

# Image Effects through Junior Sports: The Case of the UEFA Under-19 European Football Championship

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*The impact of national junior football teams, their matches and events are generally under-researched. This study analysed whether youth tournaments such as UEFA Under-19 European Football Championship 2016 in Germany influence the public perception of the German Football Association (DFB). Furthermore, in the case of an image transfer, we analysed the factors that can be found to explain these effects. The assumption was that determinants such as age (as teenagers are the main spectator group) and location (as the youth tournament was held in smaller cities) are the main drivers for image transfers and that therefore, youth events could be used to address specific target groups. The study is based on a quantitative case study approach using a survey at three different points in time: before, during, and after the tournament. The analysis showed a positive event impact of almost 6 percent, which is comparable to the image effects of the adult UEFA Football Championship in France 2016. Most important for the image effect is the level of involvement and the intensity of contact with the DFB (which was not one of the initial assumptions). Spectators at the stadium had a very positive perception of the DFB. This differs strongly from those people who did not watch a match at the stadium, especially regarding the ethic-emotional image dimensions. The willingness to watch a youth national game at a stadium is increased in the specific local area by about 40 percent. In conclusion, the findings of the study could provide the junior departments, within sport associations, with valuable arguments for organising youth events in their country as positive image effects are highly appreciated particularly from a sport marketing perspective.*

**Keywords:** Football, image transfer, youth championships, sports associations.

## Introduction and Background

In general, youth sports - and youth sports events such as the UEFA Under-19 European Football Championship in particular - are under-researched. In recent years, only a few studies can be found on Youth Olympic Games for example (Judge et al. 2016) or on the careers of youth players (Grossmann and Lames 2015).

After being unsuccessful in international football competitions around the year 2000, Germany, over the last 15 years, has made improvements in the youth

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development system by establishing specific academies, as well as implementing youth regulations for the professional clubs and their related youth centres. These strategic developments have led to recent achievements at youth and even adult stages, for example by winning the 2014 FIFA Football World Cup in Brazil (Grossmann and Lames 2015). As a logical consequence of this youth development, the German Football Association considered (DFB) hosting international youth tournaments such as the UEFA Under-19 European Football Championship, as it could bring several additional benefits including increased awareness for the youth teams, enhanced customer loyalty and the event could also be used as a positive image driver. Consequently, apart from youth development and the sports perspective, business-related objectives were crucial for the DFB as event host by choosing the different venues. In the case of that tournament, more public and media perception for the youth teams through full stadiums the aspiration (German Football Association - DFB 2013/2014).

Next to the parents and family members of the players, who are the main spectator group of youth events in general (Scott and Turco 2007), two target groups, which could be reached with this youth sport event, were identified: the first target group included younger people under the age of 20, as they are at the same age as the players. The second target group included a periphery population dependent on the fact that most of the stadiums chosen for such youth sport events are quite small, as these tournaments usually do not attract so many spectators and often take place in more regional areas instead of the major cities of a country. The UEFA Under-19 European Football Championship 2016 took place in the federal state of Baden-Wuerttemberg in Germany. In that region nine different cities were selected: Aalen, Aspach, Heidenheim, Mannheim, Reutlingen, Sinsheim Stuttgart, Ulm and Sandhausen (German Football Association - DFB 2015). Only two of these cities had football clubs playing in the highest division in German football whereas the other cities did not have high-class football teams at that time. Hence, the choice of cities, offers the chance for the population of that region (Baden-Wuerttemberg) to watch a national football team competing on international level in their regional stadiums. It was suggested that the motivation to go to an international football match of people living in these cities might have been even higher as they don't have this opportunity on a regular basis.

Within those two target groups, we analysed whether the event could have any image effect on the DFB as the organising association. This approach is different than the existing image transfer models in the literature as it is not a sponsor trying to get a positive image transfer from the event, but the organiser itself. This was more important than the question of whether an image transfer from the event to a sponsor was completed, as sponsorship is not the most important part of these youth tournaments compared to the senior sport events. Therefore, this study could potentially contribute new knowledge to that academic area.

In addition, to the challenge that the image transfer should go to the organiser itself, the DFB had two other problems with its image campaign at the UEFA Under-19 European Football Championship in 2016. Firstly, the organisation was still dealing with major image problems caused by affairs such as corruption

scandals around 2006 FIFA Football World Cup and other sport political issues (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 2016). Therefore, the population is to some extent, sceptical about further football events. Secondly, due to the (adult) UEFA European Football Championship 2016 in France some days before the Under-19 tournament, the media was concentrated almost entirely on the major adult championship instead of the youth event, at least in the weeks before the start of the tournament.

## Literature Review

Strategic sponsorship has become important in practice and theory since the early 1990s. It is an essential marketing activity within most organisations over the past decades. One of the major goals of sponsorship is the establishment, improvement or change of the brand image (Gwinner 1997).

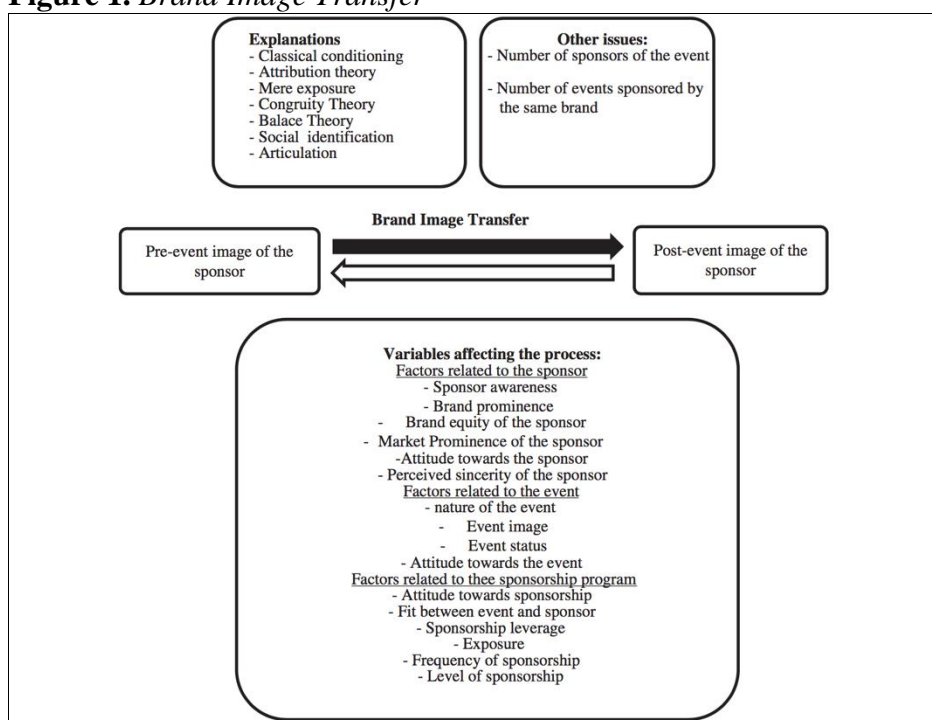
Fundamentals to the theory were established by Keller (1993: 3) who defined brand image as “*perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in memory*”. This definition underlines “the multidimensionality of the construct and the plurality of possible associations” (Novais and Arcodia 2013). Brand image, in combination with brand awareness, build the brand knowledge. This is the information about a brand that consumers have in their minds during their decision-making processes. In the definition, brand associations are highlighted and are defined by Keller (1993: 3) as “*informational nodes linked to the brand node in memory and contain the meaning of the brand for consumers*”. There are three categories of brand associations: attributes which refer to the characteristics of the product or service, benefits as the personal values of the product or service and the attitudes which represent the global evaluation of the brand by the consumer (Novais and Arcodia 2013, Keller 1993). In the context of event marketing, Keller (1993), highlighted that associations that relate to the event may become connected in memory with the brand as well.

The basic principle of the image transfer model explained by Gwinner (1997) is that events can transport certain associations similarly to endorsers. Therefore, he used the model of celebrity endorsement as a theoretical underpinning (McCracken 1989). The idea behind this is that consumers associate celebrities with certain meanings, often depending on the roles or careers these celebrities had. When these people then become involved in sponsorship deals (for instance in an advertisement) the meaning is transferred to the product or service and therefore to the customer. In the case of sporting events these meanings could develop from the type of event, event characteristics and individual consumer factors (Gwinner 1997). Hence, the purpose of sponsorship is to transfer a unique event image to the sponsoring product (Gwinner and Eaton 1999, Gwinner 1997). The term “image transfer” was defined by Zentes (1996) as a mutual transfer and intensification of object associations between objects of different categories. Hereby, the focus is on the transfer of denotative and connotative associations.

There are various image transfer models in the literature (Nufer 2002, Glogger 1999, Gwinner 1997, Schweiger 1982). One of the first and

internationally most acknowledged image transfer model in context of sport event marketing and sponsoring was established by Nufer in 2002. It is a structured theoretical attempt to point out the process of image transfer through event marketing. It illustrates the steps involved in the creation of an image transfer and the associated alternative consequences at each point. The model starts with the two transfer partners: the event and the brand. The event triggers emotions (affective) and the brand offers information (cognitive). Both need to be realised by the spectator at the same time as a crucial condition for the formation of an image transfer. Furthermore, the model integrates the affinity between the brand and the event as a sufficient condition. At this point, other scholars suggest that this fit seems to be crucial for a positive image transfer and that this should not only be illustrated as a sufficient condition (Schlesinger and Prager 2005). Consequently, the fit between the event and the sponsor is the most common variable analysed in recent studies on image transfer (Novais and Arcodia 2013). Nevertheless, the model by Nufer (2002) is acknowledged broadly in the academic area that these two prerequisites, explained previously and their extent and constellation are the main determinants for the likelihood of a positive image transfer (Nufer 2002). Also, the model explains how a negative image transfer could occur, for example, if the brand dominates the communication to such an extent that it is above the tolerance level of the spectators and if in addition to this the fit between brand and event is not obvious (Pabst 2015, Nufer 2002). While Nufer (2002) was one of the first researchers to analyse the image transfer in the context of sport sponsorship, many studies have been conducted on brand image transfer since then.

The current state of the literature is summarized in a review by Novais and Arcodia (2013) with the conceptualized model shown in Figure 1. This includes the variables, which could affect the process of the image transfer that have been researched so far.

**Figure 1. Brand Image Transfer**

Source: Novais and Arcodia (2013).

Youth sport events are not considered massively in the literature. Especially in relation with image transfer models, few empirical studies could be found with comparable research objectives. One interesting study was conducted by Kaplanidou and Gibson (2012), who analysed youth sporting events with the intention of understanding the impact of the event's image on travelling parents' supporting their children in tournaments. These parents are therefore seen as a special sport tourists group. They found that the overall event image is a significant driver of parents' attitude and subjective norms, which indicate that a positive evaluation of the tournament leads to improved attitudes of the parents. Additionally, the peer effects of that travelling activity – coming together with other parents in the same situation – are important for their attitudes and behaviour.

Despite this research by Kaplanidou and Gibson (2012), the literature focuses primarily on image effects at major sport events. Furthermore, in the existing literature of image transfers, contexts are analysed in which a brand image is transferred from an event to a sponsor. Some studies acknowledge that the reverse relationship (from sponsor to event) could also exist in the case that the event image itself is not very strong and unique (Gwinner and Eaton 1999).

Nevertheless, the literature seldom considers the event organiser or organising association as a potential receiver of the brand image transferred from an event. In all the above-mentioned theories, the partners in the process are an event and a sponsor. A study was conducted by Lee et al. (2005) where the organising association was considered as a receiver of the image transfer to some extent. They analysed the image effect of the 2002 FIFA World Cup hosted by South Korea

and Japan on South Korea as a tourist destination. However, this also focuses more on the image of the nation (South Korea) instead of the national organisation responsible for the football in that country.

In context of the UEFA Under-19 European Football Championship this youth sport event was hosted by the national sports association (the DFB), which was inserted by the UEFA as event organiser. Hence, this study addresses the potential image transfer from the event to the organising association and addresses the affinity in terms of emotional closeness of the spectator to the event, thus allowing us to distinguish between several target groups that are probably impacted differently by the event.

## Research Objectives and Methodology

The research objective is to some extent quite complex as the framework is going beyond the well-researched theories of image transfer. Therefore, a case study approach seems to be appropriate within this initial research. According to Schell (1992) a case study fits best when a contemporary phenomenon is analysed within its real-life context. This is true for this setting of the UEFA Under-19 European Football Championship in Germany in 2016. Additionally, a case study approach allows the researcher to examine data on a micro level and hence, provide better insights into behaviour (Zainal 2007). Within the case study, two hypotheses were tested in a quantitative survey design. The hypotheses have been derived from the preliminary considerations highlighted in the introduction section and represent, somehow, the objectives of the organising association of the event. Additionally, the findings from the literature are integrated. Nevertheless, this setting within a youth sport event regarding the image transfer has not yet been analysed and is not completely comparable to classic major sport events. Therefore, the case study approach is explanatory and appropriate. The hypotheses include the various target groups - people living in the periphery and/or people younger than 20 years:

H1: The Under-19 European Football Championship has a positive impact on the DFB image especially in the target segment of young spectators (age < 20 years).

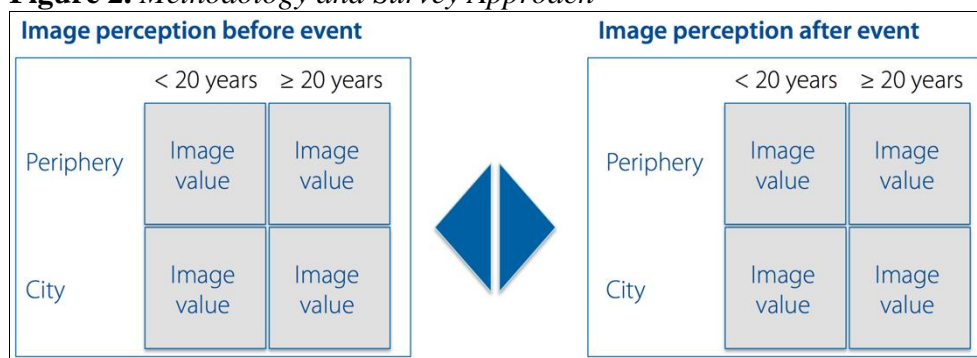
H2: The Under-19 Championship has a positive impact on the DFB image especially in the target segment of periphery fans (= no proximity to a Bundesliga club).

The assessment of the image effect of the UEFA Under-19 European Football Championship is based on several surveys that were conducted before, during and shortly after the tournament. A questionnaire was designed and given to people living within Baden-Wuerttemberg as well as outside of that federal state in which the matches took place (control group). The quantitative approach and the questionnaire were evaluated in a pre-test setting in 2015 and participants, scholars, and the organising association had the ability to give

feedback to increase the reliability. The questionnaire was quite short to allow the researchers collecting data in street surveys. The image was measured at the beginning of the survey with one general question “Please indicate your current overall impression of the DFB” on a Likert scale from 1 (very negative) to 5 (very positive). From this central question the changes in image values have been compared. Additionally, questions about qualitative image dimensions of the DFB such as the success, organisation, integrity and attractiveness of the organisation were added whereby respondents had to tick one of five boxes on a Likert scale between specific pairs of adjectives (semantic differential) such as exclusive v. inclusive or unscrupulous v. responsible.

To test the two hypotheses and to isolate the impact of the event and to eliminate other factors (for example, the adult UEFA European Championship in France), control groups outside of Baden-Württemberg were also ask to participate in the surveys. The study was conducted during two different survey periods: before the event (spring 2016,) and during and very briefly after the final match of the youth tournament. The delta between the image values before and during the event could indicate the image effects of the UEFA Under-19 European Football Championship. This methodology is illustrated in Figure 2 below:

**Figure 2. Methodology and Survey Approach**



Source: Authors' survey design.

The figure shows that the survey design consists of eight segments and to reach validity and rigor, it was aimed to achieve almost similar participation numbers in all segments. In total, almost 937 people have taken part in the two surveys in 2016. It is worth mentioning that the people completing the survey before the event are not the same as those of the study during and briefly after the tournament. For the younger target group (aged under 20), schools were selected to take part in the survey and for the other segments street surveys have been conducted in the major cities as well as in the periphery. For the selection of the schools, various variables have been considered, such as the location (venue or not), campaigning through the DFB, and the number of students in the relevant age group.

Furthermore, as some spectators have been asked at the stadium directly prior to a match, their data has been analysed separately as they had another relationship level to the event compared to those surveys taking part within the city centres on non-match days. The stadium spectators could be considered as

a ninth category in terms of the visualisation shown in Figure 2. However, even the schools were analysed separately to enlarge the data and to derive different implications from various analysis. That option for micro-level extractions describes exactly the advantage of the case study approach suggested at the beginning of that section and in this study, this analysis led to more valuable insights into the observed phenomena (Zainal 2007). The sample is illustrated in figure 3 below:

**Figure 3. Sample**

	Before the event	during and shortly after the event (without stadium)	during and shortly after the event (only stadium)
UEFA U19-EURO Baden-Württemberg (BW)	n = 188 s = 0,723	n = 137 s = 0,859	n = 144 s = 0,778
Control group Hessen (K)	n = 259 s = 0,854	n = 209 s = 0,817	
			n = 937

Source: Authors' survey design.

Tools for the data analysis were IBM SPSS and Microsoft Excel. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics, ANOVA and cross-tabulation procedures. The most important procedure has been the comparison of the image values before and after the event in the different segments. This was an explanatory and descriptive method that fits the case study approach best to get a first understanding of the effects that occurred.

A third survey will complete this research project and is just mentioned here as a matter of completeness. We planned this final stage in order to analyse the legacy effect of the image transfer, which answers the question for how long any potential image impact on the organising association will last for. Therefore, this third survey period will take part one year after the event has been hosted in Germany. This holistic research design provides three results: the basic image value (survey before the tournament), event image value (survey during and briefly after the tournament) as well as the legacy image value effect (9 – 12 months after the tournament). Nevertheless, this paper just focuses on first two image value (basic and event) as for the legacy image value effect other factors need to be considered apart from theories about image effects and image transfer.



## Results and Discussion

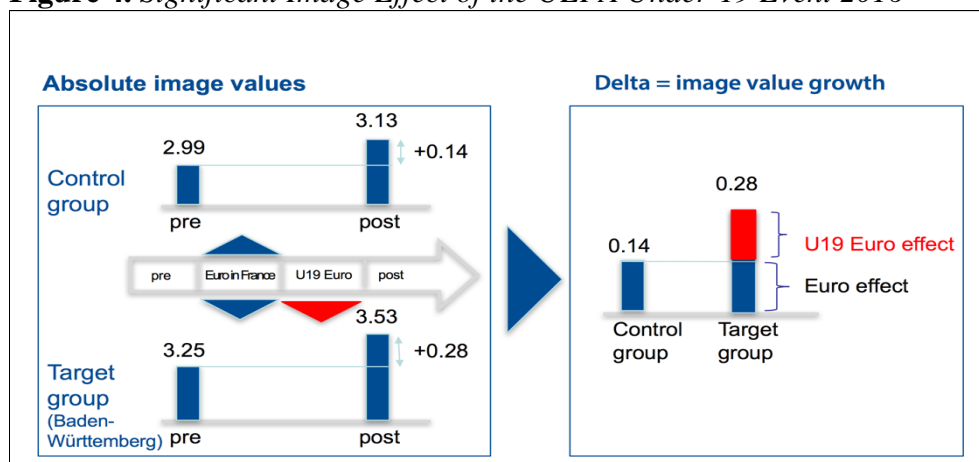
### General Findings

The demographics of the two surveys (before the event and during / briefly after the tournament) were comparable regarding gender, age and place of living (as main factors of the hypotheses). The only difference found was the membership within a football club. However, it does not seem to be relevant in the analysis of the image values. The image of the DFB is rated as “neutral” or slightly positive by the participants, and the association is perceived as organised, successful and integrative. This is to some extent an appreciation for the management of the association, as the majority seem to acknowledge the work done by the organisation on the sporting perspective as well as on the social activities. However, the negative ethic-emotional dimensions (indicated with attributes such as unscrupulous, egoistic and unsympathetic) were quite high – especially among those participants who did not watch a match live at the stadium. Those are the associations that can be linked back to the scandals and negative image trends of the DFB in recent years. Three major findings regarding the research objectives have been derived from the study, which will be explained in more detail in the following sections.

### Image Effect of the Youth Tournament to the Organising Association

First and foremost, there is a positive impact of the UEFA Under-19 European Football Championship taking place in Germany 2016 to the organising association (DFB). Surprisingly, to some extent was the fact that the image effects from the youth tournament have been comparable to those from the adult major event (measured as the delta within the control group between the two survey periods). The positive image effects can be calculated at 6 percent, which equals the effect of the UEFA EURO Championship in France in 2016. This overall image effect is shown in Figure 4 below:

**Figure 4.** Significant Image Effect of the UEFA Under-19 Event 2016



Source: Authors' survey results.

The existence of an image effect was also shown by the fact that people of the region Baden-Wuerttemberg (target group) had a 40 percent increased intention to watch a match of a youth team after the tournament.

#### *Age and Place of living are not the Relevant Drivers*

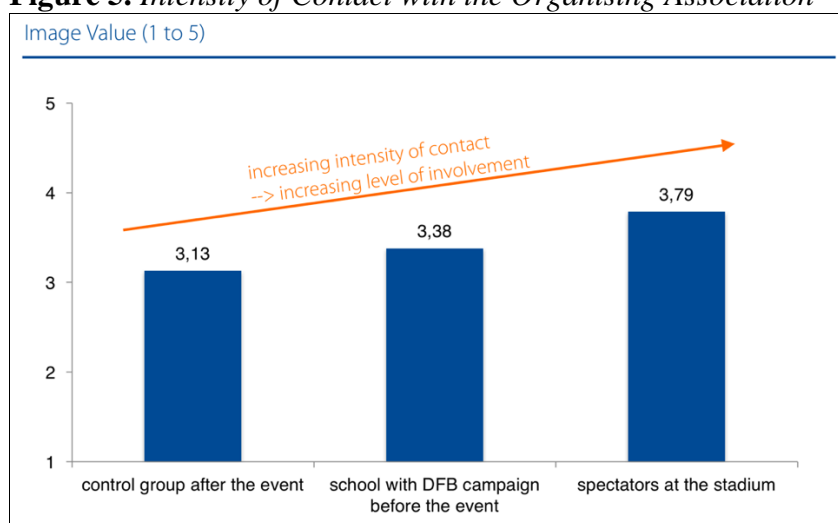
As described in the methodology section, two hypotheses were used to differentiate the different target groups. A test of the image values among those, revealed interesting findings regarding those target segment specific hypothesis:

H1 was: “The Under-19 European Football Championship has a positive impact on the DFB image especially in the target segment of young spectators (age < 20 years).” H1 could not be supported by the survey results as no significant difference was found between the image values of younger people and participants older than 20.

H2 was: “The Under-19 Championship has a positive impact on the DFB image especially in the target segment of periphery fans (= no proximity to a Bundesliga club).” H2 could not be supported by the survey results – in line with the rejection of the first hypothesis. There were no significant differences in the image value results between the participants regarding their place of living. Therefore, the findings indicate that it does not matter whether people are living in the bigger cities or the periphery, whether they have professional football clubs from the 1<sup>st</sup> Bundesliga close to their home and whether youth tournaments provide a specific opportunity to watch international football in their regional stadiums in relation to their perception of the football association’s image. The popularity of football in Germany and the fact that the DFB is already known to most people could be potential reasons for these findings.

#### *Campaigning and Contact Intensity*

Against the hypotheses, the major driver for the image value in the study has been the intensity of contact of the participants with the DFB as the organising association in advance and the event itself. Various inquiries such as the individual analysis of the stadium spectators or school with campaigns of the DFB in advance, have led to interesting insights apart from the target segments named in the hypotheses. In particular, those participants who have watched a match of the tournament live in the stadium indicate a very positive image of the organising association. These differences are shown in Figure 5 below.

**Figure 5.** Intensity of Contact with the Organising Association

Source: Authors' survey results.

This finding is supported by the analysis of the communication channels, which are used mainly in connection to the tournament. Most people had heard about the event in advance through personal contacts, including school campaigns, friends or family in addition to social media. During the event the most common channel of communication were the traditional broadcasting reports (TV, radio, newspaper).

In reviewing the extant literature, the authors acknowledge that other variables, which also have been partly conceptualized in the model by Novais and Arcodia (2013), could be more important for a successful brand image transfer in the context of the UEFA Under-19 European Football Championship. Those variables are the exposure and the level of involvement. Although the level of involvement is not a variable of the concept by Novais and Arcodia (2013) directly, they discuss it in their paper in relation to the nature of the event and sponsorship. As Neijens et al. (2009) found, the level of involvement could be crucial in the process. On one hand, it increases the level of exposure (this means as a more involved spectator a person is watching more matches and with this he or she is also exposed to more advertising). On the other hand, the level of involvement opens the consumer to advertising of a product or service that is related to the object (or in that case event) of their involvement.

In our study, the level of involvement increases with the intensity of the contact as shown in Figure 4. The students in schools with DFB campaigning in advance as well as spectators at a stadium had a higher level of involvement as the participants in the street surveys.

## Conclusion, Limitations and Future Research

This paper investigated the image transfer from an event to the organising association in the context of youth sport tournaments by analysing the case of

the UEFA Under-19 European Football Championship. It was found that there are positive effects from the youth tournament on the image of the national football association that are comparable to the image effects caused by senior tournaments. Hence, the study is a first attempt to show that image transfer models, such as the one established by Nufer (2002) or the conceptualized model by Novais and Arcordia (2013), could also be applicable in the relationship between an event and the organising association as in the case of the UEFA Under-19 European Football Championship. These findings give host associations further ammunition to justify the investment required for hosting those events, as it is an enhancement of the association's image. However, this is only true for those people who are involved in the event in some way. This has been shown by the fact that the image value is much higher for those people who either attend matches or were reached by communication campaigns. This leads to further implications for future host associations.

Nevertheless, given the early stage and the practice-orientated approach of that case study, there are some limitations. First, some bias could exist within the answers on the image questions regarding the DFB due to the overall situation and image trend of the DFB caused by scandals shortly before and after the survey. Second, the senior UEFA European Football Championship 2016 in France could also had an influence on the answers given to the questions. Third, there could have been some bias within the data collection process (for example with the choice of schools or cities to conduct the surveys), however, the authors have applied professional due diligence as far as possible.

Finally, future studies should be able to distinguish more strongly within the target groups. The result that the hypotheses could not be supported shows that other factors next to age and place of living are more relevant for the image effect in the setting of international youth competitions. As suggested in the results and discussion, the level of involvement could be one major predictor for the intensity of the image effect. It was obvious that match spectators are very different in their opinions from those participants in the street surveys in the major cities, regarding their information level of the tournament as well as the image of the organising association or event. Another group, which shows different results within the target groups, consists of pupils from those schools where the organising association of the event (the DFB) did more campaigning and promotion of the event in advance. Therefore, it is worth in future research to link the level of involvement (in terms of promotion and campaigning activities of organisers) to the image effects. The ideas from this analysis will be considered in the legacy study following later this year. Then the hypotheses will be tested in relation to this level of involvement. Furthermore, the legacy image value effect will be the final part of this case study as it could add knowledge to the question in the literature of how long an image impact could last. Some studies conclude that this could be possibly be for as long as a year (Simmons and Becker-Olsen 2006) whereas others only found effects lasting for three months (Neijens et al. 2009). This will be analysed in this setting of the UEFA Under-19 European Football Championship 2016 in the next months.

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