

## Behind Kelme's Sponsorship: The Role of Perceived Prestige and Bobotoh Engagement in Strengthening Persib Bandung's Brand Equity

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**ABSTRACT**

The development of the professional sports industry has encouraged sports clubs to manage brand equity as a strategic asset capable of enhancing competitiveness and organizational value. In this context, sponsorship serves as a marketing instrument that can strengthen a club's brand equity through the transfer of brand image from sponsor to sponsored organization. This study aimed to analyze the effect of Kelme's sponsorship on Persib Bandung's brand equity, focusing on the role of perceived prestige as a mediating variable and Bobotoh engagement as a moderating variable. The study adopted a quantitative approach using a purposive sampling technique involving 100 Bobotoh who met the research criteria. Data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). The results showed that Kelme's perceived sponsorship brand equity did not have a direct effect on Persib Bandung's brand equity. However, perceived prestige significantly mediated the relationship between Kelme's sponsorship brand equity and Persib Bandung's brand equity. In addition, Bobotoh engagement did not moderate the relationship between Kelme's sponsorship brand equity and Persib Bandung's perceived prestige, but it did strengthen the relationship between Kelme's sponsorship brand equity and Persib Bandung's brand equity. These findings indicate that improving club brand equity through sponsorship is more effective when it operates through the formation of perceived club prestige, while supporter engagement plays a reinforcing role in enhancing the impact of sponsorship-based brand image transfer.

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### INTRODUCTION

The professional sports industry has experienced rapid growth, making club brands highly valuable assets. According to Kurniawan et al. (2023), club brand equity is developed to maintain the added value of sports events so that they continue to meet the needs of attending consumers. Brand equity is an important factor because it can increase fan loyalty (Putri & Praswati, 2024), merchandise purchase intention, sponsorship attractiveness, and club economic value. Therefore, sports clubs need to manage their brands strategically to maintain competitiveness and enhance organizational value (Costa et al., 2018; Mahmoudabadi et al., 2019; Shuv-Ami et al., 2015).

Sponsorship is one of the most widely used marketing strategies to build brand image and equity. According to Hunt & Hunt (2022), sports sponsorship is currently the most dominant form of sponsorship. The level of investment is based on the belief that sports sponsorship can increase brand equity, differentiate brands from competitors, and expand reach to new audiences. Through sponsorship, a reciprocal relationship is formed between sponsors and sports organizations, enabling image transfer. In addition, Cobbs & Groza (2020) note that recent research has focused on image transfer among multiple sponsors within the same entity, as well as the combined effect of an entire sponsorship portfolio owned by a single sponsor. However, in Indonesia, most sponsorship research has focused on benefits gained by sponsors, such as increased brand awareness, brand image, and sponsor brand equity. Research on the impact of sponsorship on the brand equity of sponsored sports organizations remains relatively limited, as shown in studies by Hsiao et al. (2021), Hunt & Hunt (2022), Augusta et al. (2023), and Mishra et al. (2025), which emphasize positive effects on brand equity, brand awareness, reputation, consumer loyalty, and purchase intention.

In fact, sponsorship relationships do not only benefit sponsors but also have the potential to enhance public perceptions of sponsored sports clubs. Sponsorship can serve as a source of positive image formation and brand value for sports clubs. Sponsors with strong reputations and brand equity can signal quality, status, and prestige to the sponsored organization. According to Lin et al. (2026), organizations use sponsorships to communicate their quality and positive intentions to consumers. Based on reverse image transfer theory, the sponsor's positive image can be transferred to the sports club, thereby increasing the perceived prestige of the club. High perceived prestige can further strengthen the club's brand equity in the eyes of fans and the public (Cobbs & Groza, 2020).

Fan engagement levels influence how sponsorship-related information is processed. According to Sembiring & Iskandar (2022), sports fans generally accept sponsorship as part of the sports environment, and their identification with the team can influence attitudes and purchase intentions toward sponsoring brands. Based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), highly engaged fans pay more attention to sponsorship activities than less engaged fans (Cobbs & Groza, 2020). In the context of Persib Bandung, Bobotoh are known for their strong loyalty and involvement, which has the potential to strengthen the influence of sponsorship on perceived prestige and club brand equity (Hadyan et al., 2025; Jaberi & Bahiraei, 2025; Prabasmoro, 2017).

In addition, Persib Bandung is one of the football clubs with the largest fan bases in Indonesia. The sponsorship collaboration between Kelme and Persib Bandung is therefore an interesting subject of study. Recently, Persib Bandung officially partnered with Spanish sports brand Kelme as its main apparel sponsor (Primananda, 2025), replacing Sportama, which had been the club's jersey partner for nearly a decade since 2016 (Almahidi, 2025). This transition appears to reflect a strategic move to improve product quality, strengthen branding, expand international exposure, and build a more modern and professional image. It is viewed more as a business and branding strategy than as dissatisfaction with Sportama, which reportedly contributed to Persib's success, including two consecutive championship titles (Son, 2025).

These relationships have the potential to shape perceptions of prestige and increase Persib Bandung's brand equity among Bobotoh. Bobotoh actively interact through various social media platforms and online communities, strengthening their identification with the

club, increasing emotional engagement, and influencing responses to sponsorship activities. The phenomenon of Bobotoh celebrating Persib Bandung's victories in Liga 1 on social media reflects not only support for match outcomes but also a strong sense of loyalty, emotional attachment, and identity with the club, indicating high fan engagement in the digital era (Judge, 2026). Such emotional involvement and loyalty are important assets in supporting the club's commercial activities.

The highest merchandise sales occurred in April, reaching IDR 1,256,138,800, while the lowest sales were recorded in March at IDR 405,990,400. Overall, Persib merchandise sales fluctuated throughout the year but remained at a relatively high level. After the partnership with Kelme began, jersey sales exceeded 28,000 units by December 21, 2025, driven by three main factors: high awareness of official merchandise, strong product quality, and impressive club performance (Wicaksono, 2025).

The high sales of Persib Bandung official merchandise and jerseys indicate that club brand strength is reflected not only in supporter loyalty but also in the success of commercial activities supported by sponsorship partnerships. This phenomenon suggests a relationship between sponsorship, perceived prestige, fan engagement, and the strengthening of club brand equity. However, while previous studies have examined the effects of sponsorship on brand awareness, sponsor brand equity, and purchase intention, studies exploring sponsorship's impact on sports club brand equity through perceived prestige as a mediating variable and fan engagement as a moderating variable remain limited, particularly in the Indonesian football context. Therefore, this study is important to understand how Kelme's sponsorship brand equity influences Persib Bandung's brand equity through perceived prestige, as well as how Bobotoh engagement strengthens this relationship.

## **METHOD**

### **Types and Approaches to Research**

This type of research uses a quantitative approach. According to Soesana et al., (2023) The main goal of quantitative research is to test how much influence one or more independent variables have in predicting or explaining changes in dependent variables.

### **Population and Sample**

Population is the entire object or subject of research that has certain characteristics and quantities that have been determined by the researcher to be used as a source of research data, so that the results of the study can be used as a basis for drawing conclusions (Soesana et al., 2023). The population in this study is all Bobotoh or Persib Bandung supporters who know Kelme as the official sponsor of Persib Bandung who is at least 17 years old, have seen or know Kelme's sponsorship activities at Persib Bandung, and are able to provide assessments related to Persib Bandung's brand equity, perceived prestige, and level of involvement as Bobotoh. Based on data collected from the Viking Persib Club (VPC) website, the members of the research population are 70,000 people.

In this study, the purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a sample determination technique based on the researcher's consideration by setting certain criteria that are in accordance with the research objectives (Soesana et al., 2023). then the number of samples is determined using the Slovin formula because the population of Bobotoh Persib Bandung is very large and widespread with a level of error (margin of error) of 10% ( $e = 0.1$ ), the

calculation using the Slovin formula resulted in a sample of about 100 respondents. These numbers were considered representative enough to describe population characteristics and were used as respondents in the study.

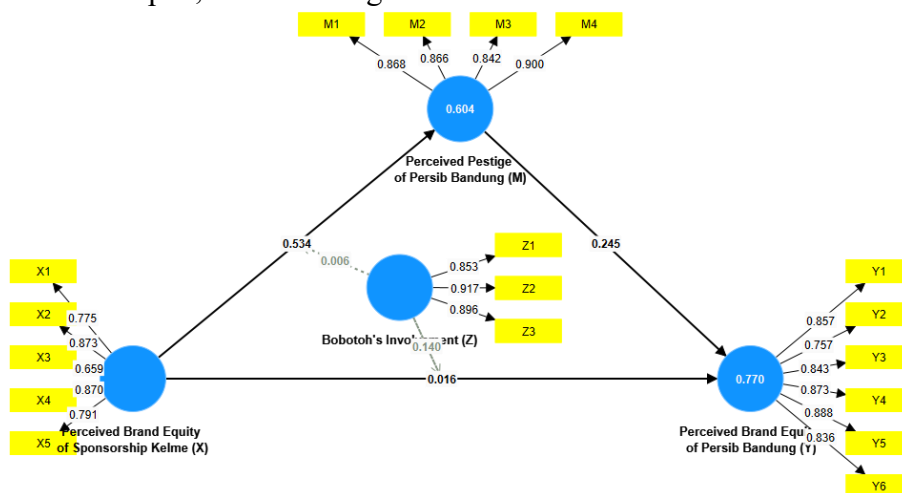
## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Validity and Reliability Test Results

Based on the results of the validity test using Pearson Correlations, all indicators in the variables Perceived Brand Equity of Sponsorship Kelme (X), Perceived Prestige of Persib Bandung (M), Bobotoh's Involvement (Z), and Perceived Brand Equity of Persib Bandung (Y) have r-calculated values ranging from 0.623 to 0.920, which are all greater than the r-table of 0.1654, so all indicators are declared valid. Then based on the results of the reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha, the Perceived Brand Equity of Sponsorship Kelme (X) variable obtained an alpha value of 0.842, the Perceived Prestige of Persib Bandung (M) of 0.885, Bobotoh's Involvement (Z) of 0.863, and the Perceived Brand Equity of Persib Bandung (Y) of 0.915. All Cronbach's Alpha values are above the minimum limit of 0.70, so each variable is declared reliable.

### Outer Model

Analysis of the outer model to test the validity and reliability of the construct through convergent validity, discriminant validity, composite reliability, average variance extracted and Cronbach's Alpha, the following results:



Picture 1. Outer Model

1. Based on the results of the *convergent validity* test, all indicators in the *Perceived Brand Equity of Sponsorship Kelme* (X) variable had a *loading factor* value of 0.623-0.850, the *Perceived Prestige of Persib Bandung* (M) variable of 0.840-0.899, the *Bobotoh's Involvement* (Z) variable of 0.853-0.917, and the *Perceived Brand Equity of Persib Bandung* variable (Y) by 0.757-0.888. All *loading factor* values are above the minimum limit of 0.60, so that all indicators are declared to meet the criteria of convergent validity and are able to reflect the construct that is measured properly.
2. Based on the results of the *discriminant validity* test, all indicators in the variables *Perceived Prestige of Persib Bandung* (M), *Bobotoh's Involvement* (Z) and *Perceived Brand Equity of Persib Bandung* (Y) have the highest loading value in the construct that should be measured compared to other constructs. One of the ones that did not pass

the test was the X6 indicator of the *Perceived Brand Equity of Sponsorship Kelme (X)* variable, therefore the indicator was eliminated and the result was that all indicators showed dominant loading in their respective constructs.

3. The results of Cronbach's Alpha (0.854-0.918) and Composite Reliability ( $\rho_a$  and  $\rho_c > 0.7$  to  $> 0.9$ ) indicated that each variable had excellent internal consistency and reliability. In addition, an AVE value above 0.5 (0.636-0.791) indicates that the entire construct has met the convergent validity as it is able to explain more than 50% of the variance of its indicators. Overall, the variables Bobotoh's Involvement (Z), Perceived Brand Equity of Persib Bandung (Y), Perceived Brand Equity of Sponsorship Kelme (X), and Perceived Prestige of Persib Bandung (M) variables were declared valid and reliable so that they were suitable for further analysis.

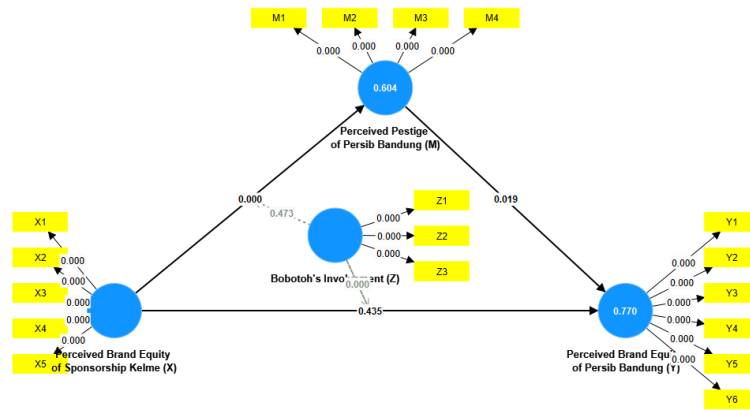
### **Inner Model**

An internal analysis of the model to evaluate the relationship between latent variables using R-Square ( $R^2$ ), Effect Size ( $F^2$ ), and Predictive Relevance ( $Q^2$ ), the following results were obtained:

1. The results of the R-square test showed that *the Perceived Brand Equity of Persib Bandung (Y)* had a value of 0.770 which means that 77% of the variation can be explained by the model and is in the strong category, while *the Perceived Prestige of Persib Bandung (M)* of 0.604 which means that 60.4% of the variation can be explained by the model and is included in the moderate category. Overall, structural models have good explanatory capabilities.
2. The results of *the Effect Size ( $F^2$ )* test showed that *Bobotoh's Involvement (Z)* had a very large influence on *the Perceived Brand Equity of Persib Bandung (Y)* (0.977) and a small influence on *Perceived Prestige (M)* (0.112). *Perceived Brand Equity of Sponsorship Kelme (X)* has no effect on *Perceived Brand Equity of Persib Bandung (Y)* 0.000 but has a moderate effect on *Perceived Prestige (M)* 0.363. Meanwhile, the interaction of *Bobotoh's Involvement (Z)* and *Perceived Brand Equity of Sponsorship Kelme (X)* had a small effect on *the Perceived Brand Equity of Persib Bandung (Y)* 0.147 and had no effect on *the Perceived Prestige (M)* 0.000.
3. The results of the  $Q^2$  test show that *the Perceived Brand Equity of Persib Bandung (Y)* has a value of 0.526 and *the Perceived Prestige of Persib Bandung (M)* has a value of 0.425 above 0.35 so it is included in the category of strong predictions.

### **Hypothesis Test Results**

Hypothesis testing was carried out based on t-statistical values and p-values, with hypothesis criteria accepted if the t-statistical value was  $> 1.96$  and p-value  $< 0.05$  at a significance level of 5%, as follows:



Picture 2. Inner Model

Table 1. Hypothesis Test Results

Variabel	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ((O/STDEV))	P values
<i>Perceived Brand Equity of Sponsorship Kelme (X) -&gt; Perceived Brand Equity of Persib Bandung (Y)</i>	0.016	0.023	0.097	0.164	0.435
<i>Perceived Brand Equity of Sponsorship Kelme (X) -&gt; Perceived Prestige of Persib Bandung (M) -&gt; Perceived Brand Equity of Persib Bandung (Y)</i>	0.131	0.134	0.068	1.920	0.027
<i>Bobotoh's Involvement (Z) x Perceived Brand Equity of Sponsorship Kelme (X) -&gt; Perceived Prestige of Persib Bandung (M)</i>	0.006	0.038	0.094	0.069	0.473
<i>Bobotoh's Involvement (Z) x Perceived Brand Equity of Sponsorship Kelme (X) -&gt; Perceived Brand Equity of Persib Bandung (Y)</i>	0.140	0.137	0.042	3.348	0.000

Based on the results of the hypothesis test in the table, it can be explained as follows:

1. The variable *Perceived Brand Equity of Sponsorship Kelme (X)* on the *Perceived Brand Equity of Persib Bandung (Y)* had a positive but not significant influence, with a coefficient of 0.016. This shows that the increase in *Kelme's brand equity sponsorship* only has a very small influence on *Persib Bandung's brand equity*. This result is supported by a t-statistical value of 0.164 which is smaller than the t-table of 1.96 and a p-value of 0.435 which is greater than 0.05. It can be concluded that the direct influence of X on Y is not significant so the first hypothesis is rejected.
2. The variable *Perceived Brand Equity of Sponsorship Kelme (X)* on the *Perceived Brand Equity of Persib Bandung (Y)* through the *Perceived Prestige of Persib Bandung (M)* showed a positive and significant influence with a coefficient of 0.131. This means that increasing *Kelme's brand equity sponsorship* can increase *Persib Bandung's brand*

*equity* through increasing Persib Bandung's *prestige*. This result is supported by a t-statistical value of 1.920 and a p-value of 0.027 which is smaller than 0.05, so this indirect influence is significant and the second hypothesis is accepted.

3. The moderation variable of *Bobotoh's Involvement (Z) x Perceived Brand Equity of Sponsorship Kelme (X) to the Perceived Prestige of Persib Bandung (M)* showed an insignificant influence, with a coefficient of 0.006. This means that the level of involvement of Bobotoh does not strengthen the relationship of X to M. This result is supported by a t-statistic of 0.069 which is smaller than 1.96 and a p-value of 0.473 which is greater than 0.05, so that hypothesis 3a is rejected.
4. The moderation variable of *Bobotoh's Involvement (Z) x Perceived Brand Equity of Sponsorship Kelme (X) to Perceived Brand Equity of Persib Bandung (Y)* was proven to have a positive and significant effect, with a coefficient of 0.140. This means that the higher the involvement of Bobotoh, the stronger the influence of Kelme's brand equity on Persib Bandung's brand equity. This result is supported by a t-statistical value of 3.348 which is greater than 1.96 and a p-value of 0.000 which is smaller than 0.05 so that the 3b hypothesis is accepted.

### **Critical Analysis**

Theoretically, this research departs from the concept of *brand equity* which emphasizes that the value of a brand is formed from consumers' perception of quality, association, awareness, and loyalty (Hunt & Hunt, 2022; Mishra et al., 2025). In the context of sports sponsorship, the theory *reverse image transfer* and brand alliances (Gwinner & Eaton (2013); Cobbs & Groza (2020)) explains that the image of the sponsor can transfer to the sponsored entity and vice versa, so that the relationship between the brands can reinforce each other. However, the results of the study show that *Perceived Brand Equity of Sponsorship Kelme (X)* has no significant direct effect on *Perceived Brand Equity of Persib Bandung (Y)*. These findings indicate that image transfer does not occur directly, but rather requires other psychological mechanisms. Critically, it can be explained that in the context of football clubs with a high fanaticism base such as Persib, the club's brand identity is more dominant formed by individuals categorizing themselves as part of a group (team) and prioritizing the identity of the group. This is based on theory Lock & Heere (2017) that social identity explores how group membership makes individuals share the same characteristics and values that underlie normative behavior. Therefore, *brand equity* sponsors don't automatically attach to *brand equity* clubs, thus weakening the assumption of direct transfers in theory *sponsorship*.

On the contrary, the results show a significant indirect influence through Perceived Prestige (M). This reinforces the theory that prestige is an important mediator in the image transfer process (Chiu et al., (2019); Cobbs & Groza (2020)). Critically, these findings suggest that sponsorship does not affect *brand equity* clubs directly, but first form the perception of the club's prestige in the eyes of consumers. When sponsors are perceived to have good value, it can increase the club's prestige, and ultimately strengthen *brand equity* club. In other words, prestige serves as a cognitive bridge that allows the transfer of meaning between sponsors and clubs to occur more subtly and gradually.

In the aspect of moderation, the results of the study showed that Bobotoh's Involvement did not strengthen the relationship between X and M, but rather strengthened the relationship between X and Y directly. Theoretically, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) states that

individuals with high engagement will process information in more depth (Cobbs & Groza, 2020). Critically, however, these results show a different pattern: Bobotoh's involvement does not strengthen the perception of prestige from sponsors, but instead reinforces direct transfers to *brand equity* club. This can be explained because Bobotoh as a club fanatic has a very strong identity towards Persib, so they are faster to associate sponsors with the club without going through complex prestige evaluations. So that high involvement does not strengthen all psychological pathways equally, but rather accelerates the internalization of sponsorship as part of the club's identity.

Overall, these findings indicate that the *theory of reverse image transfer* in the context of sport is not linear, but highly contextual and influenced by the emotional attachment structure of the supporter. *Brand equity* sponsorship does not automatically increase *the club's brand equity*, but must be through prestige as the main mediator, while involvement acts as a selective reinforcer on a particular path. This expands the theoretical understanding that in the sports industry, especially in clubs with a strong fan base, emotional and community identity factors can be more dominant than purely rational image transfer mechanisms.

## Discussion

Theoretically, this research departs from the concept of *brand equity* which emphasizes that the value of a brand is shaped by consumers' perception of quality, association, awareness, and loyalty (Hunt & Hunt, 2022; Mishra et al., 2025). In the context of sports sponsorship, reverse image transfer theory and brand alliances (Gwinner & Eaton (2013); Cobbs & Groza (2020)) explains that the image of the sponsor can transfer to the sponsored entity and vice versa, so that the relationship between the brands can reinforce each other. Previous research has also shown consistency that sponsorship has a positive effect on brand equity, brand awareness, reputation, and consumer loyalty (Hsiao et al., (2021); Hunt & Hunt (2022); Augusta et al., (2023); Mishra et al., (2025)). However, the results of this study show different findings, namely *Perceived Brand Equity of Sponsorship Kelme (X)* has no significant direct effect on *Perceived Brand Equity of Persib Bandung (Y)*. The results of this study are supported by Cobbs & Groza (2020) that the direct influence between SRBE and SEBE was not significant ( $p > 0.10$ ) therefore H1 was rejected. Critically, this shows that the assumption of direct image transfer in sponsorship theory does not fully apply in the context of a football club with a fanatical supporter base such as Persib. Based on Team Identification Theory and Social Identity Theory (Lock & Heere, 2017) Individuals in a supporter group build a very strong social identity towards the club, so evaluation of the club is determined more by group identity, loyalty, and emotional attachment than by external attributes such as sponsorship.

On the contrary, the results of the study show that the indirect influence through Perceived Prestige (M) is proven to be significant. These findings reinforce the view Cobbs & Groza (2020) and Chiu et al., (2019) that prestige is an important psychological mechanism in the image transfer process. Critically, prestige plays a role as *cognitive bridge* which bridges the relationship between sponsors and clubs. This means that sponsors do not directly increase *brand equity* clubs, but first formed the perception of the club's prestige, which then influenced *brand equity*.

In the moderation aspect, the results showed a pattern that was not fully in accordance with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Cobbs & Groza, 2020). In theory, high

engagement should strengthen deep information processing and strengthen all lines of influence. However, the findings of this study suggest that *Bobotoh's Involvement* does not strengthen the relationship of X to M, but rather strengthens the relationship of X to Y directly. Critically, it can be explained that in the context of fanatical supporters, high engagement does not necessarily result in more complex cognitive processing of sponsors. On the other hand, Bobotoh with a very strong identity towards Persib tends to do *identity-based processing*, i.e. directly integrating the sponsor into the club's identity without going through an in-depth prestige evaluation or *involvement*. It does not work as a cognitive enhancer, but as a social identity enhancer.

When compared to previous studies, these findings provide an important difference. Cobbs & Groza (2020) found that engagement amplifies the effect of prestige transfer in the context of hockey, while this study shows that in the context of Indonesian football, engagement plays more of a role as a reinforcer of club identity, rather than just a reinforcement of cognitive processes. This is also different from Hsiao et al., (2021) and Hunt & Hunt (2022) that emphasizes more direct relationships *sponsorship* against *brand equity* without considering the dominance of the identity of the supporter group.

This study provides a new perspective that the development of *the reverse image transfer model* in the context of football clubs with a fanatical supporter base, which shows that the influence of *brand equity* sponsorship on the club's *brand equity* is not direct, but must be through perceived prestige as the main mediator, in addition to this study also reveals that *the Elaboration Likelihood Model* (ELM) is not entirely applicable in the context of fanatical supporters, because Bobotoh's involvement does not function as a cognitive processing reinforcer as in other sports contexts, but rather as a social identity reinforcer that actually strengthens the direct relationship between sponsors and *club brand equity*; thus, this research offers a new contribution in the form of a social identity-based model and contextual prestige that explains that in the sports fandom environment Highly emotional, the mechanism of sponsor image transfer is determined more by the structure of group identity than by rational cognitive processes as assumed in previous literature.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis and discussion, it was concluded that Kelme's sponsorship brand equity does not have a significant direct effect on Persib Bandung's perceived brand equity. This indicates that sponsorship brand equity alone is not sufficient to automatically enhance the club's brand equity, leading to the rejection of the first hypothesis. However, Kelme's sponsorship brand equity does have a significant indirect effect on Persib Bandung's perceived brand equity through Persib Bandung's perceived prestige. This finding suggests that perceived prestige plays an important mediating role in facilitating the transfer of brand image from sponsor to club, resulting in the acceptance of the second hypothesis.

Furthermore, Bobotoh engagement does not moderate the relationship between Kelme's sponsorship brand equity and Persib Bandung's perceived prestige, meaning that the level of supporter engagement neither strengthens nor weakens this relationship, leading to the rejection of hypothesis 3a. In contrast, Bobotoh engagement does positively and significantly moderate the relationship between Kelme's sponsorship brand equity and Persib Bandung's perceived brand equity, indicating that higher supporter engagement strengthens

the influence of sponsorship brand equity on the club's brand equity; therefore, hypothesis 3b is accepted.

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