



Comparing Sponsorship Influence Across Major Sports

Presenters: Katie Reidinger, Abbey Lopes, Hannah Smith, Dylan Estrella | Advisors: Dr. Wonjun Choi, Dr. Sophia Min
Sport Management and Leadership, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH 03824



Introduction

- Sport sponsorships are a transactional relationship between sport organizations and other organizations (e.g., beverage organizations, clothing companies, or local businesses) wherein the business will provide the sport organization with money or product in exchange for brand visibility provided by the sport organization (Laliga Business School, 2025).
- As the sport industry has become more business-oriented, sport sponsorships have become increasingly popular. Companies are paying organizations to put their branding around arenas, in commercials and advertisement reads in media, and even adding logos to sport uniforms (e.g., jerseys or helmets).
- Examples of sport sponsorships include social media posts, equipment branding, logos on or around the arena, LED signs, or media timeout advertisements. As these sponsorships become more popular, their value also increases and, in turn, so does the demand from both sport organizations and the sponsoring brands (Tafa, 2024).
- Trends in sport sponsorships can be helpful for organizations to gain an understanding of whether there is worth for them in paying to sponsor a team or league, or for an organization to sell branding space to companies. The sport industry benefits greatly from the increasing trend of sponsorship sales.
- The purpose of this project is to compare the influence of sponsorship across major sports (NHL, NFL, NBA, MLB), implicating how sponsorship strategies impact revenue generation, brand image, and fan engagement.

Method

Data Source:

- The secondary data used was compiled by Sport Business Research Network, Inc. in 2025 through a fan questionnaire. Fans were asked how influential sport sponsorships are to their inclination to purchase the sponsor's product.

Sample Analysis:

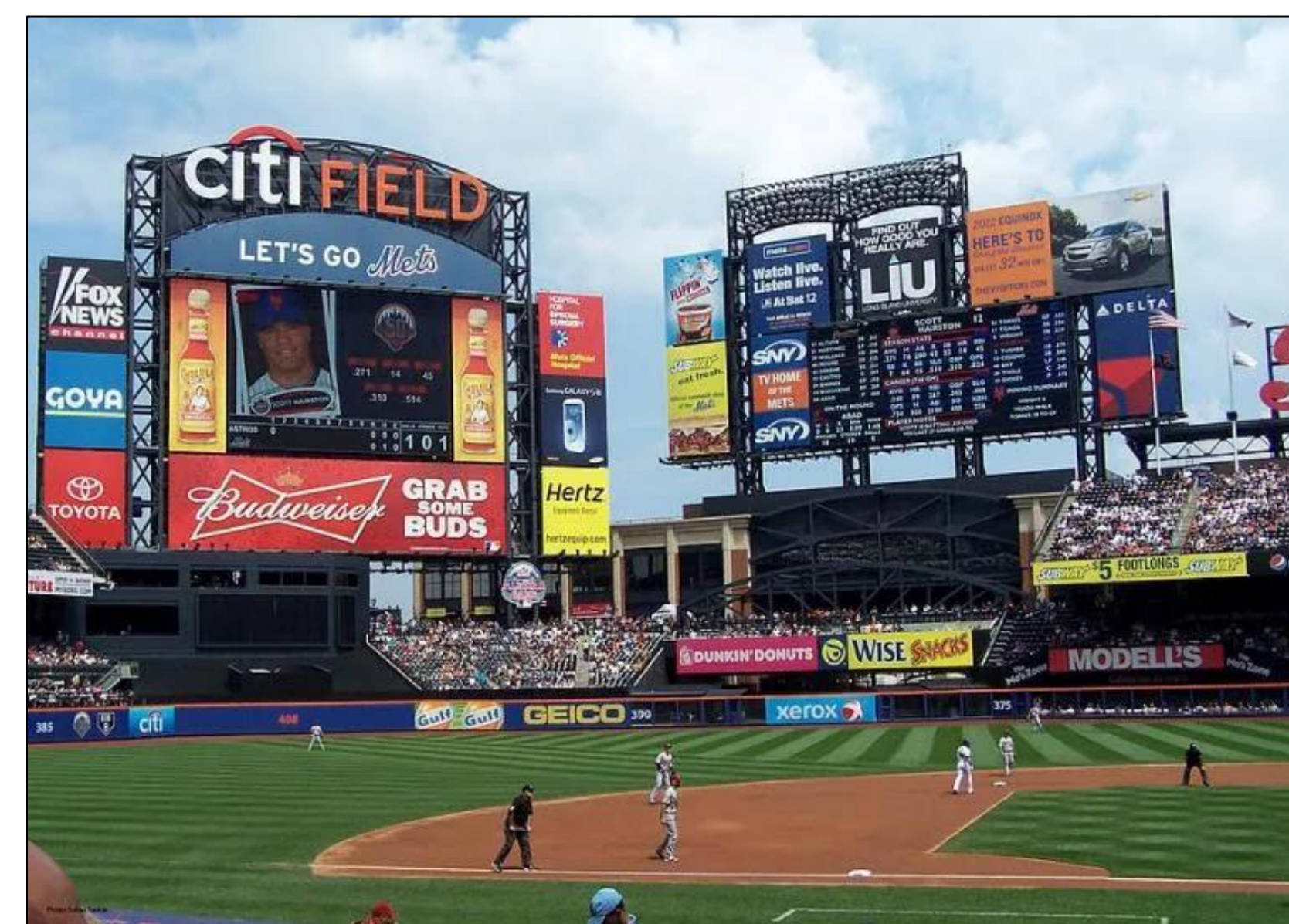
- Fan sample sizes for MLB, NBA, and NFL were drawn from annual survey data spanning 2013 to 2022, with NFL yielding the largest samples (ranging from 120,331 to 153,186), followed by MLB (86,329 to 119,727) and NBA (68,088 to 104,825) across the ten-year study period. The NHL fan sample size is not available from the dataset.

- From the dataset, the answers that were provided were turned into percentages of the total questioned population.

- Using Microsoft Excel and Claude A.I., we conducted a visual comparison of sponsorship influence perceived by sport fans across the four major professional sport leagues.

Corporate Sponsorship Examples

MLB Ballpark Advertisements



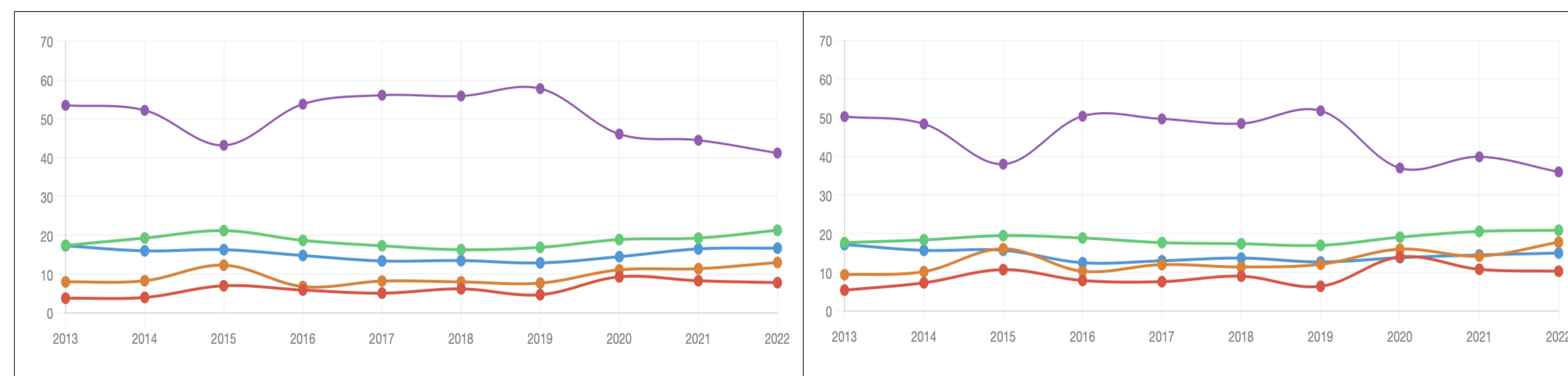
NBA Jersey Advertisements



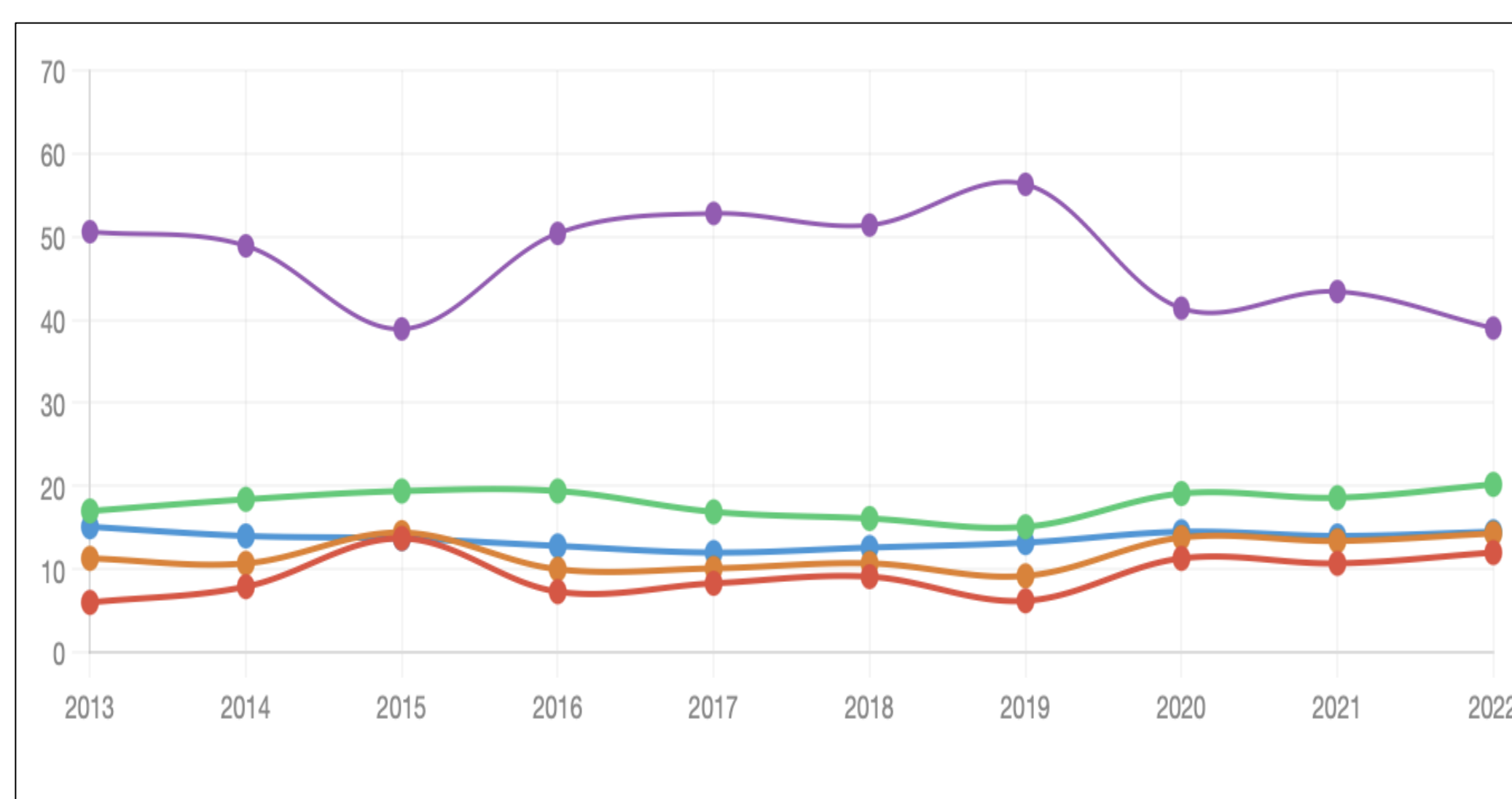
Results

- The research shows that all major league sport organizations tend to show that their Corporate Partnerships are "Not At All Influential" to their fanbases.
- Of the four, our graphs show that the NBA and the NFL both have the highest percentage of "Very Influential" (9.2%-17.8%) and "Extremely Influential" responses from their fanbases (5.4%-13.7%).
- When comparing the results, we found that the NHL had the lowest percentage of "Extremely Influential" (3.8%-9.3%) and "Very Influential" and the highest percentage of "Not At All Influential" (6.8%-12.3%).
- The major leagues ranked from most to least influential, based on the average percentage of fans who ranked the sponsorship influence as "Extremely Influential", are as follows: the NFL - 9.25%, the NBA - 8.94%, the MLB - 6.21%, and the NHL - 5.91%.

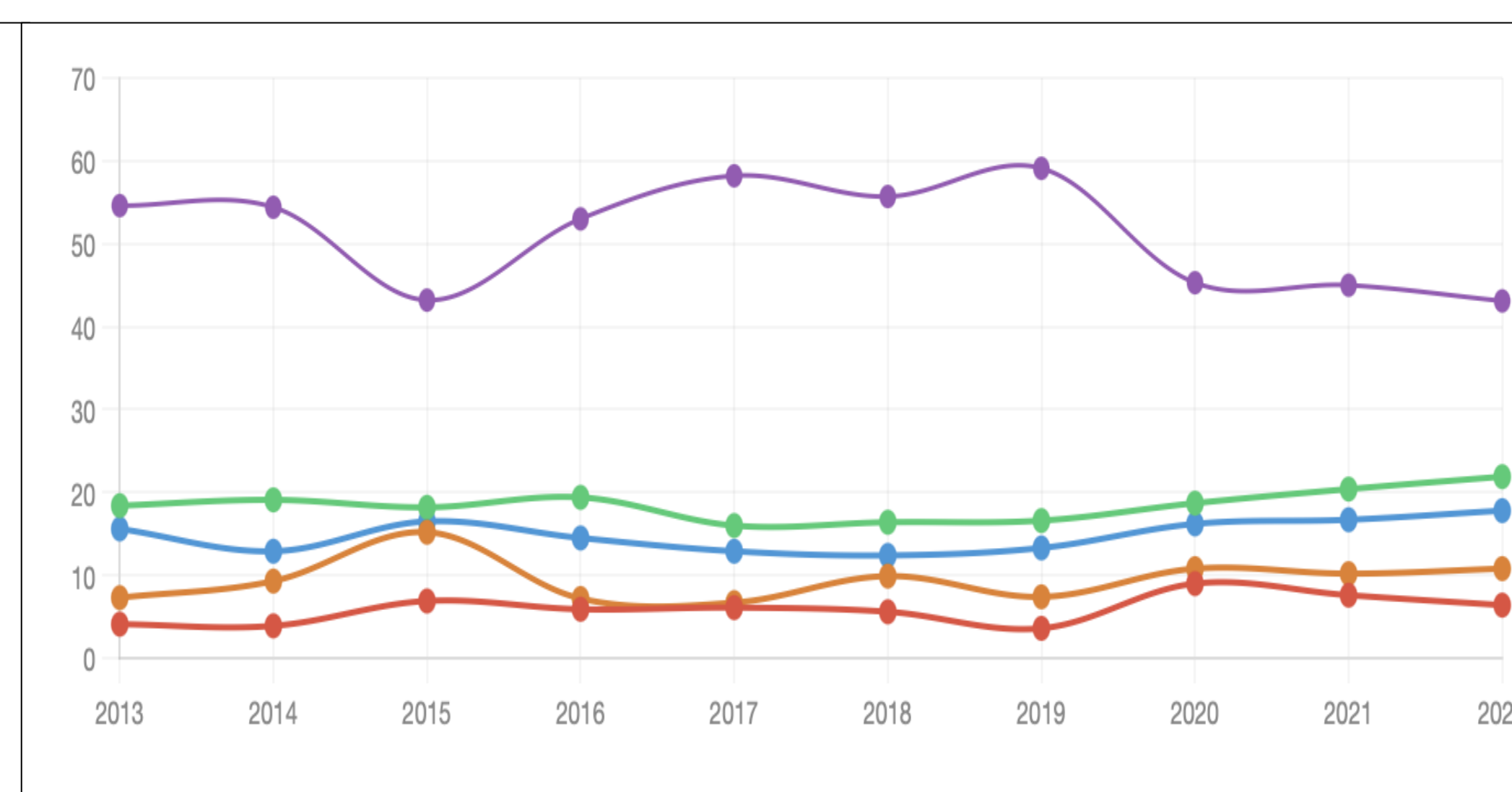
Charts



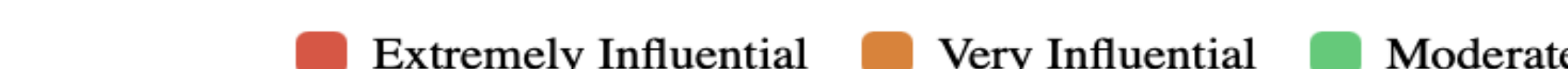
MLB Corporate Sponsorship Influence



NBA Corporate Sponsorship Influence



NFL Corporate Sponsorship Influence



NHL Corporate Sponsorship Influence



Extremely Influential Very Influential Moderately Influential Slightly Influential Not at All Influential

Discussion

- This study reveals meaningful variation in how fans across the four major leagues perceive corporate sponsorships, with implications for how organizations design and sell sponsorship packages. Most fans responded that corporate sponsorships are "Not At All Influential", organizations need to rethink how sponsorships are presented.
- Current sponsorship models, which are not appealing to fans, organizations should focus on making partnerships authentic and have an emotional connection rather than purely transactional.
- For leagues with the highest influence (NFL/NBA) their fans are influenced to a certain extent. Meaning they should conduct research into which sponsorship elements fans are most influenced by and continue to cater to that audience. For example, association with star players, culture/religion aspects, or brand reputation are all things that can attract fans past the surface level.
- The middle league (MLB) as far as influence can draw from the NFL & NBA activations to increase influence. However, they should still honor sponsorships that are unique to them. Using sponsorship activations such as fan experiences and in-stadium activations (e.g., entertainment between innings on the field) tied to a brand can help their influence levels (RTR Sports Marketing, 2025).
- The league with lowest influence (NHL), has the most area for improvement among corporate sponsorships. NHL's low influence levels leads to poor connection with fans; to grow a relationship they need to prioritize a new sponsorships strategy. The NHL tends to have surface level on-ice and dasher board sponsorships that don't connect with fans (NHLPA, 2026). By implementing play-driven campaigns and community partnerships they can grow fan connection.
- Future research could examine what specific sponsorship activations – jersey logos vs.. arena signage – drive the most influence within each league.