

THE IMPACT OF BOOKMAKERS' SPORTS SPONSORSHIP ON THE IMAGE OF FOOTBALL CLUBS

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Objective: The aim of this article is to determine the impact of sports betting sponsorship on the image of football clubs. The study seeks to answer the question of whether greater reputational benefits are achieved by the clubs themselves or by providers of betting services. An additional objective is to diagnose fans' attitudes toward betting on sports events.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The article examines the attitudes of football supporters toward sponsors and sponsored clubs. Data were collected in spring 2024 using an online survey method (CAWI) among 165 football supporters (purposive sampling). From this group, 66 respondents who had ever placed sports bets were ultimately selected for the analysis of bookmakers' influence on the image of football clubs.

Findings: The study demonstrated the existence of a social stigma associated with betting services, mainly due to concerns about gambling and past scandals. Respondents' close social circles often view betting negatively, suggesting a need for educational campaigns promoting responsible gambling. The betting sector should emphasize player responsibility and autonomy. Innovations in betting applications, such as interactive in-play wagering features, may increase user engagement. Fans are more inclined to change bookmakers if a bookmaker begins sponsoring their favorite club than if it becomes a partner of a rival team. Sponsorship should therefore be considered in terms of both economic benefits and potential reputational risks. While sponsorship does not directly translate into an increased number of bets, it supports bookmakers' brand image among fans. An in-depth analysis was also carried out of the sponsorship relationship between Lech Poznań and Superbet. This cooperation yields moderate benefits for both parties. Positive fan attitudes toward sponsors may generate long-term financial benefits and brand trust, which are crucial for future success in the betting industry.

Research limitations: Despite efforts to obtain a representative sample of fans from clubs across the entire league, the study exhibited an overrepresentation of Lech Poznań supporters. Fan communities of other Ekstraklasa clubs were underrepresented, which requires cautious generalization of the findings. Future research should extend the data collection period to ensure adequate representation of all supporter communities within the league.

Originality/Value: The study attempts to evaluate the sponsorship relationships of all football clubs in a given league during a single competitive season that were sponsored by bookmakers. The overall assessment of perceptions of relationships between bookmakers and sponsored

clubs was enriched by an in-depth analysis of the partnership between KKS Lech Poznań and Superbet.

Keywords: sponsor image, sponsorship, sports marketing, football clubs.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of sports sponsorship by betting companies in football is becoming an increasingly important and simultaneously controversial issue. On the one hand, this relationship generates significant financial benefits and contributes to the development of the sport by enabling football clubs to invest in growth, infrastructure, player training, and improved training conditions, but also better image of the city represented by the sport club (Ciechomski, Romanowski, 2013; Bloch, Romanowski, Romanowski, 2025). On the other hand, critical voices highlight the risk of normalizing gambling, particularly among younger generations. There is a concern that betting promotion within a sports context may lead to gambling being perceived as an integral part of sporting life, which may in turn influence young fans' attitudes toward betting on sports events (Polishfashionshops.pl, 2024).

Additional concerns relate to the impact of betting sponsorship on the integrity of competitions. Critics emphasize that companies investing substantial financial resources in sponsorship may attempt to influence match outcomes, thereby threatening the integrity of sport and the principle of fair play. These concerns are particularly significant in the context of live betting, where the potential for result manipulation may have serious consequences for fans' trust in sport (Długokęcki, 2018).

The primary objective of the conducted study, and of this paper, was to determine the impact of sports betting sponsorship on the image of sports clubs. Two research questions were formulated:

1. What are fans' attitudes toward betting on sports events?
2. Do greater reputational benefits accrue to the clubs themselves or to providers of betting services?

2. Literature Review – The Importance of Sponsorship in Sport

The sponsorship market in the 21st century has been developing rapidly; however, a significant global increase in sponsorship agreements had already occurred in the early 1970s (in Poland, due to political instability, this growth took place only at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries; Borowiak, Garczarek-Bąk, 2024). According to archival data, in the United

Kingdom – the cradle of European football – sponsorship expenditures amounted to approximately £4 million in 1970. Only 25 years later, this figure reached £491 million, representing an increase of more than 120 times (Kończak, 2020).

The popularity of sporting competition demonstrates that enterprises have recognized sport as an attractive promotional platform. Sport possesses a universal characteristic: whether experienced passively or actively, it evokes strong emotions. These emotions enable fans to identify with clubs as well as with the entities that support them. Sponsors expect that this emotional engagement will facilitate faster identification with their brands and enhance brand recall. Sponsorship investments are generally well received by fans, who are aware of the financial support provided to their favorite clubs. Considering that consumers often make impulsive purchasing decisions, support for a business partner of a beloved sports organization may become a key determinant of purchase behavior (Kończak, 2020).

The sponsorship process involves the cooperation of three partners operating on a collaborative basis: the sponsoring entity (sponsor), the organization offering sponsorship opportunities (sponsee), and the media, which act as intermediaries between these parties through, for example, broadcasts of sporting events (Sznajder, 2015). This relationship forms a system of mutual interaction known as the “sponsorship triangle”, illustrated in Figure 1.

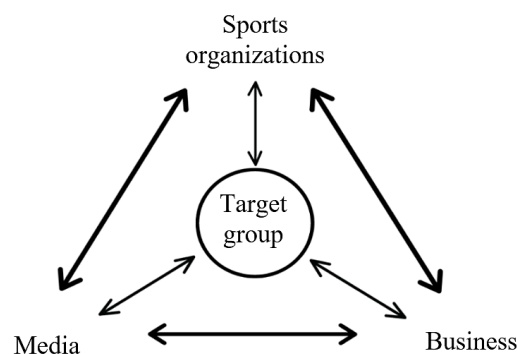


Figure 1. Sponsorship triangle.

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Sznajder, 2015.

Group relationships within the sponsorship triangle imply reciprocal benefits and obligations among the involved entities. Each participant seeks to maximize its own gains. Sponsors aim, among other things, for matches involving the supported team to be scheduled at times that attract large audiences from their target groups. For media organizations, it is essential that matches take place at times that guarantee the highest advertising revenues, while sports clubs prefer scheduling that encourages high stadium attendance (Sznajder, 2015). These differing objectives require compromise among cooperating entities.

However, the strong and influential alliances formed in this manner have, in recent years, significantly shaped the structure of sporting competitions. An example of changes influenced by the “sponsorship triangle” is the modification of the UEFA Champions League format beginning with the 2024/25 season. Previously, the competition involved 32 teams divided into eight groups. As a result of changes advocated primarily by sponsors and media organizations,

the structure of the tournament has been transformed. The championship will now include 36 teams divided into four different seeding pots. The increase in the number of matches will raise revenues from broadcasting rights and sponsorship. Sponsors will gain additional opportunities to showcase their brands, and clubs will be able to host fans in their stadiums more frequently.

3. Research Methodology

The study conducted for this article employed the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) model, which enables a detailed analysis of the factors influencing human attitudes and behaviors. This framework considers attitudes toward a specific behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, all of which shape behavioral intentions and actual actions. In the context of this research, the analysis focused on respondents' attitudes toward sports betting, the beliefs of their close social circles regarding betting, perceived control over betting decisions, future intentions related to wagering, and evaluations of sponsorship relationships between football clubs and bookmakers.

Measurement was carried out using a 7-point Likert scale (except for the assessment of actual behaviors), where 1 indicated "strongly disagree" and 7 indicated "strongly agree". The bookmakers included in the evaluation were: STS, Fortuna, Superbet, Betclix, LV Bet, Betcric, Forbet, Betfan, Etoto, Fuksiarz, and Totalbet. A summary of the model questions used in the study, along with the sources that inspired their formulation, is presented in Table 1. The study also examined respondents' club affiliations within the Ekstraklasa league, their general experiences with bookmakers, and their level of interest in football. This comprehensive approach enabled a detailed understanding of how bookmakers' promotional activities influence perceptions of football clubs. Data collection was conducted using the CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing) method. The questionnaire was completed between 3 April and 31 May 2024 and was made available via Google Forms, ensuring broad accessibility to respondents. A total of 165 participants took part in the study, providing a substantial dataset on football fans' perceptions of bookmakers' promotional activities in Poland. The sample consisted predominantly of young respondents, as sports betting is particularly popular within this demographic group (Pentagon Research, 2021).

Table 1.
Characteristics of the studied population

Characteristic	Response categories	Number of respondents
Gender	Female	89 (54%)
	Male	74 (44,8%)
	Prefer not to answer	2 (1,2%)
Age	Under 18 years	1 (0,6%)
	18-29 years	148 (89,7%)
	30-39 years	11 (6,7%)
	40-49 years	3 (1,8%)
	50-59 years	1 (0,6%)
	Over 60 years	1 (0,6%)
Employment status	Pupil/student	134 (81,2%)
	Employed full-time	32 (19,4%)
	Employed part-time	33 (20%)
	Self-employed	15 (9,1%)
	Unemployed	5 (3%)
	Retired/pensioner	1 (0,6%)
Place of residence	Rural area	49 (29,7%)
	City up to 20,000 inhabitants	14 (10,9%)
	City with 20,001–100,000 inhabitants	18 (10,9%)
	City with 100,001–500,000 inhabitants	8 (4,8%)
	City with more than 500,000 inhabitants	76 (46,1%)
Club affiliation at the Ekstraklasa level	Lech Poznań	116 (70,3%)
	Legia Warszawa	5 (3%)
	Warta Poznań	5 (3%)
	Widzew Łódź	4 (2,4%)
	Śląsk Wrocław	2 (1,2%)
	Raków Częstochowa	2 (1,2%)
	ŁKS Łódź	2 (1,2%)
	Pogoń Szczecin	1 (0,6%)
	Puszcza Niepołomice	1 (0,6%)
	Ruch Chorzów	1 (0,6%)
	Zagłębie Lubin	1 (0,6%)
	Jagiellonia Białystok	1 (0,6%)
	Cracovia	1 (0,6%)
	None	23 (13,9%)
Respondents' participation in sports betting during the 2023/24 season	Yes	66 (40%)
	No	99 (60%)

Source: Authors' own elaboration

The sampling procedure was purposive and included two screening questions. The first concerned the level of interest in football. Respondents who indicated no interest in football concluded their participation after completing the section examining general attitudes and preferences. At this stage, 133 out of the initial 165 respondents were invited to continue. The second screening question addressed prior experience with sports betting. Participants who had never placed bets ended their participation after the section on betting behavior.

Consequently, the initial sample of 165 respondents was reduced to 133 after the first screening stage, and ultimately 66 individuals qualified for the final analysis (Figure 2). The characteristics of the study population were diverse and included variables such as gender, age, employment status, place of residence, Ekstraklasa club affiliation, and participation in sports betting during the 2023/24 season (July 2023-May 2024).

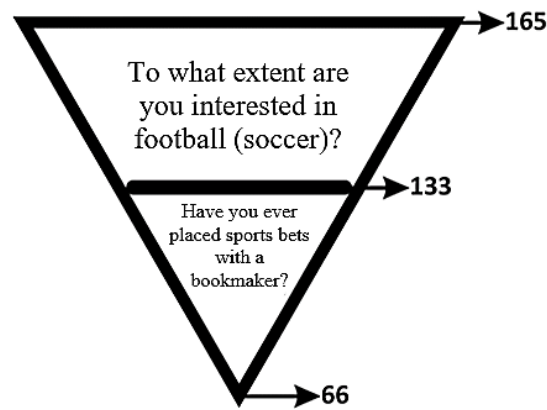


Figure 2. Distribution of the number of respondents after applying filtering questions.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Among the respondents, 53.9% were women, 44.8% were men, and 2 respondents (1.2%) chose not to disclose their gender. The relatively high proportion of female participants indicates growing interest in football among women and reflects the ongoing feminization of the football community in Poland. The in-depth phase of the study ultimately included 66 participants, comprising 21 women (32%) and 45 men (68%). Subsequent analyses incorporated statistics related to gender and club affiliations.

An analysis of club affiliations within the Ekstraklasa league reveals a pronounced overrepresentation of Lech Poznań supporters. They accounted for as much as 70.3% of respondents (116 individuals), while the second-largest group consisted of 23 respondents who did not identify with any club (nearly 14% of the total sample). Other clubs were only marginally represented, with Warta Poznań and Legia Warszawa ranking jointly third, each with 5 supporters (3% of the total sample). As many as five Ekstraklasa clubs had no representation in the study. The survey was conducted primarily among the Poznań local community, which likely explains the observed disproportions in respondents' answers. Nevertheless, the analysis of club affiliations provides valuable insights in the context of the sponsorship-related issues discussed later in this paper.

4. Results and Discussion – Assessment of Sports' Betting Perception in Respondents' Opinions

The investigation of bookmaker awareness began with a “top-of-mind” indicator. Respondents were asked to name one company they associated with the term bookmaker. This was an optional question answered by 123 respondents (over 92% of those qualified for this stage of the study) (Figure 3).

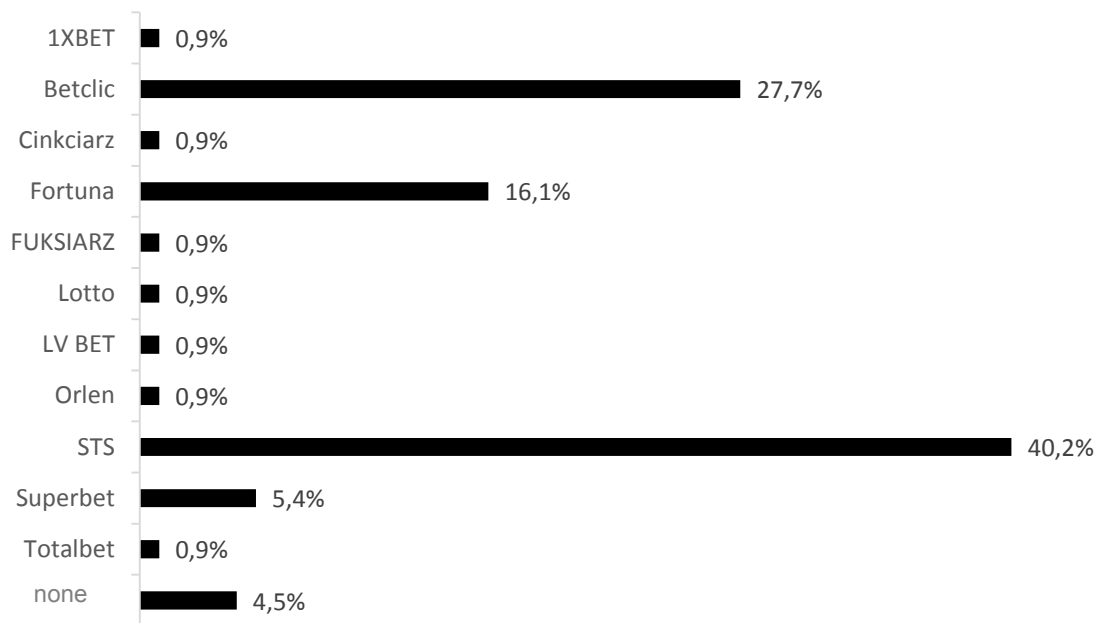


Figure 3. Top-of-mind companies associated with the term “bookmaker”.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

A review of the results indicates that STS is by far the most frequently mentioned brand, recognized by 40.2% of respondents, which strongly suggests its dominant position in the domestic market. Betclik also enjoys substantial brand recognition (27.7%), while Fortuna was mentioned by 16.1% of participants. Superbet, with 5.4% of responses, is present in consumer awareness to a considerably lesser extent. Other companies—including 1XBET, Cinkciarz, Fuksiarz, Lotto, LV BET, Orlen (likely a respondent error due to the company's broad service portfolio, which does not include betting services), and Totalbet—each received only 0.9% of responses, highlighting their limited presence in market perception. These findings suggest that the betting market is dominated by a few key players whose effective marketing communication and broad service offerings translate into high brand recognition. The relatively low visibility of smaller brands may serve as an incentive to increase their market share through intensified promotional activities, including sports sponsorship, in order to strengthen their presence in fans' awareness and encourage the use of their services.

At this stage, more than half of the participants (67 out of 133) concluded their involvement in the study. Only respondents who had used bookmakers' services at least once in their lifetime (66 individuals) proceeded to the subsequent sections. The in-depth analysis focused on respondents' attitudes toward betting and the involvement of betting companies in sports sponsorship (Table 2).

Table 2.

Mean evaluations of attitudes toward betting and the involvement of betting companies in sports sponsorship

Attitudes toward bookmakers	Female	Male	Total
Cooperation between football clubs and bookmakers is a positive phenomenon.	4,43	4,20	4,27
Cooperation between clubs and bookmakers is attractive to me.	3,52	3,91	3,79
Football clubs associated with bookmakers have a positive impact on the world of sport.	3,81	3,62	3,68
Bookmakers should promote themselves through sponsorship of football clubs.	3,71	4,36	4,15

Note: a 7-point Likert scale was used.

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the scale proposed by Bazargan-Hejazi et al. (2018).

The analysis of respondents' attitudes toward bookmakers and their engagement in sports sponsorship suggests that the overall perception of these phenomena is not strongly negative. The mean score of 4.27 for the overall assessment of cooperation between football clubs and betting service providers indicates a moderate attitude, with a tendency toward acceptance of such partnerships. Similarly, the mean rating of 4.15 regarding the promotion of bookmakers through football club sponsorship reflects respondents' recognition of the advertising value of these activities and a more positive than negative reception. Slightly lower yet still moderate mean scores for the perceived attractiveness of such cooperation (3.79) and its impact on the sports world (3.68) may indicate more reserved opinions regarding direct benefits and may reflect certain ethical reservations.

Based on these findings, bookmakers may be advised to continue or even intensify their engagement in sports sponsorship, particularly in football. They are not perceived unequivocally negatively, which from a reputational standpoint is valuable and may encourage further expansion within the Polish football market. At the same time, they should strive to increase transparency and educate the public about the benefits of such partnerships, which could improve perceptions of attractiveness and impact. Football clubs considering initiating or continuing cooperation with bookmakers should maintain open communication with fans, explaining how sponsorship funds are used to support team development and infrastructure. By adhering to ethical standards and emphasizing their contribution to sports development, bookmakers have the opportunity to build long-term trust and loyalty among fans, thereby strengthening their market reputation.

The next section examined subjective norms imposed by respondents' social environments regarding betting behavior. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements concerning their close associates' attitudes toward betting (Table 3).

Table 3.*Mean evaluations of subjective norms regarding betting, by gender*

Subjective norms	Female	Male	Total
My choice regarding sports betting is shaped by the opinions of my friends/family.	3,33	2,67	2,88
My friends/family expect me to use the services of bookmakers supporting football clubs.	2,05	1,67	1,79
When it comes to betting, I want to act in line with the expectations of those closest to me.	1,90	1,84	1,86

Note: a 7-point Likert scale was used.

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the scale proposed by Bazargan-Hejazi et al. (2018).

An analysis of responses related to the influence of family and friends suggests that women report greater sensitivity to the opinions of close others than men, as reflected in a higher mean score (3.33 compared to 2.67 for men). Although this does not indicate strong conformity, it reveals a noticeable gender difference. Both women and men, however, appear relatively convinced that their close social circles disapprove of betting, as indicated by low mean scores (2.05 for women and 1.67 for men). Social pressure and past scandals, including corruption cases, likely contribute to this perception.

Regarding willingness to align betting behavior with the expectations of close others, both genders show remarkable similarity. Low scores (1.90 for women and 1.84 for men) indicate that decisions about betting are largely autonomous. In light of these results, bookmakers involved in sports sponsorship should emphasize education and responsible gambling in ways that respect consumer autonomy. Increasing awareness of potential benefits—such as support for favored football clubs—may contribute to a more positive image. Marketing campaigns should highlight both social and personal benefits while promoting ethical gambling practices. Such an approach may attract new customers and foster long-term loyalty, gradually reducing social pressure and improving the industry's reputational standing.

The next section assessed respondents' perceived behavioral control regarding their use of betting services. This part was divided into two subsections. The first addressed general perceptions of control over betting behavior (Table 4).

Table 4.*Mean evaluations of perceived behavioral control over betting decisions, by gender*

Perceived behavioral control	Female	Male	Total
I have full control over my decisions regarding sports betting.	5,95	6,27	6,17
It is entirely up to me whether I participate in sports betting.	6,24	6,64	6,52
If I wanted to, I could regularly use the services of bookmakers supporting football clubs.	4,62	5,67	5,33

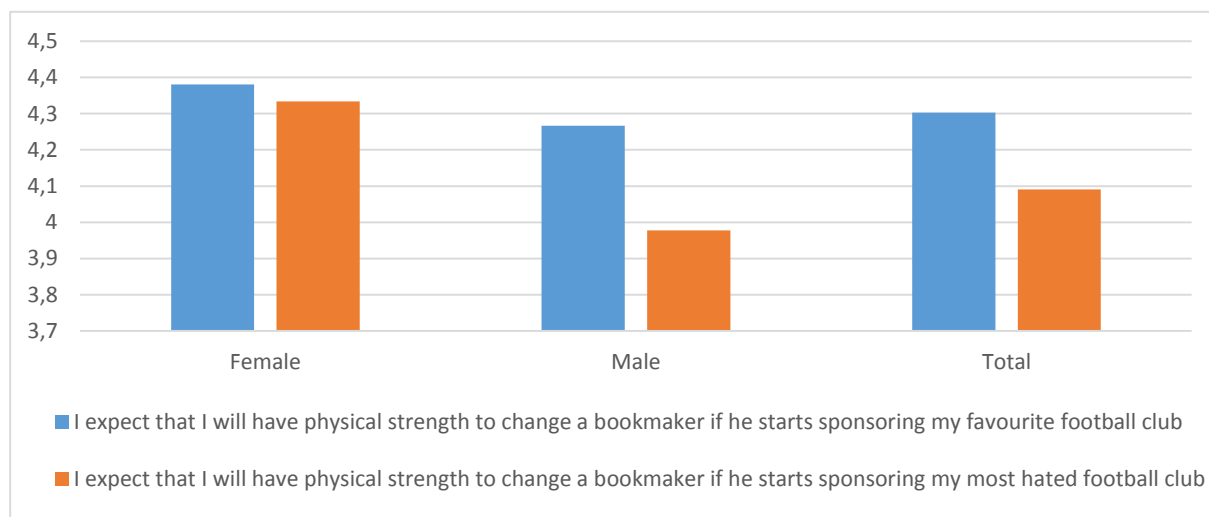
Note: a 7-point Likert scale was used.

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the scales proposed by Bazargan-Hejazi et al. (2018) and Ajzen (2002).

Respondents reported a strong sense of control over their betting decisions, reflected in high mean scores for independence in decision-making (6.17) and autonomy in participation (6.52). However, a lower mean score of 5.38 regarding readiness to regularly use bookmakers

supporting football clubs suggests that perceived control does not automatically translate into frequent betting activity. This discrepancy may indicate the influence of concerns or external constraints. Consequently, betting companies should emphasize responsible gambling and reinforce the message that customers retain full control over their participation. The introduction of innovative application features that enhance user engagement—such as interactive, user-generated in-play betting options analyzed algorithmically by bookmakers—could further increase activity among users seeking both excitement and personal agency.

In the second part of this section, respondents evaluated statements concerning bookmakers' sponsorship of clubs toward which they held strong positive or negative emotions (Figure 4). Respondents demonstrated moderate willingness to switch bookmakers depending on sponsorship involvement. Mean scores indicate a slightly greater tendency to change providers when a bookmaker sponsors a favored club (4.31) than when it sponsors a disliked team (4.12). This difference reflects fans' preference for brands aligned with their club loyalties. Given the strong loyalty and long memory characteristic of football fans—especially regarding negative associations—bookmakers must approach sponsorship decisions cautiously.



Note: a 7-point Likert scale was used.

Figure 4. Mean evaluations of statements concerning bookmakers' sponsorship of emotionally significant clubs.

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the scale proposed by González et al. (2012).

An inappropriate sponsorship choice may weaken a bookmaker's image within certain fan segments, particularly among female supporters, who show a greater tendency to switch providers (mean 4.33 vs. 3.97 for men). Even if the economic impact of customer attrition is limited, reputational losses may be substantial. Bookmakers should therefore carefully analyze fan dynamics before entering sponsorship agreements and maintain transparent communication explaining their choices and ethical commitments. Continuous monitoring of fan reactions would enable rapid strategic adjustments and minimize negative consequences. The study also examined participants' future intentions regarding betting services (Figure 5).

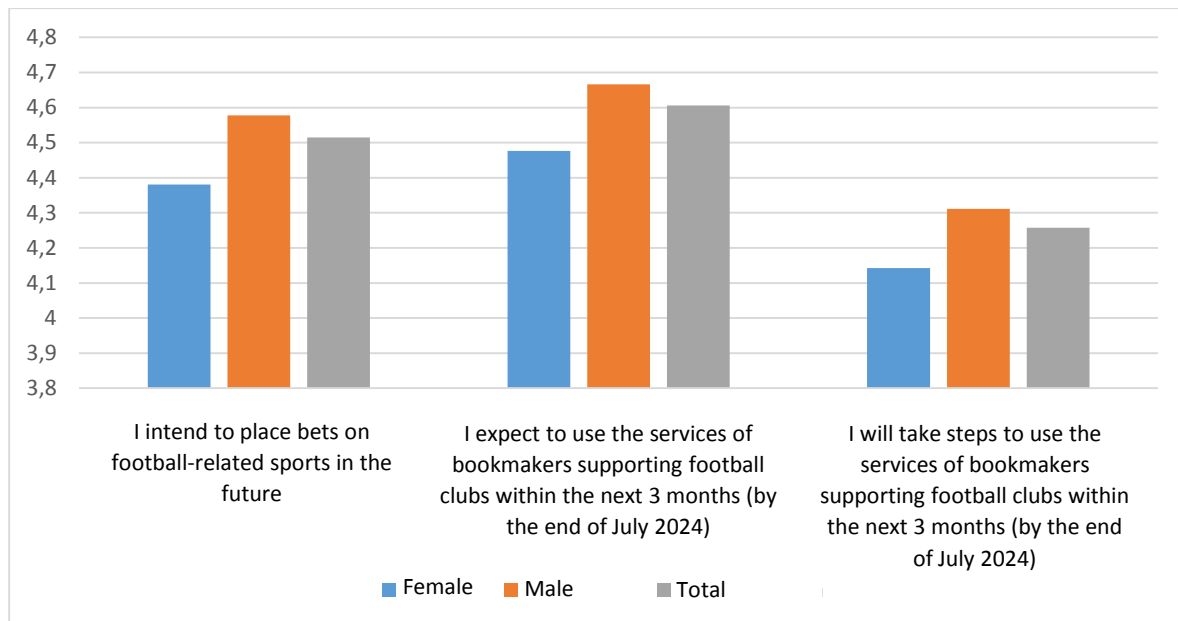


Figure 5. Mean evaluations of respondents' future intentions regarding betting.

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Ajzen (2002) and González et al. (2012).

The results indicate a generally positive outlook among both genders toward future engagement with betting. Respondents expressed intentions to participate in betting in the near future and to use services of bookmakers sponsoring football clubs up to July 2024. The mean score for this intention was 4.67 among men and 4.48 among women. The higher male score may partly reflect the anticipation of the UEFA European Championship occurring shortly after the survey period. In a longer, unspecified timeframe, men again showed slightly stronger intentions (4.58 vs. 4.38). However, readiness to undertake concrete actions was somewhat lower (4.31 for men and 4.14 for women), suggesting potential logistical, financial, or ethical considerations that moderate the transition from intention to behavior.

For bookmakers, strengthening relationships with clubs and fans through transparent sponsorship practices will be essential. Additional initiatives—such as club-specific promotions or loyalty programs—may encourage consumers to act on their intentions. Further research should identify barriers that hinder the transition from intention to actual behavior and propose strategies to reduce them.

Respondents were also asked about their actual use of bookmakers operating in the Polish market. They could select from 11 major providers and an “other” option (Figure 6), with multiple selections allowed.

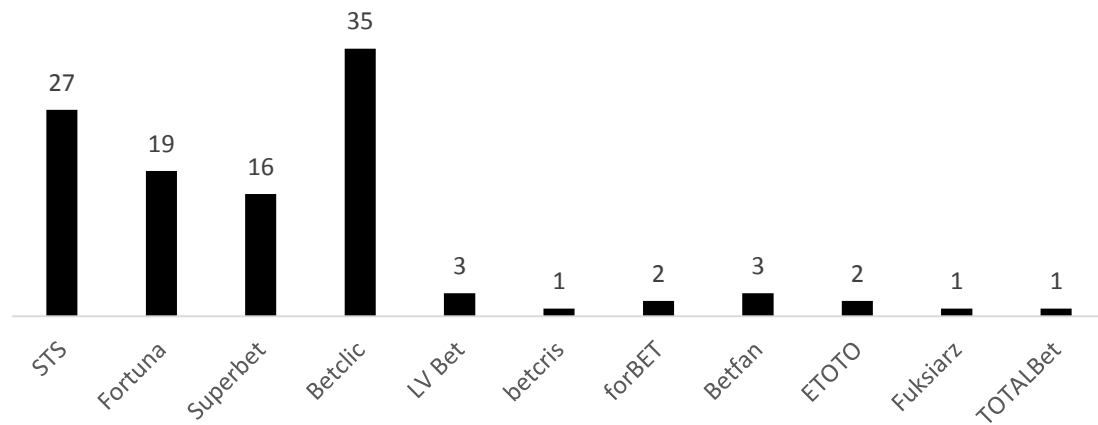


Figure 6. Betting companies used by respondents.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The results reveal substantial differences in popularity among companies. Betcltic (35 responses), STS (27), Fortuna (19), and Superbet (16) were most frequently used. Other companies—including LV Bet, forBET, Betfan, E-Toto, Betcris, Fuksiarz, TOTALBet, and unspecified providers—received significantly fewer selections, suggesting possible limitations in their offerings or marketing strategies. Interestingly, although STS achieved a higher top-of-mind indicator than Betcltic, the latter's greater usage may be linked to its tax-free betting offer, which increases potential winnings.

Despite strong fan affiliation with Lech Poznań, many supporters reported using Betcltic (25 responses), even though the club is sponsored by Superbet. Only 13 Lech supporters reported using Superbet. Although the overrepresentation of Lech fans may introduce some bias, this pattern suggests that respondents prioritize attractive service offerings over relatively recent sponsorship ties. Consequently, bookmakers should not rely solely on sponsorship and promotional activities but also ensure high product quality and competitive, trend-aligned offerings.

This subsection focused on fans' perceptions of how sponsorship influences relationships between bookmakers and football clubs. Understanding these perceptions is essential for evaluating mutual reputational benefits and assessing whether sponsorship activity contributes to increased transaction volumes within the betting industry. Such analysis clarifies the dynamics of sponsor–club relationships and supports the development of more effective marketing and communication strategies. It also enables conclusions about which party derives greater reputational advantages from the partnership.

To examine these interdependencies, three questions using a 7-point Likert scale were employed. Respondents evaluated each of seventeen sponsorship relationships between Ekstraklasa football clubs and specific bookmakers (Figure 7).

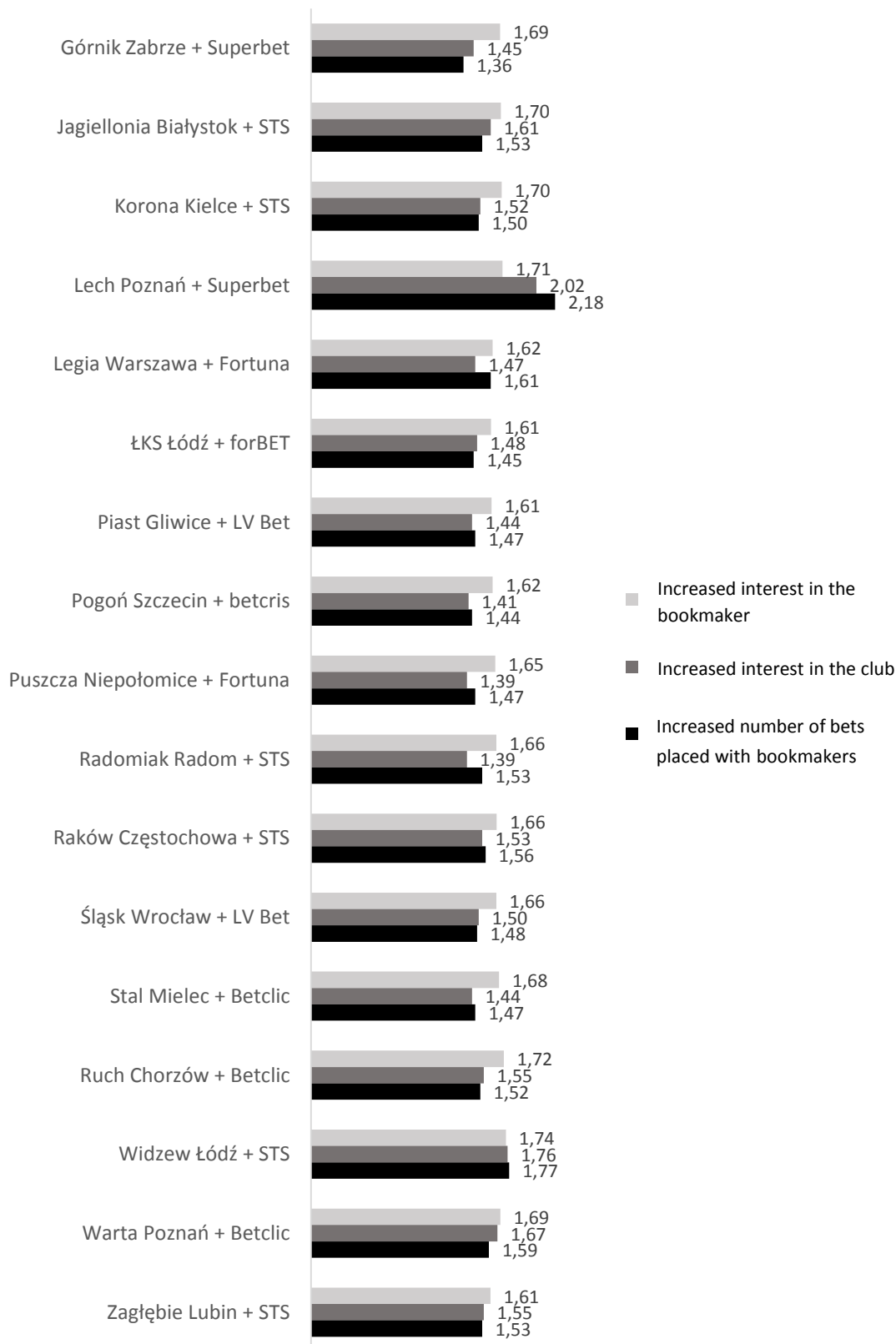


Figure 7. Mean evaluations of sponsorship relationships between Ekstraklasa football clubs and specific bookmakers.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The obtained results indicate generally low average ratings, suggesting that sponsorship theoretically did not exert a significant influence on respondents' interest. Scores across all three categories are surprisingly low in most cases, which may indicate a weak link between sponsorship effects and direct benefits for bookmakers and clubs. For example, even the highest average score of 2.18 (Lech Poznań + Superbet in the category of increased number of placed bets) remains far from a moderate value, which may reflect respondents' limited perception of the positive impact of sponsorship.

In particular, the analysis shows that sponsorship relationships do not automatically translate into increased fan engagement in betting activities, nor do they significantly enhance affection toward clubs. However, it is important to consider the overrepresentation of respondents identifying as supporters of Lech Poznań. Their high proportion (47 out of 66 respondents at this stage of the questionnaire) may create disparities in the perception of other clubs and bookmakers. For this reason, the analysis focused on responses from this subgroup regarding the relationship between their favorite club and its sponsor (Table 5).

Table 5.

Mean evaluations of the sponsorship relationship between the bookmaker and supporters of Lech Poznań

Impact of sponsorship on behavior	Mean score among Lech Poznań supporters	Mean score among all respondents
Increased interest in the club	2,23	2,02
Increased interest in the bookmaker	3,23	1,71
Increased number of placed bets	2,47	2,18

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

A clear discrepancy is immediately visible between the evaluations of this sponsorship relationship by the overall sample and by the segment of Lech Poznań supporters. A slightly higher score is observed regarding increased interest in the club due to sponsorship, although the difference is marginal. A similar pattern appears in relation to the increase in the number of placed bets. A pronounced contrast is evident in the area of increased interest in the bookmaker, Superbet. Lech supporters reported a mean score of 3.23, whereas the overall sample yielded only 1.71. Although this value still falls within a moderate range, it clearly indicates that, for this subgroup, the sponsorship relationship between Superbet and Lech Poznań positively influenced interest in the bookmaker and generated reputational benefits.

The marked positive difference within this group may also be influenced by the relatively recent nature of this partnership, as cooperation between the two entities began only at the start of the 2023/24 season. This suggests that Superbet may be employing strategies that resonate more strongly with the expectations of Lech supporters than with those of the broader sample, resulting in a substantial increase in interest in its offer. Although the obtained ratings are not particularly high, the difference between 3.23 and 2.23 clearly indicates that greater reputational benefits—measured by increased interest resulting from the relationship—accrue to the

bookmaker. Through sponsorship-based promotion, the bookmaker gains access to new customers and visibility among a wide audience of sports spectators.

The effectiveness of this partnership may also be reflected in the bookmaker's nomination for the EGR Marketing & Innovations Award in the category of "Best Sponsorship" (Lech Poznań, 2024). The cooperation between Lech Poznań and Superbet appears to be positively received by supporters. Initiatives such as #SUPERDZIARA, which offered fans the opportunity to refresh their supporter-themed tattoos, may contribute to strengthening relationships and further building a favorable image among fans.

The finding that bookmakers derive greater reputational benefits from sponsorship activities is not limited to the case of Poznań supporters. In 15 of the 17 evaluated club–bookmaker partnerships, an advantage was observed in terms of increased interest in the bookmaker relative to the sports entity. This suggests that the phenomenon is widespread and may largely explain the strong interest of betting service providers in promoting their activities through sport. Fans may perceive this connection as a valuable integration of their passion for sport with opportunities for additional entertainment and financial gain. This demonstrates bookmakers' ability to embed their services within the sporting context in a way that naturally attracts fan interest.

It should also be noted that the greater benefits obtained by bookmakers compared to clubs may stem from the more direct nature of the incentives offered by commercial entities. Promotions, registration bonuses, and special odds related to club-specific events are directly tangible to supporters and may quickly translate into increased betting activity and customer loyalty. Overall, within the studied group, sports sponsorship did not significantly increase the number of bets placed; however, there is visible potential for this relationship to become more advantageous for bookmakers in the future. Any increase in betting volume represents a direct conversion of promotional activities into consumer behavior. Recognizing that betting engagement is a secondary effect of initial brand interest, bookmakers may continue to explore strategies aimed at maximizing this conversion. Thus, their key objective becomes not only attracting fan attention through sponsorship but also transforming that interest into betting activity.

The comparison of sponsorship effects among Lech Poznań supporters and the overall sample reveals how substantial reputational benefits can be for bookmakers, particularly when activities are well aligned with the expectations and preferences of local fans. Betting service providers achieve noticeable success in increasing interest in their brands and associated clubs, especially among Lech supporters. The rise in bookmaker interest within this subgroup is significantly higher than in the general sample, indicating the effectiveness of sponsorship campaigns that resonate with local expectations. Although the increase in betting activity is less pronounced, it remains an important indicator of sponsorship effectiveness, as each additional bet directly contributes to bookmakers' financial outcomes.

To maximize the benefits of sponsorship activities, betting service providers should pursue greater personalization and localization of their marketing strategies. Integrating betting offers with club events, developing targeted promotions for specific fan segments, and implementing educational and engaging campaigns may significantly enhance fan interest and loyalty. Continuous monitoring of campaign effectiveness would enable bookmakers to flexibly adjust their strategies in response to evolving audience expectations and behaviors. Bookmakers that effectively employ these mechanisms can not only increase revenues but also build durable and positive relationships with supporters, strengthening long-term loyalty and engagement.

5. Conclusions and Discussion

Sports sponsorship conducted by bookmakers has become a significant component of the contemporary sports landscape, particularly in football. This article analyzed the impact of bookmaker sponsorship on the image of sports clubs and examined fan behaviors related to sports betting. The primary objective was to determine the influence of bookmaker sponsorship on the image of sports clubs. Additionally, the study addressed two research questions: (1) What are fans' attitudes toward betting on sports events? and (2) Do greater reputational benefits accrue to clubs or to betting service providers?

An important finding is that respondents expressed generally moderate attitudes toward bookmaker-driven sports sponsorship. This may be interpreted as a form of implicit acceptance of such activities, accompanied by cautious observation of their development. Consequently, companies in this sector should structure sponsorship agreements in ways that improve the perception of these relationships and maximize their attractiveness to fans, who represent the primary audience of this promotional form. Organizing events and tailoring offers to specific fan groups constitute key recommendations that may improve perceptions and ultimately influence fan attitudes.

The study also revealed the presence of social stigma surrounding betting services, largely due to concerns about gambling and past scandals. Respondents' close social circles often view betting negatively, highlighting the need for educational campaigns promoting responsible gambling. At the same time, respondents declared autonomy in their financial decision-making, suggesting that the betting sector should emphasize player responsibility and independence. Technological innovations in betting applications, such as interactive in-play wagering features, may further enhance user engagement.

The results indicate that fans are more willing to switch bookmakers if a company begins sponsoring their favorite club than if it becomes a partner of a disliked rival. This demonstrates that sponsorship decisions should consider not only economic benefits but also potential reputational risks and social media conflicts generated by supporters. Continued development

of sponsorship relationships is advisable, provided that fan sentiment is carefully monitored to avoid crises and negative publicity.

A noticeable gap also exists between declared intentions to place bets and actual reported behaviors. Identifying barriers and motivating fans through targeted offers and a better understanding of their needs is therefore essential. Although sponsorship does not directly increase betting frequency, it strengthens bookmakers' brand image among supporters, which is a necessary long-term condition for the development of both individual firms and the industry as a whole.

An in-depth analysis was conducted of the sponsorship relationship between Lech Poznań and Superbet, as the largest subgroup of respondents identified as supporters of this club. The results suggest that this partnership generates moderate benefits for both parties. Superbet's promotional initiatives, including support for local activities and event organization, increased interest in the bookmaker among Lech supporters. While the direct effect on betting volume was limited, active engagement in club life and positive relationship-building with fans significantly improved the bookmaker's image. Supporter goodwill toward sponsors may translate into long-term financial benefits and brand trust, which are crucial for future success in the betting industry.

In summary, bookmaker sponsorship in football represents a mutually beneficial relationship. Clubs gain financial resources that support development and long-term stability, while bookmakers gain access to highly engaged fan communities. The shared interest in the club serves as a bridge encouraging supporter engagement. However, fan bases are heterogeneous, encompassing individuals of different genders and generations. Promotional and sponsorship communications should therefore be inclusive and emphasize educational content and responsible gambling practices. The betting market holds substantial potential and significance for football, and it is in the interest of both sponsors and clubs to develop partnerships that generate financial benefits for teams and reputational gains for bookmakers.

For future research, it is recommended to expand the sample to include a larger and more diverse group of respondents representing various clubs and regions, as the present study was dominated by Lech Poznań supporters. This would enable a deeper understanding of sponsorship effects across different fan communities. It is also important to investigate determinants influencing fans' choice of bookmaker, such as promotional attractiveness, reputation, and club affiliations. Understanding these preferences could provide valuable guidance for optimizing marketing strategies.

Equally important is identifying barriers in the decision-making process that prevent fans from converting interest in betting offers into actual participation. Addressing these obstacles could significantly increase engagement and betting activity. Such an approach would enhance the rigor of future research and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of sports sponsorship on diverse fan segments, which is essential for the continued development of the betting market.

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