alignment with corporate objectives, financial feasibility, audience relevance, proposer credibility, creativity, and ethical considerations. Proposals were frequently rejected due to misalignment with corporate goals, weak value propositions, poor presentation, limited audience reach, ethical concerns, and budgetary constraints. Conversely, successful proposals demonstrated precise strategic fit, financial clarity, targeted audience engagement, proven track record, innovative concepts, and well-structured communication. The study concludes that sponsorship evaluation in Ghana is increasingly professionalised, moving beyond ad hoc decisions to a structured, strategic, and ethically aware process. The study further recommends developing clear sponsorship policies, providing professional training for evaluators, establishing structured evaluation frameworks with measurable key performance indicators, strengthening ethical oversight, and conducting additional research across industries to enhance understanding of sponsorship practices. These measures aim to enhance the success of sponsorship initiatives by ensuring alignment with corporate objectives, audience engagement, and responsible management.

Keywords: Sponsorship, Telecommunications, Marketing Managers, Strategic Alignment, Proposal Evaluation, Ethical Considerations

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANA	Association of National Advertisers
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
IEG	International Events Group
ILO	International Labour Organisation
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MA	Master of Arts
MASB	Marketing Accountability Standards Board
MNO	Mobile Network Operator
PR	Public Relations
ROI	Return on Investment
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
SoGS	School of Graduate Studies and Research
UniMAC	University of Media, Arts and Communication
USD	United States Dollar

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.0 Chapter Introduction

This chapter introduces the dissertation by providing the context for the study and outlining the key issues that inform the research. It states the problem, objectives, and research questions, and highlights the study's academic and practical importance. The chapter also defines the scope of the work and concludes with an outline of the dissertation structure, serving as a guide for the chapters that follow.

1.1 Background of the Study

Corporate sponsorship has increasingly become a central component of modern marketing strategies, moving beyond its historical perception as a peripheral or philanthropic activity. Today, sponsorship is recognised as a deliberate tool for brand management, communication, and stakeholder engagement (Meenaghan, 2001; Cornwell, 2020). It enables organisations to communicate their identity, project their values, and build emotional connections with audiences in ways that traditional advertising alone cannot. As markets grow more competitive and consumers more discerning, firms strategically leverage sponsorship to differentiate themselves, enhance brand visibility, and cultivate loyalty (Roy & Cornwell, 2003; Papadimitriou et al., 2008). The strategic significance of sponsorship lies not only in increasing exposure but also in embedding the brand meaningfully within socially and culturally resonant contexts (Frempong, 2007; Farrelly et al., 2006).

In Ghana, the telecommunications sector is a dynamic environment where sponsorship holds both commercial and strategic importance. The industry, projected to grow from USD 1.93 billion in 2025 to USD 2.25 billion by 2030 at a compound annual growth rate of 3.15%, is dominated by firms such as MTN, Telecel (formerly Vodafone), and AirtelTigo (Mordor Intelligence Research & Advisory, 2025). Since liberalisation and regulatory reforms in 1996, which established a competitive landscape and the National Communications Authority, these operators have innovated extensively, expanding network coverage, improving service quality, and introducing value-added services such as mobile money and enterprise solutions (Allotey & Akorli, 1999; Owusu-Kumih et al., 2022; Tella et al., 2007). Such developments position telecommunications not only as a commercial enterprise but also as a critical enabler of socio-economic growth, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that rely heavily on connectivity and digital financial platforms (Frempong, 2007; Waverman et al., 2005).

Within this context, sponsorship emerges as a strategic avenue through which telecommunications firms strengthen brand recognition, cultural relevance, and consumer engagement while supporting community and societal initiatives. The evaluation and selection of sponsorship opportunities in this sector are informed by a combination of strategic and theoretical considerations. Marketing managers place particular emphasis on brand congruence, ensuring that proposed events or initiatives align with the firm's identity, values, and target audiences (Speed & Thompson, 2000; Dees et al., 2008). High congruence enhances message clarity, authenticity, and recall, while poor alignment can undermine credibility and weaken consumer engagement (Olson, 2010; Roy & Cornwell, 2003). Audience relevance and engagement potential are also critical; firms increasingly prioritise events with defined demographic profiles or niche followings, integrating interactive or co-branded campaigns to maximise participatory engagement (Scheinbaum et al., 2015; Farrelly et al., 2006).

Sponsorship has, for many years, been viewed as a mere philanthropic act. However, it has been redefined as a commercial transaction with expected returns on investment (Cornwell, 2020).

Organisations now view sponsorship as a vehicle to enhance their brand and engage their audience (Meenaghan, 2013), which requires measurable outcomes. For this reason, firms adopt performance measurement frameworks, including key performance indicators and post-event reporting, to ensure accountability and strategic impact (O'Reilly & Horning, 2013; Papadimitriou et al., 2008). Theoretical models such as Congruence Theory and Carroll's CSR Pyramid provide guidance by emphasising cognitive alignment between sponsor and event as well as the ethical, legal, and philanthropic responsibilities of firms (Speed & Thompson, 2000; Olson & Thjømøe, 2011; Carroll, 1991; Carroll & Shabana, 2010).

Despite these strategic frameworks, a significant gap persists in Ghana's telecommunications sector. Many sponsorship proposals are rejected, often due to misalignment with corporate expectations, insufficient attention to audience fit, or failure to demonstrate measurable outcomes (Thjømøe et al., 2002; Hägglund & Landfeldt, 2024). Informal networks, political affiliations, and socio-cultural factors further complicate the sponsorship landscape, creating a disconnect between corporate decision-makers and sponsorship seekers (Amponsah-Tawiah & Dartey-Baah, 2011). Understanding the determinants of sponsorship approval, particularly in high-profile firms such as MTN, Telecel, and AirtelTigo, is therefore essential.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

1.2.1 Issue/Evidence Gap

There is a growing body of scholarship examining sponsorship as a strategic marketing practice, especially its role in enhancing brand equity, consumer engagement, and organisational visibility (Masterman, 2007; Meenaghan, 1991). While these studies provide valuable insights into how sponsorship functions as a marketing tool, the literature remains largely silent on the internal decision-making processes that determine whether a sponsorship proposal is accepted or rejected. Existing research focuses heavily on sponsorship outcomes, particularly consumer responses and brand effectiveness metrics (Kim et al., 2015), yet offers limited empirical evidence on how managers evaluate proposals at the organisational level. Although scholars such as Olson (2010) acknowledge that sponsorship effectiveness varies across contexts, little is known about the evaluative criteria that drive managerial decisions in real-world organisational settings. Furthermore, while some studies highlight that intuition significantly shapes sponsorship decisions (Delaney et al., 2014), this area remains underexplored. This lack of evidence constrains our understanding of how sponsorship seekers can effectively tailor proposals to align with corporate objectives. As such, a study that provides empirical insight into managerial decision-making is timely and necessary.

1.2.2 Methodological Gap

Much of the existing sponsorship literature relies on quantitative methods, such as surveys to assess sponsorship outcomes and consumer behaviour (Kim et al., 2015; Olson, 2010). Although these methodologies produce generalisable findings, they overlook the deeper, nuanced, and context-dependent decision-making processes within organisations. Qualitative research that centres on the lived experiences and strategic reasoning of marketing managers is comparatively scarce. Delaney et al. (2014) emphasise that intuition plays a crucial role in sponsorship decisions, suggesting the need for methodological approaches capable of capturing subjective judgment, organisational dynamics, and everyday evaluative practices. Therefore, a qualitative study focusing on how managers interpret, assess, and approve sponsorship proposals is necessary to enrich the methodological diversity of sponsorship research.

1.2.3 Context Gap

Sponsorship scholarship continues to be dominated by studies conducted in Western contexts, where formal structures, mature sponsorship markets, and clearly defined organisational processes strongly influence sponsorship practice (Masterman, 2007; O'Reilly & Lafrance Horning, 2013). However, these contextual realities may not reflect decision-making in other regions, such as Sub-Saharan Africa. For instance, organisational cultures, institutional constraints, and informal networks common in emerging markets can significantly influence how sponsorship decisions are made. The absence of studies grounded in diverse business environments limits the applicability of existing sponsorship theories to regions whose organisational dynamics differ from Western norms. Without context-specific research, current literature cannot fully address how managers in varied organisational, cultural, and economic settings evaluate sponsorship opportunities.

1.2.4 Theoretical Gap

Theoretical perspectives in sponsorship research have predominantly focused on rational, performance-oriented models that emphasise alignment, return on investment, and activation effectiveness (Kim et al., 2015; O'Reilly & Lafrance Horning, 2013). Although useful, these approaches may not entirely capture the multidimensional nature of sponsorship decisions. Emerging evidence suggests that internal organisational factors, such as employee brand behaviour and engagement, are influenced by sponsorship activities (Batt et al., 2021). Additionally, intuitive and experiential elements, which Delaney et al. (2014) identify as central to decision-making, remain insufficiently theorised. The limited engagement with alternative theoretical lenses restricts our understanding of how sponsorship decisions are negotiated within complex organisational environments. Expanding theoretical perspectives to include intuitive, behavioural, and organisational dimensions is therefore necessary.

1.2.5 Population Gap

Lastly, many sponsorship studies have focused on consumers, event organisers, or sponsorship-seeking entities, with limited attention paid to the organisational actors who make sponsorship decisions (Delaney et al., 2014; Olson, 2010). Marketing managers and corporate communication professionals who review, recommend, and approve sponsorship proposals are often overlooked in empirical research. This omission results in an incomplete understanding of sponsorship practice, as the perspectives of those who shape and administer sponsorship portfolios remain marginal in existing literature. Additionally, despite the significant organisational influence of these managers, scholarship has yet to adequately explore their decision-making processes, evaluative criteria, and organisational constraints. Addressing this population gap is essential for developing practical and theoretically grounded insights into sponsorship decision-making.

1.3 Research Objectives

The study generally explores why sponsorship proposals fail and how to win over marketing managers: a case study of the telecommunications industry in Ghana. The study seeks to:

1. Identify the key reasons why corporate organisations decline sponsorship requests.
2. Explore the criteria and strategic considerations that marketing managers use when assessing sponsorship requests.
3. Determine the attributes of successful sponsorship proposals from the perspective of marketing managers.

1.4 Research Questions

The study addresses the following questions:

1. Why do corporate organisations decline sponsorship requests?
2. What criteria and strategic considerations do marketing managers use when assessing sponsorship requests?
3. What attributes characterise successful sponsorship proposals from the perspective of marketing managers?

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on sponsorship decision-making within the telecommunications sector in Ghana, specifically examining the perspectives of marketing managers. It is limited to three major telecommunications companies, MTN, AirtelTigo, and Telecel, chosen for their active involvement in corporate sponsorship and the volume of requests they receive. The research investigates why sponsorship proposals are approved or rejected, the criteria and strategic considerations used by marketing managers, and the attributes of successful proposals. Other managerial staff, non-marketing employees, and sectors outside telecommunications are excluded, as are other marketing activities not related to sponsorship. By focusing on these companies and their marketing managers, the study provides practical insights to help sponsorship seekers align proposals with corporate priorities and increase the likelihood of approval.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study provides valuable insights into the factors influencing the success and failure of sponsorship proposals in Ghana's telecommunications sector. By examining the perspectives of marketing managers, this study highlights the criteria and strategic considerations used to evaluate sponsorship requests, offering guidance for both practitioners and researchers. For sponsorship seekers, the findings can improve proposal quality by identifying the elements most likely to secure approval, such as alignment with corporate objectives, brand congruence, and measurable outcomes. This knowledge can enhance their chances of building successful partnerships with corporate organisations.

For corporate organisations, the study can inform more structured and transparent evaluation processes, enabling marketing managers to make decisions that are consistent, accountable, and aligned with organisational priorities. The research also contributes to the academic literature by addressing gaps in sponsorship decision-making in emerging markets, particularly in the telecommunications industry in Ghana. Furthermore, the study can assist policymakers and industry associations in developing guidelines or frameworks that support effective sponsorship practices. By understanding the internal evaluation processes of corporate organisations, stakeholders can promote best practices that benefit both sponsors and seekers, fostering stronger collaboration and mutual value creation.

Additionally, the research has broader implications for marketing strategy and corporate communication. Insights from the study can help companies design sponsorship initiatives that not only enhance visibility and brand reputation but also align with ethical, social, and strategic priorities. This can strengthen the overall impact of sponsorship as a tool for engagement and competitive advantage in Ghana’s telecommunications sector.

1.7 Organisation of the Study

The study is organised into five chapters, each addressing a distinct aspect of the research process. Chapter One introduces the research by presenting the background, problem statement, objectives, research questions, scope, significance and organisation of the study. Chapter Two reviews relevant literature, examining theoretical frameworks and previous empirical studies related to the topic. Chapter Three discusses the research methodology, outlining the research paradigm, approach, design, data collection methods, and analytical procedures. Chapter Four presents and analyses the research findings in relation to the stated objectives. Chapter Five summarises the main findings, draws conclusions, outlines practical and theoretical implications, and proposes areas for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews existing studies on corporate sponsorship and its place in organisational practice. The review is undertaken to provide an understanding of how previous research has approached the subject, the insights that have been generated, and the gaps that remain unexplored. In doing so, it helps establish the context within which the present study is situated and clarifies the contributions it seeks to make. The chapter also outlines the theoretical perspectives that inform the study, offering a framework for interpreting sponsorship behaviour and decisions within broader scholarly debates.

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Sponsorship Definition

Sponsorship has become a prominent form of marketing communication, yet its definition remains unsettled due to its varied application across industries. Cornwell and Maignan (1998) defined sponsorship as the provision of resources to an event, activity, or organisation in exchange for promotional opportunities. Meenaghan (1983) describes sponsorship as the provision of financial or material support to an activity in return for commercial benefits. Gardner and Shuman (1988) adopt a similar view, framing sponsorship as an investment in causes or events that align with corporate or marketing goals. Furthering this idea, Quester and Thompson (2001) suggest that sponsorship involves a transactional relationship in which the sponsor gains access to the commercial potential embedded in an event, activity, or personality. Although distinct from advertising or philanthropy, sponsorship often overlaps with public relations and charitable contributions, making its boundaries difficult to define clearly (Polonsky et al., 1996; Gwinner, 1997). Still, most literature agree that sponsorship is driven primarily by commercial intent, aiming to generate measurable brand or corporate outcomes (Ryan & Fahy, 2003).

Multiple strategic considerations shape the decision to sponsor a particular event or activity. Mack (1999) notes that elements such as event type, audience profile, geographic relevance, media exposure, and scale are key in determining sponsorship appeal. Coppetti et al. (2009) adds that successful sponsorships often allow a brand to become part of the audience's experience, which can strengthen positive brand associations when the sponsorship feels appropriate or relevant. In cases where the audience perceives a fit between the event and the sponsor, the resulting emotional and cognitive responses tend to benefit the sponsor (Rifon et al., 2004). For this reason, scholars have argued that sponsorship can outperform traditional advertising in generating goodwill, particularly when executed with subtlety and relevance (Meenaghan, 1991).

There has also been a clear shift in how firms approach sponsorship, moving from isolated transactions to more deliberate, strategic practices. Terrazas (1995) observes that many organisations now align sponsorships with broader communication or community goals. Walliser (2003) contends that sponsorship operates at the intersection of advertising and public relations, offering both visibility and long-term brand value. Evidence of this dual function is found in studies that link sponsorship to enhanced brand loyalty (Verity, 2002) and expanded media reach (Nicholls & Roslow, 1994). As sponsorship becomes increasingly institutionalised within corporate strategy, firms are investing in tailored packages designed to support specific marketing aims. Cornwell (2008) and Sneath et al. (2005) report that many organisations now adopt formal sponsorship policies and evaluate opportunities based on fit, return on investment, and brand alignment. The trend towards long-term partnerships, rather than one-off engagements, reflects a deeper understanding of sponsorship's role in building consumer relationships and competitive advantage (Komoroski & Biemond, 1996).

2.1.2 Evaluation of Sponsorship

Sponsorship evaluation is the process of measuring the outcomes and effectiveness of sponsorship activities in a marketing context. It involves assessing both tangible and intangible results, such as brand exposure, audience engagement, image transfer, and behavioural impact. As sponsorship has become a mainstream marketing tool, evaluation serves not only to justify investment but also to inform future strategy. Crompton (2004) highlights that effective evaluation links sponsorship activities to marketing and organisational objectives. However, many early models focused mainly on media visibility, often overlooking more meaningful consumer responses. Current literature suggests that sponsorship evaluation remains inconsistent across industries. Hartley (2015) notes that many decisions are influenced by subjective judgement, with some organisations relying on informal or outdated approaches.

Leite (2016), in a study of Brazilian firms, found that some companies avoid formal evaluation or rely only on internal analysis. This practice risks bias and limits objectivity. Although media exposure is still the most commonly used metric, it does not capture shifts in consumer perception or long-term brand effects. Crompton (2004) proposes a three-stage model involving media exposure, changes in awareness or image, and behavioural intent. While this model offers a useful starting point, each stage poses methodological challenges, particularly in isolating sponsorship effects from other promotional activities. Scholars have introduced more comprehensive models to address these limitations. O'Reilly and Madill (2009) present a five-dimensional framework that includes brand recall, image and attitude change, product-related outcomes, media coverage, and behavioural responses. Their findings show that most evaluations focus heavily on awareness, while consumer behaviour is often neglected. Advanced techniques such as Structural Equation Modelling (Chen & Reams, 2013) and Data Envelopment Analysis (Walraven et al., 2016) offer more precise tools for evaluating impact. These studies suggest that factors such as sponsorship duration and fit with brand values influence return on investment.

Despite this progress, Pearsall (2010) and the ANA-MASB (2018) found that many organisations still do not measure return on investment or objectives in a structured manner. Jensen and Cobbs (2014) demonstrate that sponsorships, especially in high-profile sports like Formula 1, can deliver measurable returns when media value is calculated accurately. However, they caution that media exposure alone may not reflect strategic impact. Other scholars have examined broader brand effects. Cornwell et al. (2001) and Grohs (2016) argue that sponsorship can strengthen brand equity, while Carrillat et al. (2010) explore how brand image is transferred between sponsor and event. Meenaghan (2001) observes that sponsorship often benefits from a "halo of goodwill", making messages less likely to face consumer resistance than traditional advertising. These insights point to the need for evaluation models that go beyond surface metrics and account for attitudinal, behavioural, and strategic dimensions.

2.1.3 Sponsorship Decision Process

Sponsorship decisions are often shaped by a firm's familiarity with past arrangements and the involvement of marketing or product managers. This tends to ensure closer alignment with strategic goals (Quester et al., 1998; Farrelly et al., 1997). Internal and external relationship networks also play a role, creating opportunities shaped by organisational ties (Farrelly et al., 1997; Erickson & Kusner, 1999). Brassington and Pettit (2000) identify six factors commonly used by firms when selecting sponsorships: relevance to target audiences, alignment with promotional goals, and duration of impact, potential for spin-off promotion, uniqueness, and exclusivity. They advise firms to approach sponsorship decisions with the same logic and objectivity applied to other marketing investments to avoid bias.

Chien et al. (2010) add that coherence between brand identity and event characteristics is essential for sponsorship to be effective. McCook et al. (1997), drawing on findings from the Sprint Sponsorship Vision Project, propose eight criteria that guide selection. These include expected revenue gains, product integration opportunities, cost, audience reach, brand enhancement, competitive edge, hospitality benefits, and the potential for corporate social responsibility. This approach frames sponsorship as a strategic investment rather than a symbolic gesture. Post-event evaluation is also critical. It helps firms assess whether sponsorship objectives have been achieved and provides insight to inform future decisions.

2.1.4 Sponsorship as an Organisational Marketing Tool

Sponsorship has become a significant aspect of marketing communication in contemporary brand strategy. Unlike traditional advertising, which often disrupts consumer engagement, sponsorship tends to work through association and relevance. It aligns the brand with events or entities that carry cultural or emotional weight. This alignment can help to build meaning around the brand. Cornwell and Maignan (2008) argue that sponsorship enables firms to shape brand associations through strategic linkages. When the sponsored event or activity resonates with consumers' values, the brand benefits by proxy. This process is particularly valuable in saturated markets where differentiation is increasingly symbolic. Gwinner and Swanson (2003) suggest that consumers do not always respond solely to product attributes. Instead, they are often drawn to the brand's emotional or identity-based appeal. In such contexts, sponsorship can contribute to long-term brand positioning. However, it must be handled with care. Not every sponsorship results in meaningful outcomes, especially if it lacks integration within the broader marketing mix.

To create sustained value, sponsorship needs strategic coherence. Tripodi (2001) warns against treating sponsorship as a one-off expense. When used in isolation, its potential is limited. Rather, it should support brand objectives such as increasing awareness, reinforcing image, or cultivating loyalty. These goals require deliberate planning and consistent brand alignment. Without this, sponsorship may appear disconnected from broader marketing efforts. There is also a growing recognition that sponsorship cannot stand alone. Activation has become central to realising its benefits. Activation refers to the additional marketing activities that surround and extend the sponsorship experience. O'Reilly and Horning (2013) describe it as the effort to transform passive exposure into consumer engagement. This might involve event-based promotions, social media campaigns, or interactive content. Breuer and Rumpf (2015) found that activation often demands even greater investment than the sponsorship rights themselves. Yet the returns, in terms of brand recall and consumer interaction, can justify the cost.

The IEG Sponsorship Report (2010) notes that firms that activate their sponsorships effectively tend to see stronger brand impact. This includes improved audience engagement and measurable shifts in perception. Although results may vary across sectors, the principle appears consistent. Without activation, sponsorship risks being reduced to corporate philanthropy, offering little more than visibility. Despite these developments, one area remains underexplored. Evaluation is often the weakest point in the sponsorship process. Chadwick and Thwaites (2005) highlight that many firms fail to apply clear metrics or structured assessment frameworks. As a result, they struggle to justify their investment or to learn from outcomes. Walliser (2003) echoes this concern, noting that firms frequently rely on assumptions rather than empirical evidence. In practice, this limits accountability and strategic learning. Proper evaluation helps firms align sponsorship with specific goals such as awareness or brand preference, ensuring resources are used efficiently (Walliser, 2003). Without it, assessing impact becomes difficult in an increasingly competitive marketing environment.

2.1.5 Motivation of Organisational Sponsorship

Sponsorship is increasingly recognised as a deliberate marketing tool for enhancing corporate visibility, brand positioning, and long-term profitability. Its appeal lies not only in reach but in its ability to establish emotional connections with target audiences. In domains such as sport and music, this connection tends to be more pronounced. Koenderman (2000) and Cornwell and Maignan (2008) both acknowledged that sponsorship in high-affinity spaces offers unique advantages. It can create emotional resonance that advertising alone often struggles to achieve. Relational value remains a central feature of sponsorship's appeal. Hansen et al. (2006) suggested that sponsorship has the capacity to build affiliations between the sponsor and external stakeholders. These relationships may become more meaningful when they align with shared cultural or emotional values. The outcome is often a stronger sense of brand authenticity, which, over time, can deepen consumer loyalty.

The discussion around sponsorship has tended to focus on large corporate actors. However, there is growing recognition that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) also benefit. Mahoney and Howard (2001) noted that community-level sponsorships allowed smaller firms to reach niche markets. They also suggested such arrangements could improve staff morale and enhance the organisation's local image. This suggests that sponsorship may contribute to internal cohesion, not just external visibility. From an operational standpoint, the effective use of sponsorship requires strategic oversight. Senior executives often lead in securing agreements. Yet, as Chadwick and Thwaites (2005) observed, there are frequent breakdowns in implementation. Sponsorship contracts are sometimes finalised without input from those responsible for activating them. This creates gaps between strategic intent and execution. In many organisations, junior staff must deliver outcomes without having been involved in earlier planning. Such disjuncture can reduce the value derived from sponsorship investment.

There has been a noticeable shift in how firms manage sponsorship internally. Roberts (2006) noted an increasing presence of professionals with experience in brand and event management. This indicates a redefinition of sponsorship as a marketing function rather than a peripheral activity. Similarly, Thømøe et al. (2002) argued that marketing departments now play a central role in sponsorship planning. When integrated with brand strategy, sponsorship can support broader communication goals. Nonetheless, one persistent challenge remains evaluation. O'Reilly and Madill (2007) found that many firms lack structured approaches for assessing sponsorship outcomes. This may be due to resource limitations or possibly because the returns are not always immediate or easily quantifiable. The potential benefits of sponsorship extend beyond commercial advantage. Walliser (2003) and Verity (2002) emphasised that sponsorship is most effective when used in conjunction with other marketing efforts. This suggests that sponsorship should not stand alone but rather form part of a coordinated communication strategy.

Moreover, at the local level, sponsorship may support community development. Du et al. (2008) highlighted that many non-profit organisations depend on sponsorship as a funding source. These partnerships can enhance organisational visibility and support skill exchange. Lamont and Dowell (2008) further noted that sponsorship can act as a platform for cultural engagement. It may also contribute to social cohesion and identity formation. In certain contexts, such as festivals or local sports events, the presence of a sponsor has implications for tourism and local pride. These effects, though not always the primary objective, reflect the wider socio-economic potential of sponsorship when deployed with awareness of its broader impact. In sum, sponsorship is not merely a financial transaction or brand visibility exercise. It is a marketing communication tool with strategic and relational dimensions. When aligned with organisational values and carefully managed, it offers economic, social, and cultural benefits.

2.1.6 Factors Contributing to the Rejection of Sponsorship Requests

Corporate organisations frequently reject sponsorship requests due to limited financial resources and budgetary restrictions. In highly competitive markets, marketing expenditures are carefully scrutinised, often leading firms to prioritise initiatives with measurable short-term returns. Walliser (2003) noted that although sponsorships can enhance brand recognition, they are often excluded during budget cuts because their effectiveness is difficult to quantify. Similar concerns were raised by Cornwell and Maignan (1998), who emphasised that companies prefer investments where key performance indicators can be easily tracked and justified. The pressure to demonstrate accountability in marketing has further shifted attention toward media channels with more precise metrics. Roy and Cornwell (2003) argued that, in an era of increased data availability, sponsorship competes with digital and broadcast advertising, both of which offer clearer performance evaluation tools.

During economic contractions, this pressure intensifies. As Meenaghan (2005) observed, cost-benefit considerations dominate decision-making processes during financial uncertainty, making sponsorship a less favourable option. Another common reason for rejection is the lack of strategic alignment between the proposed sponsorship and the sponsor's brand identity. Firms are often hesitant to associate with events that may confuse audiences or present reputational risks. Speed and Thompson (2000) demonstrated that brand-event congruence is a key determinant of sponsorship success, as it reinforces consumer recall and emotional connection. Proposals that fail to reflect the sponsor's values or demographic targets are likely to be dismissed. This concern is echoed by Gwinner and Eaton (1999), who warned that poor alignment may dilute brand equity or even generate negative consumer perceptions. The quality and structure of the proposal itself often influence sponsorship decisions. Many are rejected because they lack detailed activation strategies or fail to offer clear evaluation frameworks. Farrelly et al. (2006) found that marketing professionals frequently dismissed proposals without measurable objectives and defined engagement plans.

O'Reilly and Madill (2007) similarly argued that sponsorship approval increasingly depends on the ability to demonstrate projected returns, whether financial or reputational. Firms expect evidence of impact, particularly when resources are tight, and performance accountability is prioritised. Ethical and reputational concerns further complicate acceptance. Companies generally avoid partnerships that could associate them with controversial or politically sensitive issues. This is not purely about risk aversion but also a reflection of growing expectations regarding corporate responsibility. As Nufer and Bühler (2010) noted, sponsorship decisions are no longer confined to marketing logic alone but increasingly reflect ethical judgement and social accountability. Rejection, therefore, cannot always be interpreted as disinterest. In many cases, it reflects a cautious balancing of brand protection, financial justification, and social considerations.

2.8 Criteria and Strategic Considerations in Sponsorship Decision-Making

Marketing managers typically approach sponsorship with a clear strategic focus and rely on specific evaluative criteria. One key factor is brand congruence, where the perceived fit between the sponsor and the event plays a key role in shaping consumer perception and recall (Speed & Thompson, 2000; Dees et al., 2008). A strong brand fit improves message clarity, supports authenticity, and limits audience scepticism (Roy & Cornwell, 2003). Conversely, a poor match can undermine the sponsorship's credibility and reduce consumer engagement (Olson, 2010). This becomes especially relevant in sectors where emotional or cultural resonance influences brand loyalty.

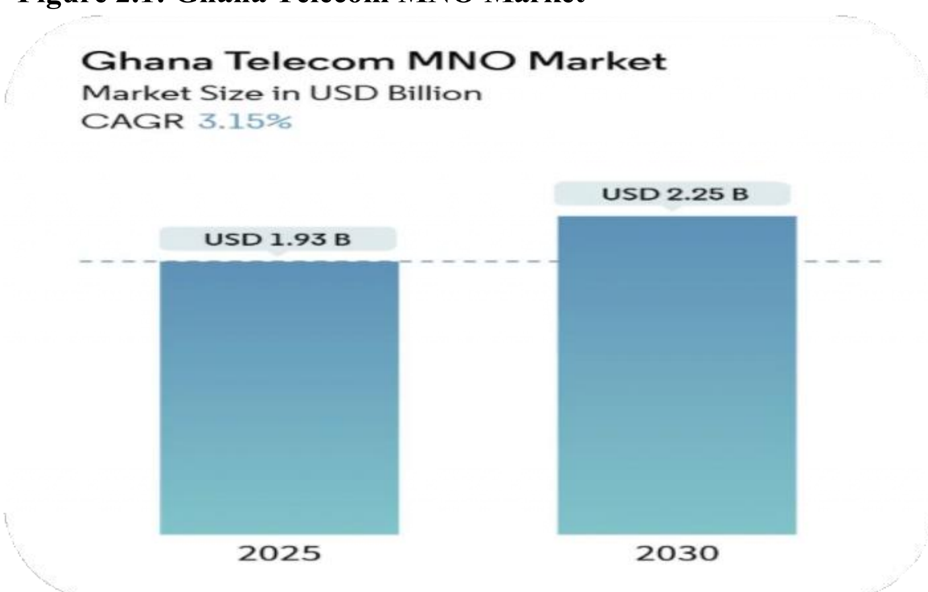
Audience profile and engagement potential also feature prominently in sponsorship evaluations. Events with a clear demographic focus, particularly those appealing to youth culture or niche interest groups, are often preferred for their targeted reach (Scheinbaum et al., 2015). Strong media exposure and interactive elements tend to increase appeal, especially when the proposal outlines structured activation strategies such as on-site experiences, digital content, or co-branded campaigns (Farrelly et al., 2006). This marks a shift from passive sponsorship formats towards more participatory approaches.

Other strategic concerns include performance measurement, reputational impact, and overall integration within the marketing mix. Sponsors increasingly expect proposals to outline measurable outcomes, using tools like key performance indicators (KPIs), feedback mechanisms, and post-event reports (O'Reilly & Horning, 2013). Risk is also a growing concern. Managers often assess whether the sponsored event aligns with their organisation's public image and values, particularly in terms of ethics and social responsibility (Papadimitriou et al., 2008). Finally, for sponsorships to have a lasting effect, they must align with broader brand communication strategies, including advertising and public relations (Keller, 2013). Otherwise, there is a risk that the sponsorship remains disconnected and fails to generate meaningful brand value.

2.9 Telecommunication Industry

The telecommunication industry in Ghana has become a key driver of economic growth and social connectivity, supporting the operations of businesses, government, and households. Liberalisation and regulatory reforms introduced since 1996, including the establishment of the National Communications Authority, have created a competitive environment among Mobile Network Operators (Frempong & Atubra, 2001), such as MTN, Telecel (formerly Vodafone), and AirtelTigo. These reforms have encouraged innovation, improved network infrastructure, and expanded access, making telecommunications an essential enabler of economic activity and the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (Owusu-Kumih et al., 2022; Tella et al., 2007). Today, the market is projected to grow from USD 1.93 billion in 2025 to USD 2.25 billion by 2030, at a compound annual growth rate of 3.15% (Mordor Intelligence Research & Advisory, 2025).

Figure 2.1: Ghana Telecom MNO Market



Source: Mordor Intelligence (2025).

In this competitive and technologically dynamic environment, telecommunications firms increasingly use marketing and sponsorship to differentiate their brands and strengthen consumer engagement. The widespread adoption of mobile money, data services, and enterprise solutions has created opportunities to integrate sponsorship into broader marketing strategies, especially through culturally or socially significant events. Sponsorship initiatives serve not only to increase visibility but also to reinforce brand identity, create emotional connections, and cultivate loyalty among target audiences (Papadimitriou et al., 2008; Roy & Cornwell, 2003). In this way, sponsorship functions as a strategic investment that aligns with corporate objectives, enabling firms to use both technological capabilities and social engagement to maintain a competitive advantage (Frempong, 2007; Farrelly et al., 2006).

Despite these opportunities, firms face challenges that shape their sponsorship decisions. Network limitations, cybersecurity risks, and the need to demonstrate measurable returns require careful selection of sponsorship initiatives that align with brand values, audience profiles, and broader marketing strategies (Ampomah, 2012; Aivo Conversation AI, 2020; Speed & Thompson, 2000). Marketing managers in MTN, Telecel, and AirtelTigo therefore assess proposals based on strategic fit, reputational impact, and potential for audience engagement. Understanding Ghana's telecommunications sector, its competition, technology, and socio-economic role, is key to analysing sponsorship success and identifying critical factors for effectiveness.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Congruency Theory

The study is guided by the Congruence theory and Carroll's CSR pyramid. Congruency Theory focuses on the perceived fit between a sponsor and the sponsored entity. A growing body of research supports the idea that sponsorships tend to be more effective when the association appears logical or symbolically aligned (Speed & Thompson, 2000; Koo et al., 2006). Congruence can be based on shared values, audience overlap, or brand identity. When this alignment is evident, consumers are more likely to integrate the message into their cognitive frameworks, leading to improved recall and more positive evaluations (Olson & Thjømøe, 2011). On the other hand, low congruence may lead to adverse inferences, especially if the sponsorship seems purely transactional or disconnected from brand values (Woisetschläger & Michaelis, 2012). These patterns reflect broader tendencies in consumer processing, where coherence and familiarity often facilitate persuasion.

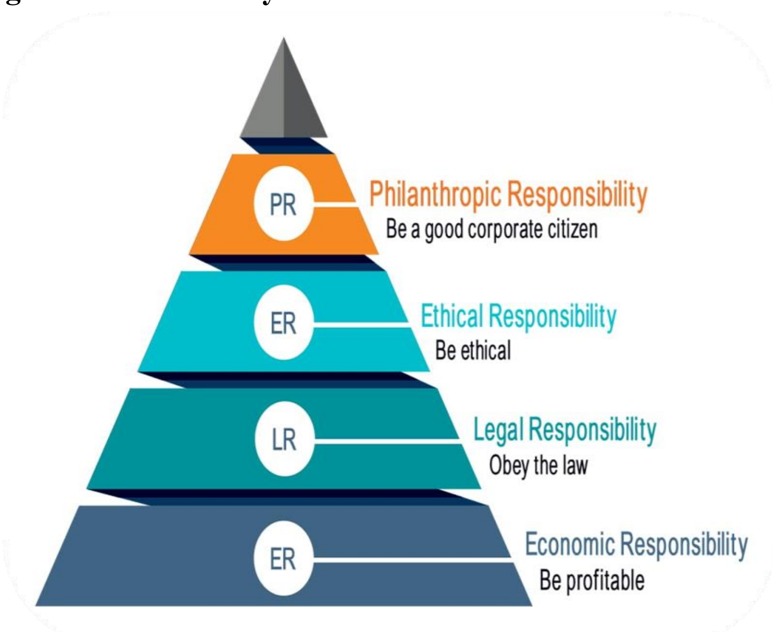
From a managerial perspective, the combined insights from schema and congruence theories provide a valuable basis for assessing sponsorship proposals. Marketing managers often evaluate whether a proposed sponsorship aligns with the brand's image, communication objectives, and audience expectations (Pappu & Cornwell, 2014). A strong fit helps reinforce desired brand associations, while a poor fit may undermine them or generate cognitive dissonance. Managers, therefore, favour proposals that are not only visible but also meaningfully integrated with broader brand narratives (Grohs & Reisinger, 2014). Understanding how associations activate consumer schemas helps clarify why certain sponsorships resonate while others fail to connect.

The study applies these theoretical perspectives to examine why many sponsorship requests are rejected, despite the quality of the events. Sponsorship success appears to rely not only on exposure but also on the cognitive compatibility of the proposed association. Proposals that lack symbolic or strategic alignment with the sponsor's identity may fall short, even when offering large audiences or media value. Schema and congruence theories thus offer a dual lens for interpreting the decision-making process, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of sponsorship strategy and its cognitive foundations.

2.2.2 Carroll's CSR Theory

Carroll's Theory of Corporate Social Responsibility also serves as another theoretical foundation for this study. The theory posits that businesses have multiple responsibilities to society, which include economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic obligations. Originally proposed by Archie B. Carroll in 1979 and later refined in 1991, the model outlines four interrelated dimensions of corporate responsibility: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic. These dimensions are often presented as a pyramid, where economic responsibility forms the base, suggesting that financial viability is the foundation upon which all other responsibilities rest (Carroll, 1991). The legal dimension involves compliance with formal rules and regulations. Ethical responsibility refers to practices that are fair, just, and morally defensible, even where the law is silent. At the apex is philanthropic responsibility, which includes voluntary efforts to support societal welfare, such as community initiatives, charitable donations, or environmental protection.

Figure 2.2: Carroll Pyramid of CSR



Source: Carroll (1991).

The value of Carroll's framework lies in its integration of both obligatory and discretionary expectations. It proposes that firms must not only meet legal and financial requirements but also contribute meaningfully to societal well-being. Scholars such as Visser (2006) and Kurucz et al. (2008) have affirmed its continued relevance, particularly in contexts where stakeholder trust and corporate legitimacy are paramount. The theory remains influential in shaping how firms position themselves in relation to both market performance and social accountability. It also provides a structured means for evaluating how businesses may respond to external proposals, such as sponsorship requests, that require alignment with corporate values.

In sponsorship decision-making, Carroll's CSR theory explains why firms may reject proposals that, although potentially profitable, fail to align with broader ethical or social commitments. Sponsorship is increasingly viewed as a platform not only for brand exposure but also for fulfilling legal, ethical, or philanthropic responsibilities (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). Firms are more inclined to engage with proposals that reflect their stated values or contribute to societal good, especially in environments where corporate image and public trust are closely scrutinised. The theory thus provides an important lens for understanding how sponsorship opportunities are evaluated in practice, particularly when decisions extend beyond commercial logic to include ethical and reputational considerations.

2.3 Empirical Study

Corporate sponsorship has moved from a peripheral tactic to a central component of strategic brand management. Scholars increasingly frame sponsorship not merely as a promotional add-on, but as an integral part of branding, stakeholder engagement, and organisational identity. Early conceptualisations treated it as a philanthropic gesture or an exercise in public relations. However, this view has shifted. Sponsorship is now widely interpreted as a deliberate marketing investment intended to strengthen brand image, raise visibility, and influence audience perceptions (Meenaghan, 2001; Cornwell, 2020).

Evaluation of sponsorship effectiveness remains a key theme in the literature. Scholars have proposed several metrics, both tangible and intangible. Quantitative indicators include brand recall, awareness, and purchase intention (Crimmins & Horn, 1996; Speed & Thompson, 2000), while qualitative outcomes include brand loyalty, emotional resonance, and consumer attachment (Olson, 2010; Breuer & Rumpf, 2015). However, a substantial portion of research focuses on consumer-facing results, often overlooking how firms internally assess proposals. Papadimitriou et al. (2008) suggest that firms increasingly use formal evaluation criteria, such as alignment with strategic goals, audience match, and reputational risk. Farrelly and Quester (2003) also highlight factors like exclusivity and the potential for return on investment. Nonetheless, most of these studies are Western-focused, often neglecting emerging markets. Amponsah-Tawiah and Dartey-Baah (2011) argue that in Sub-Saharan Africa, including Ghana, sponsorship decisions may be shaped by informal networks, political affiliations, and social expectations, which are poorly reflected in dominant theoretical models. Moreover, sponsorship decision-making from the manager's perspective is understudied, particularly in regions with differing institutional logics and limited regulatory oversight.

An important but often overlooked issue is the information gap between sponsors and sponsorship seekers. Nickell et al. (2011) note that while sponsors rely on structured internal mechanisms, applicants are often unaware of how proposals are evaluated. This asymmetry can lead to inefficiencies and missed opportunities. Additionally, there is a methodological skew in the literature. Quantitative approaches dominate, especially surveys and experiments assessing consumer responses (Close et al., 2006; Fleck & Quester, 2007). In contrast, qualitative studies exploring the internal reasoning of corporate decision-makers are rare (O'Reilly et al., 2008). This is a critical gap, particularly in non-Western contexts where standardised processes may not apply. Given these shortcomings, this study adopts a qualitative lens to examine how Ghanaian marketing managers interpret, assess, and approve sponsorship proposals. It explores the criteria they prioritise, the strategic considerations involved, and the extent to which these align with or depart from global models. Ultimately, this enquiry contributes to a more context-sensitive understanding of sponsorship as a marketing tool.

2.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed existing literature on corporate sponsorship, showing how it has developed into a strategic tool for brand building and audience engagement. It examined challenges such as poor evaluation of sponsorship outcomes and the need for strong brand-event alignment. The chapter also drew on Congruency Theory and Carroll's CSR Theory to explain the commercial and social motivations behind organisational sponsorship decisions, particularly within emerging markets like Ghana.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology adopted for the study. It outlines the philosophical orientation, research paradigm, research design, population, sampling strategy, data collection methods, and analytical procedures. Ethical considerations and measures for ensuring trustworthiness are also discussed to establish the rigour and credibility of the research.

3.2 Research Paradigm

This study adopted an interpretivist paradigm to explore why sponsorship seekers fail and how marketing managers assess sponsorship proposals within Ghana's telecommunications industry. Interpretivism views reality as socially constructed and context-dependent, shaped by individual experiences and institutional settings (Creswell, 2014; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). This makes it an appropriate approach for examining how marketing managers interpret sponsorship requests and make evaluative judgements influenced by organisational goals, brand values, and local business norms.

Sponsorship decision-making is inherently subjective, involving managerial reasoning, ethical considerations, and contextual interpretation, which are not easily captured through positivist or purely quantitative designs. The interpretivist paradigm, therefore, provides a suitable framework for investigating how marketing managers construct meaning in sponsorship evaluation and rejection. According to Willis (2007) and Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018), this paradigm is particularly useful for studies seeking to understand human perspectives, contextual realities, and value-based decision-making within specific organisational environments.

3.2 Philosophical Assumptions

This study adopts an interpretivist paradigm shaped by four philosophical assumptions: ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology. Ontologically, it assumes a relativist view that sponsorship decisions are socially constructed and influenced by organisational culture, managerial perception, and contextual realities (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Blaikie, 2007). Epistemologically, knowledge is viewed as co-created through interaction and reflection between the researcher and marketing managers. Axiologically, the study recognises that values and ethical judgements influence decision-making in corporate sponsorship. Methodologically, it relies on qualitative interviews to capture how marketing managers interpret, assess, and justify sponsorship proposals within Ghana's telecommunications industry. This reflects the interpretivist belief that meaning arises from lived experience and professional context (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Heron, 1996; Patton, 2015).

3.4 Research Approach

Research approaches are generally classified into quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. Quantitative research seeks to measure and analyse variables to identify causal or correlational relationships (Neuman, 2014; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). In contrast, qualitative research investigates meanings, experiences, and interpretations within natural settings (Flick, 2018; Bryman, 2012). Mixed methods combine both forms to achieve complementary insights (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). This study employed a qualitative approach to explore why sponsorship seekers fail and how marketing managers assess sponsorship proposals in Ghana's telecommunications industry. The sponsorship decision-making process involves subjective judgement, organisational priorities, and contextual factors that cannot be easily quantified (Stake, 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Qualitative inquiry enables a deeper understanding of how marketing managers interpret sponsorship requests, balance strategic and ethical considerations, and make approval decisions within real-world settings. Aligned with a constructivist epistemology, this approach assumes that knowledge is generated through interaction and interpretation between researcher and participants (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Charmaz, 2014). It therefore provides an appropriate framework for uncovering how meaning and evaluation processes develop within the specific organisational and cultural context of Ghana's telecommunications sector.

3.5 Research Design

This study employed an exploratory case study design to investigate the ethical and strategic dimensions of sponsorship practices within Ghana's telecommunications industry. The case study approach allows for a detailed understanding of organisational behaviour, decision-making, and ethical reasoning in real-world contexts (Yin, 2018; Simons, 2009). It is particularly suitable for examining how sponsorship managers interpret proposals, evaluate brand alignment, and address ethical dilemmas within a competitive market environment. The telecommunications sector, represented by firms such as MTN, AirtelTigo, and Telecel (formerly Vodafone Ghana), provides a bounded context for understanding broader industry patterns. Within this framework, semi-structured interviews were used to collect rich and consistent data, enabling the interpretation of motives, judgements, and contextual factors that shape sponsorship decisions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 2010).

3.6 Sampling Strategy

This study employed a purposive sampling strategy to select participants with practical experience in sponsorship management within Ghana's telecommunications industry. Purposive sampling is appropriate in qualitative inquiry where the aim is to obtain an in-depth understanding rather than broad generalisation (Etikan et al., 2016; Palinkas et al., 2015). Twelve participants were selected based on their direct involvement in sponsorship evaluation, marketing communication, and corporate partnership decisions. Guest et al. (2006) found that in homogeneous studies using purposive sampling, twelve interviews are often sufficient to achieve data saturation. The concept of homogeneity guided this selection, as participants from MTN, Telecel (formerly Vodafone), and AirtelTigo shared similar roles, expertise, and experiences in corporate sponsorship. This common professional background ensured consistent insights and helped achieve data saturation. Participants were drawn from the marketing and sponsorship departments of the three companies, identified through professional networks and organisational referrals to ensure relevance and depth of expertise.

3.7 Data Collection Technique

This study employed structured interviews as its primary data collection method. A uniform set of questions was administered to all participants to ensure consistency and facilitate comparison across responses (Gray, 2018; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2017). This method was appropriate for exploring sponsorship practices within Ghana's telecommunications industry, where systematic questioning allowed for clarity and thematic alignment. Structured interviews helped minimise interviewer bias and maintained rigour in examining how marketing and sponsorship managers evaluate proposals and interpret brand fit (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2019). As Rowley (2012) observes, structured interviewing is particularly useful when investigating managerial perceptions and decision-making processes within professional contexts. This approach was thus effective for eliciting insights into how ethical considerations, corporate values, and commercial objectives shape sponsorship decisions.

3.8 Data Collection Process

The data collection process followed a structured and ethically guided procedure, beginning with formal approval from the selected telecommunications companies –MTN Ghana, AirtelTigo, and Telecel Ghana. Participants were chosen based on their involvement in sponsorship evaluation, marketing strategy, or brand management to ensure relevance to the study's objectives. Each participant received an information sheet and consent form explaining their rights, including the option to participate voluntarily, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any stage, in accordance with the ethical standards outlined by Israel and Hay (2006) and the British Psychological Society (2021). Structured interviews were conducted in private office settings during non-peak hours, lasting 30-45 minutes. With prior consent, sessions were audio-recorded and manually transcribed to maintain data accuracy, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2013). Transcripts were anonymised and systematically coded. A reflective journal was maintained throughout the process to support transparency and an audit trail, in line with the principles of trustworthiness articulated by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

3.9 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to strict ethical standards, with formal approval obtained from the participating telecommunications companies before data collection commenced. Informed and voluntary consent was secured from all participants, consistent with the principles outlined by Wiles et al. (2008). Transcripts were anonymised, and data were securely stored in accordance with the guidelines of Saunders et al. (2015). Organisational identities were generalised to prevent traceability, following Hammersley and Traianou (2012). The structured interview format maintained ethical consistency, and sessions were paused whenever participants expressed discomfort, as recommended by Tracy (2020). Additional safeguards included limited data access, participant debriefing, and careful review of all research instruments to minimise potential emotional or reputational harm.

3.10 Authenticity and Trustworthiness

Authenticity and trustworthiness were prioritised to ensure the credibility of this qualitative inquiry. Guided by Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework, the study addressed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The study achieved credibility through structured interviews with experienced marketing and sponsorship managers and through validation of responses during interviews, as suggested by Birt et al. (2016). Transferability was enhanced by providing detailed contextual information on the telecommunications sector to support judgements about applicability to similar organisational settings (Tracy, 2010). Dependability was ensured through a transparent audit trail documenting methodological and analytical decisions (Nowell et al., 2017). Confirmability was maintained through reflexive interpretation and systematic questioning, ensuring that the findings reflected participants' perspectives rather than the researcher's assumptions.

3.11 Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected through structured interviews were analysed using thematic analysis, an approach suitable for identifying and interpreting patterns within qualitative data. This method allowed an in-depth exploration of how marketing managers and sponsorship officers conceptualised proposal evaluation and decision-making within Ghana's telecommunications industry (Nowell et al., 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2019). Following Terry et al.'s (2017) six-phase framework, the process moved from initial coding to the development of broader interpretive themes. An inductive, data-driven approach ensured that findings were grounded in participants' experiences (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Manual coding was used to maintain sensitivity to contextual meanings, as excessive reliance on software can obscure interpretive depth (Gherardi, 2019). Direct quotations were incorporated to enhance authenticity and give voice to participants’ perspectives.

3.12 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the methodological steps and considerations that guided the study, demonstrating the study's systematic and scientific nature. It explained the rationale for the chosen research approach, design, sampling strategy, data collection procedures, and analytical techniques, and highlighted why each was appropriate for the study’s objectives. The detailed discussion of these elements helped establish the epistemological grounding of the research and justified the methodological choices made.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the findings from structured interviews with sponsorship and marketing professionals in Ghana's telecommunications industry. The study examined how sponsorship proposals are evaluated, the reasons behind their acceptance or rejection, and the ethical and strategic factors influencing decision-making. Data were analysed in relation to the study's three objectives using thematic analysis. Emerging themes were drawn directly from participant accounts to preserve contextual authenticity and interpretive depth.

4.2 Analysis of Demographics of Participants

Demographic information provided essential context for interpreting participants' perspectives on sponsorship practices within the telecommunications industry. Data on gender, age, professional role, and years of experience helped explain variations in managerial judgement and practical understanding of sponsorship decisions. This information also confirmed that participants possessed relevant expertise and experience. Table 4.1 presents these details.

Table 4.1: Summary of Biodata of Participants

Variable	Category	Frequency
Gender	Male	7
	Female	5
Age Range	30–39	4
	40–49	5
	50 & above	3
Role	Sponsorship/Marketing Managers	5
	Brand Managers	4
	Corporate Communications Officers	3
Experience	5–10 years	3
	11–15 years	5
	Over 15 years	4

Education	Bachelor’s Degree	5
	Master’s Degree	7

Source: Author’s Field Survey, 2025.

The demographic characteristics of the participants, as presented in Table 4.1, reveal a diverse yet professionally experienced group whose backgrounds enhance the credibility of this inquiry into sponsorship decision-making within Ghana’s telecommunications industry. The sample comprised seven males and five females. This reflects the relatively balanced, yet still male-leaning, gender representation typical of corporate marketing and brand management in developing economies (ILO, 2023). The age distribution shows that most participants were between 40 and 49 years old, with others aged 50 or older. According to Armstrong and Taylor (2020), professionals within this age group tend to demonstrate stronger judgement and strategic foresight due to accumulated workplace experience. Similarly, Mintzberg (2013) emphasises that managerial maturity develops through years of exposure to organisational complexities, enabling individuals to interpret and respond effectively to dynamic corporate challenges.

Participants occupied three main professional roles: Sponsorship or Marketing Managers (5), Brand Managers (4), and Corporate Communications Officers (3). This distribution reflects a cross-section of the key functional departments that drive sponsorship decisions in the telecommunications sector. It allows for a holistic understanding of how sponsorship proposals are assessed from both strategic and communicative perspectives. The experience profile of participants, with most having over 10 years of corporate practice, aligns with Bryman's (2016) view that extensive experience strengthens the validity of qualitative findings by anchoring responses in practical expertise rather than abstract theory.

Regarding education, five participants held bachelor's degrees, while seven held master's degrees. The predominance of postgraduate qualifications indicates a high level of academic and professional competence. According to Clegg, Pitsis, and Rura-Polley (2018), such educational attainment is often associated with enhanced analytical reasoning and ethical awareness in managerial decision-making. This is particularly relevant to studies of sponsorship, where decision processes intertwine commercial objectives with ethical and reputational considerations.

Overall, the respondents in this study were well educated, professionally seasoned, and strategically positioned within their organisations. Their accumulated experience and academic grounding enabled them to articulate informed, contextually rich perspectives on corporate sponsorship practices in Ghana's telecommunications sector. This combination of professional maturity, role diversity, and educational competence ensured that the data collected were credible, reflective, and deeply insightful about how sponsorship decisions are made, justified, and at times rejected in the industry.

4.3 Analysis of Study Objectives

The study explores factors that influence the success or failure of sponsorship proposals in Ghana's telecommunications industry, focusing on MTN, AirtelTigo, and Telecel. It specifically addresses three objectives: (1) to identify the reasons why sponsorship proposals are rejected, (2) to examine the criteria and processes marketing managers use to evaluate sponsorship proposals, and (3) to determine the key attributes and characteristics that contribute to the success of sponsorship proposals. Data from twelve structured interviews with sponsorship and marketing managers, brand managers, and corporate communications officers were analysed through thematic analysis.

This section presents the findings regarding the first study objective, highlighting patterns across the three companies and their perceptions of sponsorship proposals.

4.3.1 Reasons for Rejection of Sponsorship Proposals

Sponsorship assessment within Ghana's telecommunications industry is a layered and deliberate process. Proposals are not dismissed arbitrarily; they are evaluated through multiple lenses: strategic, ethical, and operational. Participants across MTN Ghana, AirtelTigo, and Telecel Ghana consistently highlighted that sponsorship rejections often stemmed from misalignment with corporate objectives, weak value propositions, poor proposal presentation, limited audience reach, reputational risks, and budgetary constraints. These factors demonstrate the increasing professionalisation of sponsorship decisions, which have shifted from goodwill-driven gestures to strategically informed investments in brand equity and social legitimacy.

4.3.1.1 Misalignment with Corporate Objectives

The most dominant reason for rejecting sponsorship proposals was misalignment with corporate objectives or a lack of strategic fit. Sponsorship managers emphasised that proposals must clearly correspond with the company's broader marketing strategy, brand positioning, and communication priorities. Submissions that failed to demonstrate how the sponsored activity would advance strategic goals or reinforce brand identity were routinely dismissed. Managers highlighted that alignment ensures that sponsorship investments contribute meaningfully to organisational objectives, optimise brand exposure, and maintain consistency with the company's long-term vision and market positioning. An MTN Ghana sponsorship manager explained that proposals are screened first for strategic relevance before any financial discussion takes place, stating:

> "Even if a proposal looks good, it must tie into what we are already doing. We cannot spread our efforts too thin by supporting unrelated

> projects If a proposal does not tie into our brand story or the strategic pillars we are focusing on, it does not progress beyond the initial review stage."

Some participants suggested that proposers fail to research the company's brand direction before submitting their requests. As one participant put it,

> "People don't study our marketing trends. They just send letters hoping we'll help. But we are not donors; we are brand investors."

This sentiment reflects a shift towards strategic sponsorship management, echoing Cornwell's (2019) findings that corporations increasingly treat sponsorship as an integrated marketing communication tool rather than a philanthropic act. AirtelTigo, in contrast, demonstrated a slightly more flexible interpretation, with a brand manager noting that proposals with innovative or social impact potential could still receive attention even if they did not fully align with corporate themes. Telecel Ghana's corporate communications officer added that alignment often depends on "timing and the narrative fit" within ongoing brand campaigns. These insights suggest that while all firms prioritise alignment, its operational meaning varies. MTN appears to view alignment through a strict strategic lens, AirtelTigo through innovation and community engagement, and Telecel Ghana through branding synergy and visibility. This variation indicates how corporate culture mediates the interpretation of alignment criteria within sponsorship evaluation.

4.3.1.2 Weak Value Proposition

Participants across all three firms frequently cited weak value propositions as a key reason for rejecting sponsorship proposals. Many proposals, they explained, failed to articulate a clear, compelling, and measurable benefit for the sponsoring organisation. In several cases, proposals lacked a coherent link between the proposed activity and the company's strategic objectives, making it difficult for marketing managers to justify investment. Additionally, participants noted that vague or overly general claims, insufficient evidence of potential audience reach, and unclear return on investment further undermined the credibility and persuasiveness of these submissions. One Manager remarked:

> "Most proposals focus on their needs, funding, exposure, logistics, but they forget to show us what the brand gains in return. That's where many fall short."

This emphasis on reciprocity supports the view of Meenaghan and O'Sullivan (2020), who argue that modern sponsorship requires demonstrable value exchange. MTN Ghana participants noted that value is often defined in terms of visibility, brand recall, and market penetration. AirtelTigo, however, prioritised emotional resonance and community connection, while Telecel Ghana leaned towards digital visibility and youth engagement. Across firms, there was consensus that proposals lacking clear audience data, engagement metrics, or media integration plans are unlikely to succeed. The comparative analysis shows that while the nature of "value" differs across brands, proposers who fail to quantify it in terms relevant to the sponsor's communication strategy risk immediate disqualification.

4.3.1.3 Poor Proposal Design and Presentation

The design, structure, and overall presentation of sponsorship proposals also played a significant role in decision-making. Participants agreed that poorly written, disorganised, or visually unappealing proposals often created a negative first impression, signalling weak managerial competence, lack of professionalism, or limited capacity to execute the proposed initiative effectively. Such shortcomings not only reduced the proposal's perceived credibility but also raised doubts about the sponsor's potential return on investment, making approval less likely. A corporate communications officer observed:

> "Some proposals have excellent ideas but are carelessly presented. If the document looks rushed or inconsistent, we begin to doubt whether the organiser can deliver."

This finding resonates with Crompton's (2017) argument that proposal presentations often serve as a proxy for professional reliability. Other participants described internal review processes in which presentation quality, clarity of objectives, logical flow, and budget transparency played significant roles in the shortlisting process. Other managers expressed a similar sentiment but noted that creativity and originality could occasionally compensate for minor presentation flaws if the core idea was compelling. Some participants appeared to place more weight on digital readiness, favouring proposals that demonstrated an understanding of online engagement and audience analytics. These patterns reveal that professionalism in proposal presentation does not merely reflect aesthetic appeal but communicates organisational credibility, which in turn shapes perceptions of risk and reliability.

4.3.1.4 Inadequate Audience Reach and Media Exposure

A further reason for rejection was inadequate audience reach. Sponsorship officers across all three companies emphasised that proposals must clearly demonstrate substantial audience potential and measurable exposure. In the highly competitive telecommunications sector, high visibility is directly linked to brand recognition and equity, making it a critical factor in the evaluation process. Proposals lacking evidence of reach or failing to specify target demographics were often deemed insufficient to justify investment. One Marketing Manager remarked:

> "We look at the audience size, the channels of exposure, and the post-event visibility plan. If it's not measurable, it's not justifiable."

This focus reflects the arguments of Weeks et al. (2008), who assert that sponsorship decisions are increasingly data-driven, prioritising reach and return on investment. Airtel, however, took a slightly more community-oriented stance, supporting smaller events that align with its corporate social investment agenda, particularly in education and youth empowerment. Telecel Ghana was described as strategically targeting media-based and entertainment-driven events to build digital engagement and brand revitalisation. Thus, while exposure is universally valued, its evaluation differs by corporate orientation, commercial visibility for MTN, community resonance for AirtelTigo, and media vibrancy for Telecel Ghana.

4.3.1.5 Ethical and Reputational Concerns

Ethical and reputational considerations also significantly influenced sponsorship rejection. Managers explained that telecommunications firms in Ghana operate under intense public scrutiny, so any potential association with activities or organisations perceived as unethical, controversial, or misaligned with corporate values could negatively affect brand image. Proposals that lacked transparency, demonstrated questionable practices, or failed to provide credible assurances regarding compliance with legal and social standards were frequently rejected. Participants highlighted that maintaining stakeholder trust, safeguarding corporate reputation, and aligning with socially responsible practices were central to the decision-making process, making ethical and reputational factors decisive criteria in evaluating sponsorship requests**.** A corporate affairs manager stated:

> "Every sponsorship reflects our identity. If an event involves activities that may spark moral controversy or public backlash, we simply cannot be part of it."

Similarly, one participant stated,

> "Sometimes the organisers themselves are the problem. If their image is controversial, we cannot risk it. Sponsorship is not just about exposure, it's about credibility."

Marketing managers consistently emphasised that ethical considerations and the reputational impact of sponsorships are central to their decision-making processes. This observation aligns with Lacey and Close (2013), who highlight that sponsorship relationships directly shape stakeholder perceptions and long-term trust. AirtelTigo participants expressed similar caution, though they mentioned occasionally supporting culturally embedded events if the broader purpose served social unity. Telecel Ghana participants indicated that they prioritised the "reputational tone" of events, examining organisers' track records before making commitments. Across all firms, avoiding ethical missteps was considered crucial to preserving corporate integrity and consumer loyalty. Participants recognised that in Ghana's value-conscious environment, a single misjudged partnership could have significant reputational repercussions.

4.3.1.6 Budgetary and Resource Constraints

Budgetary constraints emerged as a recurring, yet frequently misunderstood, reason for sponsorship rejection. Sponsorship managers explained that each financial year operates within clearly defined priorities and strict budgetary limits, leaving minimal flexibility to accommodate unplanned or last-minute proposals. Once resources are allocated to pre-approved initiatives, late submissions or unsolicited requests face significant hurdles, irrespective of their potential value, strategic alignment, or innovative merits. Participants emphasised that careful planning, adherence to submission timelines, and alignment with organisational priorities are essential for increasing the likelihood of proposal approval, highlighting the critical role of financial management in the sponsorship evaluation process. A sponsorship manager commented:

> "Many people assume rejection means disinterest, but sometimes the funds are already committed for the year. Timing is everything."

This reflects Speed and Thompson's (2021) observation that sponsorship operates within structured financial cycles that limit discretionary spending. A cross-section of the participants explained that while small contingency funds exist for exceptional opportunities, approvals require multi-departmental justification. Others added that budgetary competition between marketing and corporate social responsibility divisions sometimes complicates decision-making, while the rest of the participants further noted that budget limitations encouraged selectivity, prompting firms to focus on fewer but higher-impact partnerships.

4.3.2 Criteria and Strategic Considerations in Sponsorship Decisions

Sponsorship evaluation is a complex process influenced by strategic alignment, brand positioning, audience engagement, and anticipated return on investment. Many proposals fail because these key factors are not adequately addressed. The second objective of this study, therefore, examines the criteria and strategic considerations that marketing managers use when assessing sponsorship proposals in the Ghanaian telecommunications industry. By exploring the perspectives of marketing managers, brand managers, and corporate communications officers across MTN, AirtelTigo, and Telecel, the study identifies key themes showing how corporate priorities, market dynamics, and organisational strategies shape sponsorship decisions. Thematic analysis of the structured interviews generated six dominant themes, which are discussed in detail below.

4.3.2.1 Alignment with Corporate Strategy and Brand Objectives

A primary consideration highlighted by participants across all three companies was the strategic alignment of the sponsorship proposal with the company's broader corporate and brand objectives. Participants emphasised that proposals that failed to clearly demonstrate this alignment were typically rejected, as such submissions were perceived to offer limited value in advancing the organisation's marketing strategy or reinforcing its brand identity. They noted that alignment ensures that sponsorship investments contribute meaningfully to long-term corporate goals, support cohesive brand messaging, and maximise return on investment, making it a critical determinant in the evaluation process. One participant noted:

> "If a sponsorship does not clearly complement our brand positioning or long-term strategy, it is difficult for us to justify the investment."

This finding resonates with Cornwell et al. (2001) and Meenaghan (2001) who argue that strategic congruence between sponsorship initiatives and corporate objectives is a key predictor of sponsorship acceptance. In this study, some participants emphasised alignment with national visibility and corporate social responsibility initiatives, whereas AirtelTigo participants focused more on audience engagement and brand recall metrics. By contrast, Telecel participants highlighted the importance of measurable impact on consumer perception and sales growth. This comparative difference indicates that even within the same sector, organisational priorities influence how alignment is assessed. The participants' responses underscore that sponsorship is not merely a transactional activity but a strategic tool for reinforcing brand narratives.

4.3.2.2 Financial Viability and Budget Constraints

Financial feasibility was another dominant consideration, assessed in relation to the organisation's budget and anticipated returns. Participants consistently emphasised that proposals must demonstrate cost-effectiveness, justify the requested investment, and provide a clear projection of tangible and intangible benefits. Submissions that lacked detailed financial planning or failed to show a reasonable return on investment were often rejected, as managers prioritised initiatives that optimally balance expenditure with strategic and marketing outcomes. Reflecting on the evaluation process, a participant remarked,

> "We receive many very appealing proposals, but some are simply too costly relative to the benefit. We cannot stretch our budget for initiatives that don't justify the spend."

The importance of robust financial planning emerged as a recurring theme, highlighting how cost transparency and expected returns shape sponsorship approval. This finding supports Cornwell and Maignan's (1998) suggestion that financial pragmatism strongly influences corporate sponsorship decisions. MTN participants, in particular, highlighted that proposals must fit within multi-year sponsorship budgets, while Telecel participants emphasised the need for demonstrable ROI in short-term campaigns. Participants indicated that proposals lacking transparent cost structures or projected outcomes were rarely considered. These findings suggest that financial scrutiny is as much a gatekeeping mechanism as a strategic evaluation tool, ensuring resources are directed toward high-impact sponsorships.

4.3.2.3 Audience and Market Relevance

Participants across all three networks stressed the critical importance of aligning sponsorship proposals with the target audience and ensuring they are relevant to the intended market segment. They highlighted that sponsorships that failed to resonate with the company's key consumer demographic or lacked clear identification of the target audience were often rejected. Managers explained that audience alignment not only influences brand visibility and engagement but also affects the potential return on investment, as initiatives that do not connect with the intended consumers are unlikely to generate meaningful impact or contribute to the company's marketing objectives. A participant explained the importance of aligning proposals with corporate objectives,

> "We ask ourselves: who will this initiative reach? Will it resonate with our core consumers? If not, it's unlikely to gain approval."

The significance of aligning sponsorships with the intended audience became evident across all interviews, reinforcing the role of market understanding in decision-making. This view is augmented by the findings of Meenaghan and Shipley (1999), who highlight audience congruence as central to effective sponsorship. Some participants reported prioritising initiatives targeting urban youth segments, while a few focused on middle-income consumers in key cities. The rest, by contrast, focused on underserved or niche markets where sponsorship could generate brand differentiation. These differences suggest that audience insight and segmentation analysis are critical tools in the evaluation process, reflecting how marketing strategies shape sponsorship decisions.

4.3.2.4 Track Record and Credibility of the Proposer

The proposer's track record and organisational credibility emerged as key considerations in the sponsorship evaluation. Participants indicated that prior experience in successfully executing events or campaigns significantly influenced the likelihood of approval. Proposals from organisations with a strong history of reliability, professionalism, and measurable outcomes were viewed more favourably, as past performance provided assurance of effective execution and reduced perceived risk. Conversely, applicants with limited or unverified experience often faced higher scrutiny and a lower probability of securing sponsorship. A participant highlighted that:

> "We consider whether the organisers have a proven history of delivering results. Without that assurance, it's too risky to commit."

The importance of organisational credibility and proven track records emerged clearly during interviews, reflecting a key factor in sponsorship evaluation. This observation is supported by Cornwell, Roy, and Steinard (2005), who suggest that organisational reputation and reliability significantly affect sponsorship acceptance. MTN participants emphasised partnerships with established NGOs and event companies, while AirtelTigo participants were more flexible, sometimes considering smaller but innovative organisers. Telecel participants preferred proposers who could provide quantitative evidence of past campaign outcomes. The emphasis on credibility highlights a risk-management approach in which companies seek to mitigate reputational and financial exposure.

4.3.2.5 Innovation and Differentiation of the Proposal

Participants noted that proposals presenting unique, innovative, or differentiated concepts were more likely to receive approval. Creativity and novelty were regarded as strong indicators of potential impact, audience engagement, and the ability to enhance brand visibility. Participants explained that original ideas not only capture attention but also create memorable experiences that resonate with consumers, thereby strengthening brand equity. Proposals incorporating novel approaches, distinctive activations, or inventive marketing strategies were perceived as demonstrating forward-thinking and strategic insight, which increased confidence in the proposer's ability to deliver high-quality outcomes and achieve meaningful returns on investment. A professional involved in sponsorship management stated:

> "We are looking for something that stands out. Standard proposals
> without fresh ideas rarely excite decision-makers."

In sponsorship evaluations, the ability to offer differentiated, innovative approaches is often a decisive factor in capturing corporate attention and securing approval. This aligns with Cornwell (2010), who suggests that differentiation is critical for sponsors seeking to enhance brand visibility and memorability. Participants highlighted that innovation was often linked to digital engagement strategies, while Telecel participants valued creative integration with community development initiatives. Some of the participants emphasised multimedia campaigns that leveraged emerging technologies. The findings indicate that innovation serves as both a strategic enabler and a persuasive factor in proposal evaluation.

4.3.2.6 Risk Assessment and Compliance Considerations

Risk assessment was also consistently highlighted by participants as a decisive factor in sponsorship evaluation. This included considerations of regulatory compliance, potential reputational impact, and operational feasibility. Participants emphasised that proposals that failed to address these risks adequately were often rejected, as organisations sought to avoid legal complications, negative publicity, or logistical challenges. Effective risk management within a proposal was seen as an indicator of thorough planning, organisational competence, and the likelihood of successful execution, all of which were critical to securing sponsorship approval. One participant explained:

> "Even a brilliant idea can be rejected if it poses legal, reputational, or operational risks. We have to ensure that everything aligns with our policies and regulatory frameworks."

Effectively managing risk is a crucial consideration in sponsorship decision-making, influencing both approval and implementation. This is supported by the work of Cornwell and Coote (2005), who argue that sponsorship decisions involve balancing opportunity with risk management. MTN participants prioritised regulatory alignment and adherence to corporate social responsibility frameworks, while AirtelTigo emphasised operational feasibility and logistical risk. Telecel participants placed higher importance on potential reputational impact and media perception. These comparative insights show that risk considerations are multifaceted, influencing not just the decision to approve but also the scope and structure of the sponsorship agreement.

4.3.4 Key Attributes Contributing to Successful Sponsorship Proposals

Several fundamental attributes contribute to the success of a sponsorship proposal. Understanding these success factors is critical for sponsors aiming to secure corporate support and for companies seeking proposals that align with strategic, financial, and brand objectives. The fourth objective aimed to determine the key attributes and characteristics that contribute to the success of sponsorship proposals submitted to telecommunications companies in Ghana**.** The thematic analysis of interviews with marketing and sponsorship managers/officers from MTN, AirtelTigo, and Telecel revealed six dominant themes that underpin successful proposals. These themes include strategic alignment, financial feasibility, audience relevance, proposer credibility, creativity and innovation, and clarity and structure, are explored below. This provides insights into the factors that consistently influence approval decisions across the three companies.

4.3.4.1 Strategic Alignment with Corporate Objectives

A prominent factor contributing to successful sponsorship proposals was alignment with corporate strategy and brand positioning. Participants indicated that proposals which clearly articulated how the initiative supported the company's strategic objectives, reinforced brand identity, and complemented existing marketing efforts were more likely to gain approval. Such alignment signalled to managers that the sponsorship would deliver tangible value, enhance brand equity, and contribute meaningfully to long-term organisational goals, making it a critical determinant of success. A participant stated,

> "Successful proposals are those that show a direct link to our brand objectives. If it supports our CSR, marketing, or visibility goals, it stands out."

Ensuring that sponsorship proposals align with a company's broader strategic objectives is widely recognised as a key determinant of success. In agreement with Cornwell et al. (2001), who emphasise that strategic congruence is fundamental to sponsorship effectiveness. Comparative insights show that some telecommunications companies prioritised proposals integrating corporate social responsibility and nationwide impact; others valued alignment with urban youth engagement and digital platforms, as well as proposals targeting niche or underserved communities. Across the three companies, strategic fit emerged as a non-negotiable factor for success, underscoring the importance of tailoring proposals to organisational priorities.

4.3.4.2 Clear and Realistic Budgeting

Participants emphasised the critical importance of well-planned budgets and clear financial projections in determining the success of sponsorship proposals. Proposals that included realistic cost estimates, detailed resource-allocation breakdowns, and transparent projections of return on investment were viewed more favourably by decision-makers. Participants explained that such financial clarity not only reflects thorough planning and organisational competence but also reduces uncertainty and perceived risk. A dialogue from the interview further illustrated that,

> "Proposals that break down costs, highlight expected outcomes, and justify expenditure always get attention. It shows the proposer understands financial discipline."

This finding aligns closely with Cornwell and Maignan (1998), who contend that financial transparency, feasibility, and clarity substantially enhance the credibility of sponsorship proposals. Participants from MTN emphasised the value of multi-year budget plans that demonstrate long-term strategic thinking and sustained investment potential. In contrast, AirtelTigo participants focused on proposals that highlight measurable short-term impacts and clearly defined deliverables, reflecting their priority for immediate, quantifiable outcomes. Telecel participants placed particular emphasis on budget efficiency, assessing whether resources were optimally allocated relative to anticipated community engagement and brand exposure. Participants collectively underscored that detailed financial planning signals organisational competence, foresight, and accountability.

4.3.4.3 Audience Engagement and Market Relevance

Participants identified a demonstrated understanding of the target audience as a critical factor in determining sponsorship success. Successful proposals clearly articulated the characteristics, preferences, and behaviours of the intended audience, and provided detailed explanations of how the sponsorship would effectively engage and resonate with them. Participants emphasised that proposals demonstrating deep insight into audience segmentation, reach, and engagement potential were significantly more persuasive. Such proposals indicated that the sponsoring company could achieve meaningful interactions, strengthen brand loyalty, and maximise return on investment. By showing a nuanced understanding of the target market, applicants signalled strategic thinking and enhanced the overall credibility and appeal of their sponsorship request. Through the interview, it was conveyed that:

> "The proposals that succeed clearly show how they will reach our audience. They know who we want to impact and how to do it effectively."

This means that understanding the target audience is widely recognised as a critical factor in sponsorship effectiveness. Meenaghan and Shipley (1999) similarly emphasise that audience relevance and market insight are central to sponsorship effectiveness. Participants noted that MTN prioritised urban youth segments, AirtelTigo valued digitally savvy consumers, and Telecel focused on local communities. Comparative analysis suggests that precise audience targeting not only increases the likelihood of approval but also maximises potential brand impact. This underscores the importance of research-driven proposals that demonstrate a clear understanding of consumer behaviour, engagement potential, and alignment with corporate marketing objectives.

4.3.4.4 Credibility and Proven Track Record

A key factor in sponsorship approval was the credibility of the proposer and evidence of past successful initiatives. Participants highlighted that proposals submitted by organisations with a proven track record, verifiable results, and demonstrated operational capacity were more likely to succeed. Such credibility reassured sponsors of the applicant's ability to execute effectively, reduced perceived risk, and enhanced confidence that the proposed activities would deliver measurable outcomes and align with corporate objectives. A participant shared an insight,

> "We look for proposers who have delivered before. If they can show a successful track record, the proposal is more convincing."

This finding shows that the proposer's credibility and proven track record are pivotal to sponsorship approval. This collaborates with Cornwell et al. (2005), who argue that sponsor credibility reduces uncertainty and perceived risk.

4.3.4.5 Creativity, Innovation, and Differentiation

Participants emphasised that unique, creative, and innovative proposals were critical determinants of sponsorship approval. Standard or repetitive ideas were generally viewed as uninspiring and less likely to gain support. In contrast, proposals that introduced novel approaches, original concepts, or leveraged emerging technologies were perceived as distinctive, forward-thinking, and capable of generating meaningful impact. Participants noted that such creativity not only captured attention but also signalled strategic insight, strong audience engagement potential, and the capacity to enhance brand visibility and reputation. By demonstrating innovation and originality, proposals positioned themselves as high-value opportunities, increasing their likelihood of approval and long-term success. It was observed during the discussion that,

> "The most successful proposals are those that bring something new –different approaches, digital integration, or innovative audience engagement strategies."

In this regard, participants consistently highlighted that proposals demonstrating originality, creative concepts, and differentiated approaches were more likely to gain approval. Cornwell (2010) notes that creativity and differentiation increase sponsorship effectiveness by capturing attention and reinforcing brand distinctiveness. MTN valued digital-first campaigns, AirtelTigo favoured multi-platform engagement, and Telecel prioritised community-centred innovation. Comparative analysis shows that innovation is both a competitive advantage and a signal of professionalism, often tipping borderline proposals toward approval.

4.3.4.6 Clarity of Communication and Proposal Structure

Participants highlighted that well-structured, clear, and concise proposals were far more likely to gain approval. Proposals that systematically outlined objectives, deliverables, timelines, and expected outcomes provided transparency, demonstrated professionalism, and facilitated informed decision-making. Participants noted that such clarity reduced ambiguity, allowed evaluators to assess feasibility and alignment with corporate priorities quickly, and signalled the proposer's organisational competence. Well-presented proposals were perceived as credible, reliable, and easier to monitor and manage, thereby increasing confidence in successful execution and overall sponsorship impact. During the interview, it was emphasised that,

> "Proposals that are easy to read, logically structured, and precise always have an advantage. Confusing or overly lengthy proposals often get overlooked."

This is supported by sponsorship consulting literature (Farrelly & Quester, 2005), which emphasises that clarity enhances persuasiveness and reduces evaluative effort. Participants noted that they valued well-prepared executive summaries and structured budgets, precise presentation of expected engagement metrics, and readability and clearly defined tangible outcomes. Effective communication, therefore, functions as both a practical tool and a strategic attribute, directly contributing to the likelihood of sponsorship success and fostering confidence in the proposer's capability to deliver on commitments.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

The study explores factors that influence the success or failure of sponsorship proposals in Ghana's telecommunications industry. It specifically addresses three objectives: to identify the reasons sponsorship proposals are rejected, to examine the criteria and processes marketing managers use to evaluate sponsorship proposals, and to determine the key attributes and characteristics that contribute to sponsorship proposal success. Data from twelve structured interviews with sponsorship and marketing managers, brand managers, and corporate communications officers were analysed through thematic analysis.

The findings reveal a structured yet nuanced approach to sponsorship evaluation among telecommunications professionals in Ghana. Participants consistently recognised the strategic importance of sponsorship in enhancing brand visibility and equity, yet interpretations of value, alignment, and impact varied. This variability echoes concerns noted by Cornwell et al. (2001), who argue that sponsorship decisions are shaped not only by corporate strategy but also by organisational culture, market priorities, and individual managerial judgement. In practice, the concept of "value" remains contested, with some firms prioritising audience reach and digital engagement, while others emphasise community resonance or brand storytelling. These observations align with Congruency Theory, which suggests that sponsorship success depends on the degree of alignment between the sponsor's brand, the sponsored activity, and perceived audience expectations. Proposals that fail to achieve this congruence are more likely to be rejected.

A central tension emerged around strategic alignment. Although all participants highlighted its importance, the operationalisation of alignment differed. MTN focused on nationwide visibility and corporate social responsibility initiatives, AirtelTigo considered innovative engagement with urban youth, and Telecel emphasised niche markets and campaign timing. This tension reflects wider debates in sponsorship literature, where alignment is recognised as crucial but is interpreted flexibly (Meenaghan, 2001). Carroll's CSR Theory further supports these findings, emphasising that firms consider economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities when making sponsorship decisions. Ethical and reputational considerations were systematically applied, with proposals linked to controversial or socially insensitive activities rejected, demonstrating the integration of corporate social responsibility into sponsorship management.

Value proposition and audience relevance were consistently cited as key determinants of approval. Many proposals were rejected for failing to demonstrate clear benefits to the sponsoring company, whether in terms of measurable exposure, engagement metrics, or market impact. This mirrors the observations of Meenaghan and O'Sullivan (2020), who argue that sponsorship effectiveness hinges on reciprocal value creation. Differences in defining "value" highlight that what constitutes a sufficient return on investment is context-dependent, reflecting company-specific priorities and strategic interpretations. Proposal presentation, clarity, and credibility emerged as decisive factors. Poorly structured or vague proposals were routinely dismissed, even when ideas were promising. This supports Crompton (2017), who notes that presentations often serve as a proxy for organisational reliability and managerial competence. Participants emphasised that clear, concise, and professionally presented proposals not only facilitate evaluation but also communicate trustworthiness and operational capability. Similarly, the credibility and track record of proposers influenced approval, aligning with Cornwell, Roy, and Steinard (2005), who highlight the role of proposer reliability in reducing risk and enhancing confidence in sponsorship outcomes.

Innovation and creativity also played a critical role. Proposals that offered novel approaches, differentiated experiences, or digital-first strategies were more likely to succeed, while standard or repetitive ideas were less compelling. This finding resonates with Cornwell (2010), who emphasises that creativity strengthens brand distinctiveness and audience engagement. Ethical and reputational considerations were highlighted as central to decision-making. Sponsorships associated with potentially controversial or unethical activities were systematically rejected, reflecting concerns about brand integrity, public perception, and stakeholder trust, consistent with Carroll's CSR Theory. Budgetary and resource constraints were another recurrent theme. Participants indicated that even strategically aligned and innovative proposals could be rejected due to limited financial capacity or pre-allocated budgets.

Overall, the study shows that sponsorship evaluation in Ghana's telecommunications sector balances strategy, audience engagement, finances, creativity, and ethics. Organisational culture and market focus shape interpretations of value and alignment. Findings highlight Congruency Theory for strategic fit and Carroll's CSR Theory for ethical responsibility, showing that successful proposals require alignment, impact, credibility, and societal value.

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the findings from the set of data collected through interviews with marketing managers responsible for analysing sponsorship proposals. The results show that sponsorship decisions are guided by strategic alignment, financial feasibility, audience relevance, proposer credibility, creativity, and ethical considerations. Rejections commonly resulted from misalignment with corporate objectives, weak value propositions, poor presentation, limited audience reach, ethical concerns, or budget constraints. Successful proposals clearly demonstrated strategic fit, audience insight, financial clarity, proven track records, innovative approaches, and well-structured communication. The overall findings reveal a deliberate, structured approach to sponsorship, highlighting the importance of integrating strategic, practical, and ethical dimensions into proposal development.

CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the study and, most importantly, draws conclusions from the key findings on sponsorship evaluation in Ghana's telecommunications industry. It also outlines the study's limitations and proposes recommendations for industry and future academic research based on the findings from the data gathered.

5.2 Summary of Findings

The study explores factors that influence the success or failure of sponsorship proposals in Ghana's telecommunications industry. It specifically addresses three objectives: to identify the reasons sponsorship proposals are rejected, to examine the criteria and processes marketing managers use to evaluate sponsorship proposals, and to determine the key attributes and characteristics that contribute to sponsorship proposal success.

The study found that sponsorship proposals were frequently rejected due to misalignment with corporate objectives, weak value propositions, poor proposal presentation, limited audience reach, ethical concerns, and budgetary constraints. Participants emphasised that proposals that failed to demonstrate clear strategic fit or measurable benefit were unlikely to progress, reflecting a deliberate, structured evaluation process. Ethical and reputational considerations were particularly significant, as firms sought to avoid associations with controversial or low-credibility initiatives. Budgetary limitations and planning constraints further shaped rejection decisions, highlighting the operational realities that underpin sponsorship management. These findings illustrate that sponsorship assessment extends beyond surface-level evaluation, encompassing strategic, ethical, and financial dimensions to safeguard brand integrity and organisational priorities.

The analysis revealed that clear criteria, including strategic alignment, financial feasibility, audience relevance, proposer credibility, innovation, and risk assessment, guided evaluation processes. Strategic alignment ensured that sponsorship investments supported long-term brand objectives and marketing campaigns, while financial scrutiny safeguarded cost-effectiveness and return on investment. Audience analysis and market relevance determined whether proposals could generate meaningful engagement and visibility, reflecting the centrality of consumer insight in corporate decision-making. Participants also stressed the importance of proposers' credibility and past performance, which mitigated risk and reassured sponsors of effective execution. Risk assessment, including compliance with legal and ethical standards, further shaped approval decisions. Collectively, these criteria reveal a structured, context-sensitive approach to sponsorship evaluation that integrates operational, strategic, and ethical considerations into decision-making.

Successful sponsorship proposals demonstrated strategic fit, financial clarity, clearly defined audience engagement, a proven track record, creative and innovative ideas, and coherent communication. The findings suggest that high-quality proposals demonstrate both strategic relevance and professional competence, effectively balancing measurable outcomes, creativity, and ethical responsibility. This underscores the professionalisation of sponsorship in Ghana's telecommunications sector, where decisions are no longer driven by goodwill alone but are carefully calibrated to achieve long-term brand equity, audience engagement, and reputational security.

5.3 Conclusions

The findings indicate that sponsorship evaluation in Ghana's telecommunications sector has become increasingly professionalised, moving well beyond ad hoc or goodwill-driven decisions. Strategic alignment with corporate objectives emerges as a primary determinant, while careful financial planning, detailed audience understanding, and the credibility and track record of the proposer are consistently critical for success. Ethical considerations, including reputational risk, exert a substantial influence on decision-making, although their interpretation varies across organisational cultures. Moreover, proposals that demonstrate creative differentiation, measurable value, and effective risk management are more likely to secure approval. Overall, these findings underscore that effective sponsorship requires a delicate balance between strategic investment, operational feasibility, stakeholder engagement, and ethical vigilance. They highlight the importance of structured evaluation processes, transparent criteria, and organisational learning in enhancing the quality, impact, and sustainability of sponsorship initiatives within the sector.

5.4 Limitations

Several limitations affected this study. The qualitative design provided a deep look into sponsorship decisions but included only 12 participants, so the findings may not apply to the wider industry. Focusing on MTN, AirtelTigo, and Telecel might not capture all sponsorship practices in Ghana. Thematic analysis, though systematic, relies on interpretation and could introduce some bias. Differences in company culture, experience levels, and familiarity with structured sponsorship processes likely influenced responses. Other factors, such as budget timing, market trends, and internal policies, may also have shaped how participants evaluated proposals. These limitations mean the findings should be seen as insightful for understanding patterns and perspectives, rather than as definitive for all firms in the telecommunications sector.

5.5 Recommendations for Future Studies

Future researchers can broaden the scope of this study by employing quantitative methods to validate the key themes that emerged from this work statistically. While this study adopted a qualitative approach, a larger survey of marketing and sponsorship managers across different industries would help establish the extent to which factors such as strategic fit, financial clarity, proposer credibility, innovation, and reputational considerations significantly influence sponsorship approval decisions.

Again, since this study focused primarily on the telecommunications sector, future researchers can expand the investigation to include other industries such as banking, manufacturing, and fast-moving consumer goods. This will help ascertain whether sponsorship decision-making criteria differ across sectors or whether there are common determinants that apply universally.

Further, future studies can include the perspectives of sponsorship seekers such as event organisers, agencies, and non-profit organisations. This will provide a more balanced understanding of the sponsorship process and reveal possible gaps in communication, proposal quality, and expectations between sponsors and proposers.

In addition, subsequent researchers can examine how informal networks, personal relationships, and cultural dynamics influence sponsorship approval in Ghana and other African contexts. Such studies will contribute to a better understanding of how cultural and contextual factors shape corporate sponsorship practices in emerging markets.

Finally, future studies can adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to assess the long-term impact of sponsorship activities on brand awareness, reputation, and return on investment. This will provide valuable empirical evidence on sponsorship effectiveness and further strengthen the theoretical foundations for sponsorship decision-making in Ghana and beyond.

5.6 Recommendations for Industry

The findings of this study have revealed that sponsorship seekers often fail not because their ideas lack merit, but because their proposals do not sufficiently align with the strategic and marketing objectives of sponsoring organisations. It is therefore recommended that individuals and organisations seeking sponsorship take deliberate steps to study and understand the priorities, brand values, and marketing focus areas of potential sponsors before submitting proposals. This will help ensure greater congruence between the sponsor's and sponsee’s objectives, thereby increasing the likelihood of approval.

Again, the study recommends that sponsorship seekers place strong emphasis on the quality and clarity of their proposals. Proposals should clearly articulate the expected benefits to the sponsor, demonstrate measurable value, and provide evidence of accountability and sound financial planning. Sponsorship seekers should also incorporate creativity and innovation into their presentations by integrating digital and experiential marketing elements that appeal to modern audiences.

Moreover, corporate organisations and sponsoring firms are encouraged to establish well-defined sponsorship policies and guidelines to ensure consistency and transparency in decision-making. These policies should include clear evaluation criteria, reporting mechanisms, and post-event assessment frameworks to measure the effectiveness of sponsored initiatives. Providing structured feedback to unsuccessful applicants can also help improve proposal quality across the industry and strengthen relationships with external stakeholders.

In addition, the study recommends that corporate organisations invest in the training of their marketing and sponsorship personnel to enhance their evaluation capabilities. Training should focus not only on technical and financial assessment but also on understanding social impact, ethical considerations, and digital activation strategies. Building such internal capacity will promote more objective and forward-looking sponsorship decisions.

Finally, sponsorship seekers and sponsoring firms alike are encouraged to embrace digital technologies and data analytics in the sponsorship process. Digital tools can support proposal evaluation, audience measurement, and impact reporting, leading to better resource allocation and improved accountability. In a rapidly evolving marketing environment, integrating data-driven insights into sponsorship management will ensure that both sponsors and proposers derive maximum mutual value from their collaborations.

5.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter summarised the study's findings, highlighting key factors behind sponsorship proposal acceptance and rejection, including strategic fit, financial clarity, audience relevance, credibility, creativity, and ethics. It noted limitations such as the small sample and potential bias, and proposed recommendations on policy, training, evaluation frameworks, and ethical oversight to improve decision-making, ROI, and stakeholder trust.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW GUIDE: SPONSORSHIP EVALUATION IN GHANA'S TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY

INTRODUCTION: The purpose of this interview is to explore why sponsorship proposals are sometimes rejected and what factors contribute to their success in Ghana's telecommunications industry. Your insights will help understand evaluation practices, strategic considerations, and key attributes of successful proposals. Responses will be kept confidential, and your participation is voluntary.

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

1. What is your gender?
2. What is your age range?
3. What is your current role in the organisation?
4. How many years of professional experience do you have?
5. What is your highest educational qualification?

OBJECTIVE 1: REASONS FOR REJECTION

6. What are the most common reasons sponsorship proposals are declined in your organisation?
7. How does strategic alignment, audience reach, ethics, or budget influence rejection decisions?
8. Can you share an example of a proposal that was rejected and why?

OBJECTIVE 2: CRITERIA AND STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

9. What key criteria guide your evaluation of sponsorship proposals?
10. How do organisational strategy, brand objectives, and audience relevance shape approval decisions?
11. How do financial feasibility, risk assessment, and proposer credibility factor into your decision-making?

OBJECTIVE 3: ATTRIBUTES OF SUCCESSFUL PROPOSALS

12. What attributes make a sponsorship proposal more likely to succeed?
13. How important are clarity, structure, innovation, and creativity in proposals?
14. How does demonstrating audience insight or measurable impact influence approval?

CLOSING

10. Based on your experience, what advice would you give proposers to increase the likelihood of approval?