

Sustainability Practices and Brand Image in Sports Sponsorship: A Structured Evidence Synthesis and the Cricket Research Gap

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ABSTRACT

Sustainability has emerged as a strategic priority within the global sports industry, reshaping how sporting events are evaluated by stakeholders, sponsors, and governing bodies. Sports organisations are increasingly expected not only to deliver commercial success but also to demonstrate responsible governance and sustainable operations. This has prompted a widely repeated claim in both industry and academic commentary: that event sustainability strengthens the brand image of sponsoring firms. This paper examines how far that claim is actually supported by evidence, and compares the state of the evidence across football and cricket.

The study adopts a structured secondary evidence synthesis, drawing on ten empirical studies and governance-level documents. It is important to state the scope precisely: no study in the reviewed corpus tests sustainability practices against sponsor brand image directly. The evidence instead forms two separate chains. The first establishes that sports sponsorship significantly improves brand image, brand association, and purchase intention, evidenced across football contexts by correlation, descriptive, and structural equation modelling studies. The second establishes that perceived environmental sustainability significantly predicts public evaluation and support of sporting events. This paper synthesises both chains and evaluates the strength of the inferential bridge between them.

The synthesis supports a theoretically coherent but empirically untested proposition: that sustainability practices influence sponsor brand image indirectly, through event evaluation and image transfer processes, and that this effect should be strongest where sustainability is institutionally embedded. Football provides the conditions for such an effect, with international federations operating advanced sustainability integration frameworks. Cricket, despite formal governance-level climate commitments, yields no primary quantitative evidence on the sponsorship–brand image relationship at all.

The principal contribution of this paper is therefore diagnostic rather than confirmatory. It maps what the evidence base currently establishes, specifies where the inferential chain remains unverified, and identifies the absence of cricket-specific sponsorship research as a substantive and addressable gap. Given cricket's commercial scale in South Asia and other major markets, this gap represents a clear priority for future primary research.

Keywords: sports sponsorship; brand image; sustainability; evidence synthesis; research gap; image transfer theory; corporate social responsibility; football; cricket

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, sustainability has transitioned from a peripheral concern to a central strategic priority across industries worldwide. Increasing awareness of climate change, environmental degradation, and corporate accountability has reshaped stakeholder expectations. Organisations are no longer evaluated solely on profitability and operational performance but also on their environmental, social, and governance (ESG)

commitments. Within this broader transformation, the sports industry has emerged as a highly visible and influential platform for sustainability integration.

Large-scale sports events generate significant environmental impacts, including carbon emissions, waste production, energy consumption, and infrastructure development. Due to their global visibility, media coverage, and commercial partnerships, these events are subject to heightened public scrutiny. As a result, sports governing bodies and event organisers increasingly implement sustainability initiatives such as renewable energy adoption, waste management systems, carbon reduction strategies, sustainable venue construction, and plastic elimination campaigns. These initiatives reflect a shift from purely commercial event management toward socially responsible governance models.

At the same time, sports sponsorship remains a central revenue mechanism within the industry. Brands invest heavily in sports partnerships to leverage fan engagement, emotional attachment, and global exposure. Sponsorship operates through associative mechanisms: the values and attributes attached to an event can transfer to the sponsoring brand. If an event is perceived as innovative, ethical, and environmentally responsible, these characteristics may positively influence sponsor reputation. Conversely, negative environmental perception may create reputational risks for both event organisers and sponsoring brands.

This dynamic raises an important research question: can sustainability practices in sports events function as a strategic tool for brand reputation management? While existing research confirms that sports sponsorship positively influences brand image and purchase intention, fewer studies integrate sustainability governance with sponsorship outcomes in a comparative framework. Much of the empirical evidence is concentrated within football, where sustainability integration is institutionally advanced. Cricket, despite its significant global following and growing commercial presence, remains comparatively under-examined in this regard.

Therefore, this study seeks to synthesise existing empirical findings and governance-level evidence to evaluate whether sustainability practices contribute to brand reputation management within sports sponsorship contexts. By comparing football and cricket environments, the research aims to identify differences in institutional maturity, empirical support, and reputational implications. In doing so, the study positions sustainability not merely as an environmental responsibility, but as a strategic instrument shaping brand perception and sponsorship value within the contemporary sports ecosystem.

1.1 Research Objectives

The study is guided by three objectives:

1. To establish what the existing empirical evidence demonstrates about the relationship between sports sponsorship, event sustainability perception, and brand image.
2. To evaluate the strength of the inferential link between these two evidence chains, and to specify where that link remains empirically unverified.
3. To compare the maturity of sustainability institutionalisation and the depth of the available evidence base across football and cricket contexts, and to characterise the resulting research gap.

1.2 Scope and Contribution

A boundary condition should be stated at the outset. This study does not test a sustainability–brand image relationship, and no study within the reviewed corpus does so directly. What the literature provides are two adjacent and well-evidenced relationships: sponsorship to brand image, and sustainability perception to event evaluation. The proposition that sustainability practices shape sponsor brand image follows logically from combining them, but the combined path has not been measured. Treating this construct bridge as established would overstate the evidence.

The contribution of this paper is accordingly diagnostic. It consolidates dispersed findings into a single comparative framework, makes the inferential structure explicit rather than implicit, and identifies precisely which empirical link is missing. The complete absence of cricket-specific sponsorship–brand image research is treated here as a finding in its own right, not as a limitation of the review.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Sustainability in the Contemporary Sports Ecosystem

Over the past two decades, sustainability has transitioned from a peripheral concern to a strategic imperative across industries, including professional sports. Sporting events are no longer assessed solely on economic returns or spectator engagement; they are increasingly evaluated based on environmental responsibility, governance transparency, and stakeholder responsiveness. This evolution reflects broader global shifts toward Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) integration and heightened societal expectations of institutional accountability.

Sustainability practices within sports events typically include carbon emission management, renewable energy integration, waste reduction systems, sustainable stadium infrastructure, water conservation mechanisms, and plastic elimination initiatives. Large-scale sports events, due to their global visibility, media coverage, and corporate partnerships, face intensified scrutiny and therefore often function as experimental spaces for sustainability implementation. Empirical evidence suggests that sustainability initiatives are increasingly embedded within governance frameworks rather than functioning as symbolic public relations instruments.

The adoption of sustainability practices within sport is frequently interpreted through three dominant theoretical lenses: Legitimacy Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and Institutional Theory. Lu (2024) argues that sport-based CSR initiatives function as mechanisms through which organisations maintain societal legitimacy in response to normative and regulatory pressures. Under Legitimacy Theory, organisations must align operations with prevailing societal values to preserve their licence to operate. Sustainability initiatives thus serve as visible signals of compliance with environmental norms (Lu, 2024).

Stakeholder Theory extends this perspective by emphasising the multiplicity of actors influencing sports organisations, including sponsors, fans, governing bodies, communities, and regulatory authorities. Sustainability initiatives operate as balancing mechanisms within this stakeholder network, enhancing trust and organisational credibility (Lu, 2024). Institutional Theory further explains the diffusion of sustainability across sports bodies through mimetic and normative pressures, wherein organisations replicate sustainability models adopted by leading federations to maintain reputational parity (Moon et al., 2022).

2.2 Sustainability Perception and Event Evaluation

While structural sustainability adoption is significant, stakeholder perception ultimately determines reputational consequences. Empirical research increasingly demonstrates that environmental sustainability perception is a statistically significant predictor of event support and evaluation.

Hugaerts, Schunk, and Könecke (2023) employed multinomial logistic regression to examine the influence of environmental perception on public support for mega sporting events. Their findings reveal that individuals perceiving an event as environmentally responsible exhibit a significantly higher likelihood of expressing support. This suggests that sustainability functions as a measurable determinant of stakeholder approval rather than a symbolic attribute (Hugaerts et al., 2023).

Complementary empirical research confirms that environmental initiatives positively influence overall event evaluation and community perception (Hugaerts et al., 2021). These findings align conceptually with Social Exchange Theory, which posits that stakeholders assess events based on perceived benefits relative to environmental and social costs. When sustainability initiatives are visible and credible, perceived benefits increase, thereby strengthening event reputation.

Notably, environmental perception has been found to mediate broader attitudinal responses toward sports organisations. This indicates that sustainability affects not only operational legitimacy but also cognitive evaluation processes among audiences and stakeholders.

2.3 Sports Sponsorship and Brand Image

Sports sponsorship has long been recognised as a strategic marketing instrument designed to enhance brand equity and consumer engagement. Sponsorship allows brands to associate themselves with emotionally resonant events, leveraging fan loyalty and global visibility to influence consumer perception.

Image Transfer Theory provides the primary theoretical explanation for sponsorship effectiveness. According to this framework, cognitive associations attached to an event are transferred to sponsoring brands through associative networks. When events are perceived positively, sponsors benefit from favourable image spillover effects.

Empirical research consistently validates this relationship. Grimaldi (2014) demonstrated statistically significant positive relationships between sponsorship exposure and brand image indicators using correlation and cross-tabulation analysis. Similarly, Phiri and Chakauya (2023) found that a majority of surveyed supporters attributed improved brand image and brand preference to event sponsorship. Sarpong and Zungu (2025) further confirmed, using partial least squares structural equation modelling, that sponsorship engagement significantly enhances brand image and, through it, purchase intention.

Beyond direct sponsorship exposure, perceived congruence between sponsor and event has been shown to moderate brand image outcomes. Higher perceived fit strengthens associative transfer, reinforcing credibility and trust. These empirical findings establish brand image as a validated dependent variable within sports marketing research.

2.4 Integrating Sustainability, CSR, and Brand Image

Corporate Social Responsibility literature provides theoretical grounding for connecting sustainability initiatives to brand-related outcomes. Sustainability represents a critical dimension of CSR, signalling ethical conduct and long-term commitment to stakeholder welfare.

Lu (2024) emphasises that sport-based CSR initiatives enhance corporate reputation by reinforcing perceptions of legitimacy and ethical responsibility. Environmental responsibility initiatives embedded within sporting platforms serve dual purposes: operational risk mitigation and reputational enhancement. Additional empirical evidence suggests that CSR engagement positively influences corporate credibility and stakeholder trust (Kim, 2006).

Given that sustainability perception improves event evaluation (Hugaerts et al., 2023) and event evaluation transfers to sponsors (Grimaldi, 2014; Phiri & Chakauya, 2023), a logical integrative framework emerges. Sustainability practices embedded within sports events may indirectly contribute to sponsor brand image through associative transfer processes. However, prior studies often examine sustainability perception and sponsorship effectiveness independently rather than synthesising them within a unified comparative framework.

2.5 Comparative Context: Football and Cricket

Comparative analysis becomes particularly relevant when examining football and cricket due to structural and commercial differences between the two sports. Football is globally commercialised and institutionally mature, with sustainability initiatives frequently examined in academic research and embedded within governance structures (Moon et al., 2022).

Cricket, while increasingly integrating sustainability frameworks, has historically received less academic attention. Nevertheless, institutional commitments demonstrate progressive incorporation of environmental responsibility. The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) has developed a formal Environmental Sustainability Plan outlining strategic commitments to emission reduction and climate action (ECB, n.d.). Governance-based evidence therefore indicates that sustainability initiatives in cricket are developing, although scholarly quantitative evaluation of their brand-related outcomes remains comparatively limited.

Differences in governance centralisation, media exposure, sponsorship intensity, and global reach may influence the magnitude of sustainability-driven brand image effects between football and cricket. However, systematic comparative research synthesising sustainability perception and sponsorship outcomes across these

sports remains underdeveloped. This gap provides the foundation for the present study, which integrates existing quantitative findings and evaluates how sustainability practices may influence brand image within sponsorship contexts across both football and cricket environments.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a structured secondary evidence synthesis with a comparative component. The purpose of the research is threefold: to establish what the published evidence demonstrates about sponsorship, sustainability perception, and brand image; to assess the strength of the inferential link between these evidence chains; and to compare the maturity of that evidence across football and cricket contexts. The design is diagnostic in intent, aimed at mapping and evaluating an existing evidence base rather than testing a new hypothesis.

Rather than collecting primary survey data, the study relies on previously published empirical research. This approach is appropriate because the relationship between sustainability, sponsorship, and brand image has already been examined in multiple quantitative studies. The present research does not seek to re-measure these variables but rather to synthesise, interpret, and compare existing quantitative evidence in a structured manner. The study is descriptive in that it summarises and interprets existing findings related to sustainability practices and brand image. It is comparative because it evaluates how sustainability integration and its brand implications differ across two major sports contexts: football and cricket.

3.2 Research Approach: Secondary Quantitative Synthesis

Although no primary numerical data were collected, the study follows a quantitative orientation. The quantitative nature of the research arises from its reliance on previously validated statistical findings reported in peer-reviewed studies.

Empirical studies reviewed in the literature employ correlation, regression, and structural equation modelling to measure relationships between sustainability perception, sponsorship, and brand image. These studies report statistical indicators such as correlation and path coefficients, and significance levels. The present research extracts and compares these findings in order to determine which relationships are consistently evidenced, which rest on single studies, and which are asserted in the literature without direct measurement.

Thus, the study engages in quantitative secondary synthesis, interpreting numerical relationships already validated in prior research rather than generating new numerical data. Because the reviewed studies use heterogeneous designs and metrics, findings are compared narratively; no meta-analytic pooling of effect sizes was attempted.

3.3 Search Strategy

Sources were identified through systematic searches of academic databases and through the published sustainability documentation of sports governing bodies. To support reproducibility, the search parameters are recorded below.

[INSERT: databases searched — for example, Scopus, Web of Science, EBSCO Business Source Complete, Google Scholar]

[INSERT: date on which the searches were conducted]

Search strings combined terms from three conceptual blocks using Boolean operators: a sustainability block (“sustainability” OR “environmental sustainability” OR “ESG” OR “corporate social responsibility”); a sponsorship block (“sponsorship” OR “sport sponsorship” OR “event sponsorship”); and an outcome block (“brand image” OR “brand association” OR “brand reputation” OR “purchase intention”). Searches were restricted to the sports and events context and to English-language publications.

Governance-level documents were retrieved directly from the official publications of the relevant governing bodies, including the England and Wales Cricket Board and the international sport federations examined by Moon et al. (2022).

3.4 Screening and Selection

Records identified through the search were screened in two stages. Titles and abstracts were assessed first against the inclusion criteria set out in Section 3.5, followed by full-text assessment of the retained records. Screening counts should be reported for transparency:

[INSERT: number of records identified; number remaining after duplicate removal; number screened at title and abstract; number assessed at full text; number excluded, with reasons]

Ten sources met the criteria and form the final corpus. Of these, five are analysed as core studies in Section 4.1 and four as extended sources in Section 4.7, with one additional source supporting the literature review. The authors acknowledge that a corpus of this size constrains the generalisability of the synthesis; this constraint is addressed in Section 3.9.

3.5 Data Sources and Selection Criteria

The study relies exclusively on secondary data drawn from credible and scholarly sources. These include:

- Peer-reviewed academic journal articles examining sustainability in sports, CSR, sponsorship, and brand image.
- Empirical quantitative studies reporting statistical relationships between sustainability perception and brand-related outcomes.
- Sustainability and governance reports published by major sports organisations.
- Reputable business and sports management publications.

To ensure academic rigour and relevance, the following inclusion criteria were applied:

- The study must examine sustainability practices, CSR, sports sponsorship, or brand image within a sports-related context.
- The study must present empirical findings, particularly those including statistical analysis (e.g., regression models, structural equation modelling).
- Publications must be peer-reviewed and published between 2005 and 2025.
- The study must contribute to understanding either the independent variable (sustainability practices), the dependent variable (brand image), or the theoretical relationship between them.

Studies focusing exclusively on environmental engineering, tourism impact assessment unrelated to brand perception, or purely technical carbon accounting were excluded, as they did not align with the conceptual focus of this research.

3.6 Variables and Conceptual Operationalisation

3.6.1 Independent Variable: Sustainability Practices in Sports Events

Sustainability practices refer to environmental and social responsibility initiatives implemented within sports events. Based on the reviewed literature, these practices include:

- Waste reduction programmes
- Renewable energy usage
- Sustainable infrastructure development
- Plastic reduction campaigns
- Carbon neutrality commitments

While the study does not measure sustainability through new survey instruments, it relies on operational definitions and constructs provided in prior empirical research.

3.6.2 *Dependent Variable: Brand Image*

Brand image refers to stakeholders' overall perception of a brand's credibility, trustworthiness, ethical positioning, and reputation. Prior empirical studies operationalise brand image using multi-item Likert scales measuring:

- Brand trust
- Brand credibility
- Corporate reputation
- Purchase intention

This research synthesises these established operationalisations to evaluate the strength of the sustainability–brand image relationship.

3.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The study employs three complementary analytical techniques.

3.7.1 *Thematic Content Analysis*

Relevant literature was reviewed and coded according to conceptual themes, including sustainability institutionalisation, CSR-driven reputation enhancement, sponsorship effectiveness, image transfer mechanisms, and stakeholder perception. Thematic categorisation allowed the study to organise findings coherently and establish logical connections between sustainability practices and brand image outcomes.

3.7.2 *Quantitative Findings Synthesis*

Statistical results reported in empirical studies were systematically extracted and compared. This included the direction of the relationship (positive or negative), statistical significance (p-values), and reported coefficients where available. If multiple studies consistently report statistically significant positive relationships between sustainability perception and brand-related outcomes, this strengthens the validity of the relationship. This synthesis approach ensures that conclusions are grounded in numerical evidence rather than purely interpretive discussion.

3.7.3 *Comparative Framework Analysis*

To address the third research objective, the study compares sustainability institutionalisation in football events, sustainability institutionalisation in cricket events, documented governance structures, and public sustainability commitments. Rather than comparing original statistical datasets, the study evaluates contextual maturity and structural integration of sustainability practices across sports. This comparative assessment is grounded in documented evidence and prior research rather than subjective interpretation.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

As the study relies solely on secondary data from published sources, no primary data were collected, and no human participants were involved. All sources are properly cited to ensure academic integrity and avoid plagiarism.

3.9 Methodological Limitations

While secondary quantitative synthesis offers efficiency and credibility, four limitations should be stated plainly.

First, the construct bridge is inferential rather than measured. No study in the corpus tests sustainability practices against sponsor brand image directly. The synthesis joins two separately evidenced relationships — sponsorship to brand image, and sustainability perception to event evaluation — and the combined path is therefore a proposition supported by theory rather than a finding supported by data. Conclusions in this paper are framed accordingly, and readers should not treat the bridged relationship as empirically established.

Second, the corpus is small. Ten sources, of which five are core empirical studies, is modest for an evidence synthesis. The corpus is best understood as a mapping of a sparse and fragmented literature rather than as an exhaustive systematic review, and the thematic frequency counts in Section 4.6 should be read as indicative rather than statistically meaningful.

Third, the comparison is asymmetric by construction. Football sustainability and sponsorship research is substantially more developed than its cricket equivalent, and the cricket arm of the comparison contains no primary quantitative evidence whatsoever. The comparison is therefore between evidence bases and governance structures, not between measured effect sizes in the two sports.

Fourth, methodological heterogeneity limits comparability. The reviewed studies employ Spearman correlation, descriptive frequency analysis, multinomial logistic regression, covariance-based SEM, and PLS-SEM, alongside qualitative case study designs. Because effect estimates are not derived from a common metric, no meta-analytic pooling was possible and findings are compared narratively.

Despite these limitations, a structured synthesis of the available evidence remains valuable. It clarifies what is currently established, isolates the specific link that requires primary testing, and provides a defensible foundation for the research agenda set out in Chapter 5.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This chapter presents the data analysis conducted through secondary quantitative synthesis and supporting qualitative evidence. All statistics and conclusions presented derive directly from the reviewed studies; no numerical data have been fabricated or inferred. The chapter is structured around eight analytical components: a consolidated evidence synthesis; individual analyses of Grimaldi (2014), Phiri and Chakauya (2023), and Moon et al. (2022); a football–cricket comparative framework; a thematic frequency analysis; an extended synthesis of four additional studies; and a summary of key findings.

4.1 Consolidated Evidence Synthesis

Table 1 consolidates findings from the core reviewed studies. Each entry records only statistics and conclusions explicitly reported in the source. Studies using purely qualitative or governance-based methods are labelled accordingly. The inclusion of Phiri and Chakauya (2023) alongside Grimaldi (2014) substantially strengthens the football-context evidence base, as both are primary quantitative studies focused on football sponsorship and brand outcomes, albeit in different geographical and event contexts.

Table 1: Consolidated Evidence Synthesis from Core Reviewed Studies

Study & Context	Relationship Tested	Method & Sample	Key Statistic	Direction	Key Finding / Notes
Grimaldi (2014) [Football — UEFA Champions League; n = 100]	Sponsorship fit → Brand association	Spearman correlation	$\rho = 0.43, p < 0.01$	Positive	Moderate positive correlation confirms that perceived fit enhances brand association.
Grimaldi (2014) [Football — UEFA Champions League; n = 100]	Sponsorship exposure → Brand awareness	Unaided recall / descriptive	66% unaided recall	Positive	Majority recalled the sponsor without prompting.
Grimaldi (2014) [Football — UEFA Champions League; n = 100]	Sponsorship exposure → Corporate image	Likert scale (5-point)	86% positive perception	Positive	Majority held a positive corporate image of the sponsor.

Study & Context	Relationship Tested	Method & Sample	Key Statistic	Direction	Key Finding / Notes
Grimaldi (2014) [Football — UEFA Champions League; n = 100]	Sponsorship → Brand association (premium alignment)	Frequency distribution	73% positive brand–event association	Positive	73% associated the sponsor with a premium event; confirmed H5.
Phiri & Chakauya (2023) [Football — Soccer; n = 400; South Africa]	Soccer event sponsorship → Brand image	Descriptive statistics / Likert (5-point); $\alpha = 0.878$	66% agreed event enhances brand image	Positive	Majority agreed the annual one-day event contributes to the sponsor's brand image.
Phiri & Chakauya (2023) [Football — Soccer; n = 400; South Africa]	Soccer event sponsorship → Brand preference	Descriptive statistics / Likert (5-point)	50% preferred sponsor brand due to sponsorship	Positive	Half of respondents expressed brand preference attributable to event sponsorship.
Phiri & Chakauya (2023) [Football — Soccer; n = 400; South Africa]	Soccer event sponsorship → Product consumption	Descriptive statistics / Likert (5-point)	58% consume sponsor's product	Positive	Majority consume the sponsor's branded product above other brands.
Moon, Bayle & François (2022) [Multiple sports — IF governance; 6 IFs]	Sustainability governance → Organisational legitimacy	Multiple case studies + semi-structured interviews	Qualitative — no numerical statistic	Positive (inferred)	Five sustainability approaches identified via neo-institutional theory.
Moon et al. (2022) [Multiple sports — IF governance]	IF size → Depth of sustainability strategy	Comparative case analysis	Qualitative — no numerical statistic	Directional	Large IFs (FIFA, WS) show more comprehensive strategies than small IFs (ICF, FISA).
Trendafilova et al. (2014) [Multi-sport — environmental initiatives]	Environmental sustainability → Legitimacy, stakeholder relations, cost savings	Qualitative synthesis / document analysis	Qualitative — no numerical statistic	Positive (inferred)	Greening framed as strategic rather than merely symbolic.
Kim (2006) [Multi-sport — SEM]	Event characteristics → Corporate ability (CA) beliefs	Structural equation modelling (SEM)	$\beta = 0.35\text{--}0.61$, $p < 0.05$	Positive	Three of four event dimensions significantly predict CA beliefs via signal theory.
Kim (2006) [Multi-sport — SEM]	Event characteristics → CSR beliefs	Structural equation modelling (SEM)	Significant ($p < 0.05$)	Mixed	Promotional capability and media attraction negatively predicted CSR beliefs (attribution theory).

Note. ρ = Spearman correlation coefficient. β = standardised SEM path coefficient. α = Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient. "Qualitative — no numerical statistic" denotes sources where no inferential statistics are reported. All statistics are sourced directly from the cited authors.

Two important methodological observations arise from Table 1. First, both primary quantitative football studies (Grimaldi, 2014; Phiri & Chakauya, 2023) use descriptive and non-parametric analysis: Grimaldi employs Spearman correlation and cross-tabulation, while Phiri and Chakauya rely entirely on descriptive frequency analysis with Likert items. Neither study uses multivariate regression, which is an acknowledged limitation of the football-context evidence. Kim (2006) provides the most sophisticated statistical analysis (SEM with β coefficients), though in a broader multi-sport context. Second, the qualitative studies (Moon et al., 2022; Trendafilova et al., 2014) provide the structural and institutional context that explains why sustainability has become a strategic tool in sports sponsorship.

4.2 Grimaldi (2014): Football Sponsorship Effectiveness — UEFA Champions League

Grimaldi (2014) is a primary quantitative study examining a beverage brand's sponsorship of the UEFA Champions League across a sample of 100 respondents from 21 countries. The study used SPSS for cross-tabulation, frequency distribution, and Spearman correlation analysis, and tested seven hypotheses related to brand awareness, brand association, and corporate image.

Table 2: Grimaldi (2014) — Hypotheses, Statistical Methods, and Verified Findings

Hypothesis	Method Used	Key Result	Verdict	Implication for Study
H1: Sponsorship → Brand awareness	Unaided recall	66% recalled the sponsor	Confirmed	Exposure to football sponsorship significantly builds brand awareness.
H2/H3: Fan involvement (generic and specific) → Brand awareness	Cross-tabulation	Majority of aware respondents reported high football involvement	Confirmed	More engaged football fans show stronger brand recall.
H4: Brand consumption → Brand awareness	Cross-tabulation	Sponsor's consumers show higher recall	Confirmed	Prior product consumption reinforces sponsorship recall.
H5: Sponsorship → Brand association (premium–premium fit)	Frequency distribution	73% positive brand–event association	Confirmed	Football sponsorship creates premium brand alignment.
H6: Sponsorship fit → Brand association	Spearman correlation	$\rho = 0.43$, $n = 100$, $p < 0.01$	Confirmed	Moderate positive correlation; perceived fit significantly enhances association.
H7: Sponsorship → Corporate image	Likert scale (5-point)	86% positive; “good products”, “community involvement”	Confirmed	Football sponsorship generates positive corporate image perception.

Note. All statistics are sourced directly from Grimaldi (2014, pp. 67–80). ρ = Spearman rank correlation. Confirmation is based on Grimaldi's own hypothesis-testing conclusions using SPSS-compatible analysis.

The most statistically robust finding is the Spearman correlation between sponsorship fit and brand association ($\rho = 0.43$, $p < 0.01$). This confirms that perceived congruence between the sponsor and the UEFA Champions League significantly and positively predicts brand association — a mechanism directly aligned with Image Transfer Theory. The additional descriptive findings (66% unaided recall; 86% positive corporate image; 73% premium brand–event association) corroborate a broadly positive sponsorship effect across all three dependent variables.

The study's primary limitations are its small sample ($n = 100$), demographic skew toward young males (70% aged 23–27; 70% male), and its focus on a single sponsor–event pairing. Despite this, it provides directly relevant quantitative evidence for football sponsorship–brand effects in a global context, and constitutes the highest-quality primary football sponsorship evidence reviewed.

4.3 Phiri and Chakauya (2023): Football Event Sponsorship — South African Soccer Context

Phiri and Chakauya (2023) offer a complementary football-context study with a significantly larger sample ($n = 400$) and a distinct event design: a single-day annual soccer event in South Africa involving a major beer brand sponsoring a match between two large football clubs, where supporters actively vote for players via SMS. The study used a five-point Likert questionnaire with 26 items, validated by Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.878$), and analysed using SPSS v25 descriptive statistics.

Table 3: Phiri and Chakauya (2023) — Key Findings, Methods, and Implications

Relationship / Finding	Key Descriptive Result	Method Detail	Implication
Soccer event sponsorship → Brand image	66% agreed or strongly agreed the event contributes to brand image; 13% disagreed; 21% neutral (n = 400)	Descriptive / Likert 5-point; Cronbach α = 0.878	A significant majority attribute brand image benefit to the soccer event sponsorship — consistent with Image Transfer Theory.
Soccer event sponsorship → Brand preference	50% agreed or strongly agreed they prefer the sponsor's product over others due to sponsorship; 40% disagreed; 10% neutral	Descriptive / Likert 5-point	Half of respondents express sponsorship-driven brand preference; the notable 40% resistance indicates preference is not universal.
Soccer event sponsorship → Product consumption	58% agreed or strongly agreed they consume the sponsor's product above other brands; 41% disagreed; 1% neutral	Descriptive / Likert 5-point	Majority consumer preference supports the brand commercially, though a significant minority remain non-converts.
Supporter involvement in event design → Engagement	Unique design: supporters vote for players via SMS; annual event since 2010 featuring two major South African football clubs	Qualitative description (event design)	The fan involvement mechanism differentiates this event; active participation likely strengthens emotional brand association.

Note. All findings are sourced directly from Phiri and Chakauya (2023, pp. 1664–1665). The study uses descriptive statistics only (frequency distributions and Likert scale analysis); no regression or correlation coefficients are reported. Cronbach's α = 0.878 confirms instrument reliability.

The central finding — that 66% of respondents agreed the event contributes to the sponsor's brand image — directly mirrors Grimaldi's (2014) 66% brand awareness recall rate, despite the different constructs measured and different national contexts. This convergence across two independent studies using different samples and different event structures is notable: it suggests a stable, cross-contextual relationship between football event sponsorship and positive brand outcomes.

The brand preference finding (50% agreed they prefer the sponsor's product due to the sponsorship, while 40% disagreed) is more nuanced. It indicates that football event sponsorship does generate brand preference shifts, but not universally — nearly an equal proportion are unaffected. This is consistent with the literature's acknowledgement that sponsorship effects are moderated by involvement, product knowledge, and consumer attitudes toward the sponsor's product category. The study's unique contribution to this synthesis is its evidence that even a single-day, annually held event — not a continuous season-long partnership — can generate measurable brand image and brand preference effects when it features strong fan engagement through supporter participation in event design.

Limitations include the study's reliance on descriptive statistics alone (no inferential analysis such as regression or correlation), its narrow focus on a beer sponsor within the South African football market, and its cross-sectional design. The authors themselves recommend future longitudinal studies using multiple regression analysis. Despite these limitations, the larger sample size (n = 400) and African football context add both statistical weight and geographical breadth to the evidence base.

4.4 Moon, Bayle, and François (2022): Sustainability Governance in International Sport Federations

Moon et al. (2022) contribute a qualitative multiple case study of six Olympic International Federations (IFs), analysed through neo-institutional theory. The study employed in-depth semi-structured interviews (n = 11 across six IFs and three international organisations) and extensive document analysis. No inferential statistics were reported; findings are presented as typologies and conceptual frameworks. Table 4 summarises the five sustainability approaches identified.

Table 4: Moon et al. (2022) — Five Approaches to Sustainability in International Sport Federations

Type	IF Case	Approach Label	Human Resources Allocated	Key Implication
Type 1	ICF (small)	Sustainability pilot events	Part-time employee + LOCs + AISTS support	Small IFs can begin the sustainability journey despite limited resources.
Type 2	FISA (small)	Partnering with NGOs	Cross-department leadership + WWF, IUCN	External NGO expertise compensates for the absence of a dedicated sustainability manager.
Type 3	FEI (large)	Partnering with sustainability consultancies	Part-time employee + Quantis, Interseroh	Voluntary toolkit approach across 4,000+ events; encourages LOCs without mandating.
Type 4	IIHF (medium)	Creating a sustainability committee	Five-member committee (~50% FTE equivalent); dedicated budget	Committee-led; structured but no dedicated full-time sustainability manager.
Type 5	WS & FIFA (medium / XXL)	Comprehensive sustainability strategy	FIFA: 10 full-time sustainability staff; WS: full-time head + eight-person commission	Most integrated stage; ISO 20121 and GRI standards; sponsor and supplier requirements embedded.

Note. All findings are qualitative. Human resource figures are approximate, based on interview data as reported by Moon et al. (2022). The “sustainability ladder” progresses from Development (economic survival) through CSR (social and environmental programmes) to Integration (sustainable development embedded in governance).

Moon et al.’s sustainability ladder provides the institutional framework for understanding why sustainability practices are more mature in football than in most other sports. FIFA’s Type 5 positioning — with a dedicated Sustainability and Diversity Department, ISO 20121 and GRI standards adoption, and sustainability criteria embedded in World Cup bid requirements — represents the benchmark of institutional integration. The neo-institutional perspective is critical: coercive pressure (IOC mandates), normative pressure (industry expectations), and mimetic pressure (emulating leading federations) collectively drive sustainability adoption, meaning sustainability is not merely altruistic but is structurally incentivised.

This has a direct implication for brand image: brands sponsoring football events at the FIFA or UEFA level are associating with a governance structure that is, in Moon et al.’s framework, at the most credible stage of sustainability integration. This provides sponsors with an institutionally legitimate sustainability platform from which to communicate brand values, strengthening the image transfer mechanism documented by both Grimaldi (2014) and Phiri and Chakauya (2023).

4.5 Comparative Framework Analysis: Football versus Cricket

Table 5 compares football and cricket across five dimensions relevant to the study’s research objectives. All comparative assessments are grounded in the reviewed evidence; where cricket-specific data is unavailable, this is explicitly noted.

Table 5: Comparative Framework — Football versus Cricket on Sustainability and Brand Image Dimensions

Dimension	Football Events	Cricket Events	Comparative Implication
Sustainability governance maturity	Advanced — FIFA at the “Integration” stage (Type 5); dedicated 10-person Sustainability and Diversity Department; ISO 20121 and GRI standards adopted (Moon et al., 2022)	Developing — ECB Environmental Sustainability Plan; ICC guidelines emerging; less institutionally embedded; no cricket IF featured in Moon et al.’s case studies	Football is significantly more institutionally mature.
Direct empirical evidence on	Strong — Grimaldi (2014): $\rho = 0.43$ fit → brand association; 66% awareness;	Absent in this synthesis — no cricket-specific quantitative	A clear research gap exists for cricket-specific evidence.

Dimension	Football Events	Cricket Events	Comparative Implication
sponsorship–brand image	86% corporate image. Phiri & Chakauya (2023): 66% brand image, 50% brand preference (n = 400)	sponsorship–brand image study reviewed	
Fan engagement and supporter involvement	High — Grimaldi (2014): fan involvement amplifies brand recall; Phiri & Chakauya (2023): active supporter voting mechanism enhances engagement	Cricket fans are highly engaged, but the mechanism is less studied in the sponsorship–brand image literature	Football is better evidenced; a cricket gap remains.
Sponsorship scale and commercial reach	Global scale — UEFA Champions League, FIFA World Cup (20+ official sponsors); R5.703bn South African sponsorship market in 2016 (Phiri & Chakauya, 2023)	Significant but lower global commercial reach; IPL growing; Test cricket retains a niche audience	Football has broader reach; cricket is growing.
Theoretical mechanisms evidenced	Image Transfer Theory (Grimaldi, 2014; Phiri & Chakauya, 2023); neo-institutional legitimacy (Moon et al., 2022); Stakeholder Theory (fan involvement evidence)	Legitimacy Theory and Stakeholder Theory applicable by extension; no cricket primary evidence in reviewed studies	Football offers direct evidence; cricket rests on theoretical inference only.

Note. Comparative assessments are grounded in reviewed empirical and governance sources. Cricket-specific comparisons are based on governance-level evidence (ECB, ICC) where no primary quantitative study was identified. Football evidence is drawn from Grimaldi (2014), Phiri and Chakauya (2023), and Moon et al. (2022).

The comparative analysis confirms a substantive asymmetry between the two sports. Football’s evidence base is multi-layered: two independent primary quantitative studies (Grimaldi, 2014; Phiri & Chakauya, 2023) provide direct empirical evidence of sponsorship–brand outcomes, while Moon et al. (2022) documents the institutional maturity of FIFA’s sustainability governance. Cricket, by contrast, lacks equivalent primary quantitative evidence in the reviewed literature.

This asymmetry is itself a key finding. It does not mean cricket sponsorship is ineffective; it means the research field has not yet produced the quantitative studies necessary to evidence the relationship. For brands sponsoring cricket events, particularly in emerging markets where cricket commands strong followings (India, Pakistan, South Africa, and the Caribbean), this gap represents both a risk (limited evidence to support return-on-investment claims) and an opportunity (first-mover advantage in sustainability-linked sponsorship positioning).

4.6 Thematic Frequency Analysis

Table 6 organises recurring themes across all reviewed studies. Frequency counts reflect the number of distinct studies where each theme is substantively evidenced.

Table 6: Thematic Frequency Analysis — Themes Across All Reviewed Studies

Theme	Study Count	Frequency	Supporting Sources
Sponsorship → Positive brand / corporate image	5	High	Grimaldi (2014) H7; Phiri & Chakauya (2023) brand image finding; Kim (2006) CA beliefs; Trendafilova et al. (2014); Sarpong & Zungu (2025) $\beta = 0.722$
Image transfer: Event image → Sponsor brand	4	High	Grimaldi (2014); Phiri & Chakauya (2023); Kim (2006); Moon et al. (2022) legitimacy transfer

Theme	Study Count	Frequency	Supporting Sources
Sponsorship → Brand preference / purchase intention	3	Moderate	Phiri & Chakauya (2023) — 50% preference; Grimaldi (2014) — brand association as precursor to preference; Sarpong & Zungu (2025) — $\beta = 0.296$ to purchase intention
Event–sponsor fit moderating brand association	2	Moderate	Grimaldi (2014) H6 ($p = 0.43$); Kim (2006) associational factors
Fan involvement amplifying sponsorship effectiveness	2	Moderate	Grimaldi (2014) H2/H3; Phiri & Chakauya (2023) supporter voting mechanism
Sustainability governance as legitimacy mechanism	3	Moderate	Moon et al. (2022) sustainability ladder; Trendafilova et al. (2014) greening strategy; Lu (2024) sport-based CSR legitimacy
Stakeholder pressure driving sustainability adoption	2	Moderate	Moon et al. (2022) coercive / normative / mimetic isomorphism; Trendafilova et al. (2014)
Football governance sustainability maturity	2	Moderate	Moon et al. (2022) FIFA Type 5; Grimaldi (2014) UEFA context
Cricket sustainability (under-researched)	0 (inferred)	Low	No cricket-specific primary study in synthesis — research gap confirmed by absence of evidence

Note. “Study count” denotes the number of distinct studies in which the theme is substantively evidenced, across both the core corpus (Table 1) and the extended sources (Table 7). High = four or more studies; Moderate = two to three studies; Low = zero to one study. The cricket sustainability theme is assigned a count of zero, as no cricket-specific primary study is included in this synthesis. Given the size of the corpus, these counts are indicative of where evidence concentrates rather than statistically meaningful in themselves.

Two themes reach the high-frequency threshold: the positive effect of sponsorship on brand and corporate image, evidenced across five studies, and image transfer as the mechanism carrying that effect, evidenced across four. These are the best-supported propositions in the corpus, and both concern the sponsorship-to-brand-image chain rather than the sustainability chain.

The distribution is itself informative. Themes concerning sponsorship outcomes cluster at the top of the table, while themes concerning sustainability governance sit in the moderate band and rest largely on qualitative case evidence rather than measured effects. No theme in the table links sustainability practices to brand image directly, which is a visual confirmation of the construct gap identified in Section 1.2. The cricket row, with a count of zero, marks the outer boundary of the current evidence base.

4.7 Extended Evidence Synthesis: Additional Studies

Table 7 extends the synthesis to four further sources that were reviewed separately: a recent structural equation modelling study, a large-sample study of environmental sustainability perception, a qualitative CSR case study, and a governance-level sustainability plan from cricket.

Table 7: Extended Evidence Synthesis from Additional Reviewed Sources

Study & Context	Relationship Tested	Method	Key Statistic	Direction	Key Finding / Notes
Sarpong & Zungu (2025) [Ghana Premier League; n = 398]	Sports sponsorship → Brand image	PLS-SEM (SmartPLS)	$\beta = 0.722$; $p = 0.001$	Strong positive	Sponsorship significantly enhances brand image.
Sarpong & Zungu (2025)	Sports sponsorship → Purchase intention	PLS-SEM (SmartPLS)	$\beta = 0.296$; $p = 0.001$	Positive	Sponsorship directly increases purchase intention.
Sarpong & Zungu (2025)	Brand image → Purchase intention	PLS-SEM (SmartPLS)	$\beta = 0.372$; $p = 0.000$	Positive	Brand image directly drives purchase intention.

Study & Context	Relationship Tested	Method	Key Statistic	Direction	Key Finding / Notes
Sarpong & Zungu (2025)	Sponsorship → Purchase intention (mediated by brand image)	Mediation (PLS-SEM)	$\beta = 0.268$; $t = 4.098$; $p = 0.000$	Positive indirect	Brand image significantly mediates the sponsorship effect.
Hugaerts et al. (2023) [Olympics & FIFA World Cup; $n = 917$]	Perceived environmental sustainability → Event support	Multinomial logistic regression	Significant predictor (no coefficient reported)	Positive / negative	Environmental sustainability perception significantly predicts hosting support.
Hugaerts et al. (2023)	Brand image of event → Support	Logistic regression	Significant predictor	Positive	Event brand perception influences resident support.
Lu (2024) [Taiwanese enterprises; multiple case studies]	Sport-based CSR → Legitimacy and stakeholder alignment	Multiple case study + interviews	Qualitative (no inferential statistics)	Positive (theoretical)	Sport-based CSR strengthens institutional legitimacy.
ECB Sustainability Plan (England and Wales Cricket Board)	Organisational sustainability strategy → Emission targets	Policy framework / strategic plan	50% reduction by 2030; Net Zero by 2040	Strategic commitment	Formal governance-level climate commitment in cricket.

Note. β = standardised path coefficient from partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). All statistics are sourced directly from the cited authors.

4.7.1 Sarpong and Zungu (2025): Sponsorship, Brand Image, and Purchase Intention

Sarpong and Zungu (2025) employ PLS-SEM on a sample of 398 Ghanaian football fans. The results indicate that sponsorship significantly enhances brand image ($\beta = 0.722$; $p = 0.001$) and directly increases purchase intention ($\beta = 0.296$; $p = 0.001$). Brand image also directly predicts purchase intention ($\beta = 0.372$; $p = 0.000$) and significantly mediates the sponsorship–purchase intention relationship ($\beta = 0.268$; $t = 4.098$; $p = 0.000$). This confirms brand image as a statistically validated transmission mechanism.

4.7.2 Hugaerts et al. (2023): Environmental Sustainability and Event Support

Hugaerts et al. (2023) analyse data from 917 German residents using multinomial logistic regression. The findings indicate that positive perceptions of environmental sustainability significantly increase support for hosting mega-sport events, while negative perceptions increase opposition. Event brand image also significantly influences support.

4.7.3 Lu (2024): Strategic Motivations of Sport-Based CSR

Lu (2024) adopts a qualitative multiple case study approach grounded in legitimacy, stakeholder, and institutional theory. The study concludes that sport-based CSR is strategically deployed to align corporate organisations with evolving sustainability expectations.

4.7.4 ECB Sustainability Plan: Institutional Commitment in Cricket Governance

The ECB Sustainability Plan outlines formal environmental commitments, including a 50% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and the achievement of Net Zero by 2040. This reflects governance-level strategic sustainability integration within cricket.

4.8 Key Findings

Drawing together all analytical components, six key findings emerge.

Finding 1 — Football event sponsorship demonstrably improves brand image across contexts. Grimaldi (2014) and Phiri and Chakauya (2023) — two independent primary quantitative studies conducted in different

countries and event formats — both show that football event sponsorship positively influences brand image. The convergence of 66% positive brand-related outcomes in both studies (recall in Grimaldi; brand image in Phiri and Chakauya) across independent samples strengthens this finding beyond a single-study conclusion.

Finding 2 — Sponsorship fit significantly moderates brand association in the football context. Grimaldi's (2014) Spearman correlation ($\rho = 0.43$, $p < 0.01$) confirms that perceived congruence between a sponsor and a football event is a statistically significant determinant of brand association strength. This is the only inferential statistic in the football-specific evidence base and provides the most robust single quantitative finding in this synthesis.

Finding 3 — Football event sponsorship influences brand preference, though not universally. Phiri and Chakauya (2023) show that 50% of football supporters preferred the sponsor's brand due to the sponsorship, while 40% did not. This confirms that brand preference effects exist but are moderated, likely by fan involvement, product attitudes, and event engagement. The sponsor's brand must provide sufficient event integration and fan touchpoints to convert brand image into preference.

Finding 4 — The institutional maturity of football's sustainability framework exceeds that of other sports. Moon et al. (2022) document that FIFA operates at the highest Integration stage of the sustainability ladder, providing football sponsors with a more institutionally credible sustainability association platform than most other sports can offer. This advantage is structurally embedded through ISO 20121, GRI standards, and bid requirements.

Finding 5 — A research gap exists for cricket-specific quantitative evidence. No cricket-specific quantitative study examining the sponsorship–brand image relationship was identified in this synthesis. This is a substantive finding: comparative conclusions about cricket must be drawn carefully, resting on theoretical inference rather than primary empirical data. Future research should address this gap directly.

Finding 6 — Fan involvement amplifies sponsorship brand effects. Both Grimaldi (2014), where more engaged football fans showed stronger brand recall, and Phiri and Chakauya (2023), where fan participation in player selection was a design feature of the event, point to supporter involvement as a key moderating variable. Events that actively engage fans as participants, not merely as spectators, generate stronger brand image and preference outcomes.

These findings address the three research objectives in turn. On Objective 1, the evidence establishes robustly that sports sponsorship improves brand image, and separately that sustainability perception improves event evaluation. On Objective 2, the link between these two chains remains unmeasured: Findings 1 to 3 concern sponsorship effects, Finding 4 concerns sustainability governance, and no reviewed study joins them. The proposition that sustainability practices shape sponsor brand image is therefore well motivated but not yet demonstrated. On Objective 3, the comparative evidence shows football to be both institutionally more mature and far better evidenced, with cricket contributing governance commitments but no primary empirical findings.

Finding 5 consequently carries the greatest weight for future research. The gap it identifies is not a peripheral omission but the precise point at which the argument of this paper currently rests on inference rather than measurement.

5. CONCLUSION

This study set out to establish what the existing evidence demonstrates about sustainability, sponsorship, and brand image in sports events, and to characterise the differences between football and cricket contexts. Its central conclusion concerns the structure of the evidence base rather than the magnitude of an effect.

Two propositions are well supported. Sports sponsorship significantly improves brand image, brand association, and purchase intention: this holds across a Spearman correlation study of UEFA Champions League sponsorship (Grimaldi, 2014), a large descriptive study in South African football (Phiri & Chakauya, 2023), and a PLS-SEM study of Ghanaian football fans in which brand image mediated the path to purchase

intention (Sarpong & Zungu, 2025). Separately, perceived environmental sustainability significantly predicts public evaluation and support of major sporting events (Hugaerts et al., 2023). Each chain is independently credible.

The proposition that motivated this study — that sustainability practices shape sponsor brand image — sits at the junction of these two chains and has not been tested. It is theoretically well founded, following directly from Image Transfer Theory and supported by neo-institutional accounts of why federations adopt sustainability in the first place (Moon et al., 2022; Lu, 2024). But theoretical coherence is not evidence, and this paper does not claim otherwise. Identifying that junction precisely, rather than obscuring it, is the primary contribution offered here.

The comparative dimension sharpens the point. Football offers both institutional maturity, with FIFA operating at the highest stage of sustainability integration through dedicated staffing, ISO 20121, and GRI reporting, and a substantive body of sponsorship research. Cricket offers formal governance commitments, including the ECB's targets of a 50% emissions reduction by 2030 and Net Zero by 2040, but not a single primary quantitative study of the sponsorship–brand image relationship. The asymmetry is not a defect of this review; it is an accurate description of the field.

5.1 Directions for Future Research

Three lines of inquiry follow directly from the gaps identified above.

- Test the bridged path directly. A study modelling event sustainability perception, event brand image, and sponsor brand image within a single structural model would convert the central proposition of this paper from inference into measurement. PLS-SEM, as applied by Sarpong and Zungu (2025), is a suitable approach.
- Generate cricket-specific evidence. Survey research among IPL, Big Bash, or international cricket audiences, using the instruments already validated in football contexts, would allow genuine cross-sport comparison of effect sizes rather than comparison of evidence bases. The commercial scale of cricket in South Asia makes this a matter of practical as well as academic interest.
- Address the moderators. Existing findings suggest that sponsor–event fit, fan involvement, and product category attitudes all condition sponsorship outcomes. Whether perceived sustainability operates as a further moderator, or as an antecedent of perceived fit, remains an open and testable question.

For practitioners, the implication is measured rather than promotional. Sponsoring an event with credible, institutionally embedded sustainability governance is defensible on grounds of legitimacy and risk mitigation, and is consistent with what the evidence on image transfer would predict. It should not yet be justified to stakeholders on the basis of a demonstrated brand image return, because that return has not been demonstrated. Distinguishing between these two claims is, at present, the most useful thing the literature can offer.

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Ethics approval. This study analysed only previously published secondary sources. No primary data were collected and no human participants were involved; ethics approval was therefore not required.

Data availability. All data analysed in this study are drawn from the published sources listed in the References section and are publicly available.

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