

Module 2. Passion Connectors & Marketing Assets—How fans consume their passions?

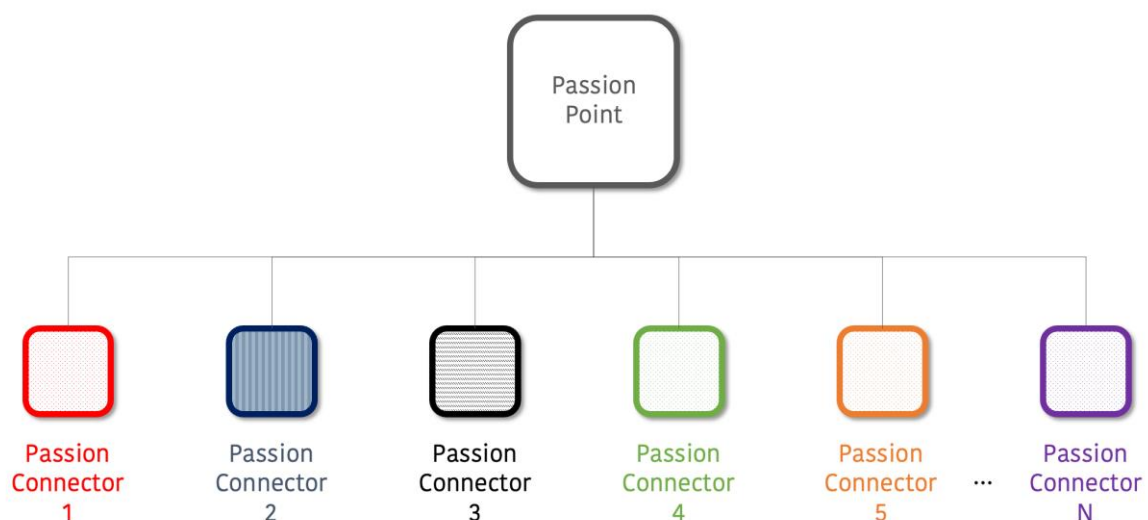
Unit 2.1 Passion Connectors

In the first module of this course, we discussed the concept of passion points, the things in life we most care about. While every passion point can be consumed by millions—if not billions of people, not all of them experience their passion in the exact same way.

The choices vary by passion, age group, geography, gender, social economic level, culture, religion, professional profile and many other factors. There is no right way to consume it. There is no better way to consume it. As long as it works for that person, it is alright. Each of us connect with our passions in our own way. The common and accepted way for the industry to refer to these passions is passion connectors.

The sponsorship decisions we make are directly related to how well we understand the passion connectors. Knowing a certain individual or group is interested in music, for example, does not give us enough information about what to do to connect our brands with them. In order to make the right choices, we must understand which passion connectors they use to live their passions.

Figure 1: Passion connectors



Author's own creation.

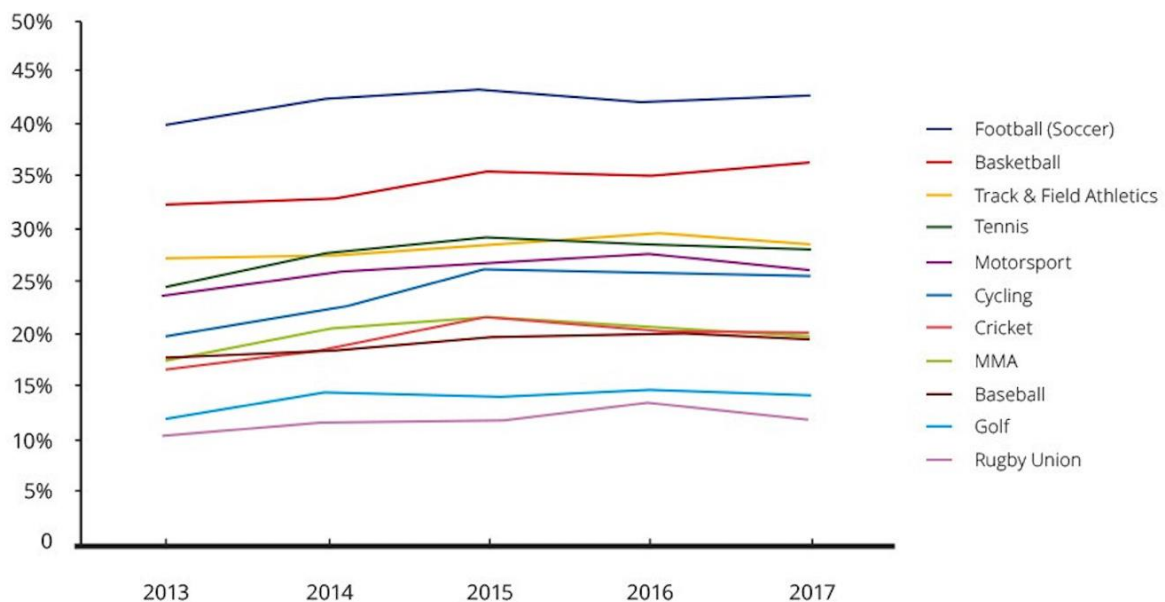


In this module, we will look at some of the most popular examples of passion points in sports, entertainment, lifestyle and activism and some of their passion connectors. At the end, you will have a complete understanding of the concept and the possibilities you have in each of them.

Passion Point #1: Sports, Football

As the most popular sport in the world, it is natural that football offers many ways for fans to experience their passion. According to Nielsen Sports DNA (2018), 40% of people 16 or older in major population centres around the world consider themselves interested or very interested in following football, more so than any other sport.

Figure 2: Percentage 'Interested' or 'Very Interested' in Major Sports



From Fan Favourite: The Global Popularity of Football Is Rising, by Nielsen Sports DNA, 2018. Nielsen Sports DNA. <https://www.nielsen.com/eu/en/insights/article/2018/fan-favorite-the-global-popularity-of-football-is-rising/>

Here are some of the most common ways people connect with football:

Some people consume football through the FIFA World Cup, an event like no other, it is one of the most popular ways to consume football. Many casual fans tune in only one every four years to enjoy the gatherings and the cultural significance of the tournament. The results of the matches are not important, and, in most cases, they do not even have a team.

- (1) Some people consume football through the national teams: many casual fans, the ones that do not usually follow everyday league football, tune in when their national team plays. It can be at the FIFA World Cup, one of the Confederation Cups (like Euro



or Copa America) or even friendly matches. Patriotism is the core motivation and experiencing the feeling of unity as a country is very important to them.

- (2) Some people consume football through the international leagues and clubs: thanks to the globalization of football and the high quality of football played in some European leagues, football fans around the world developed the interest to watch their matches even if they do not have a favourite team. Today you have engaged audiences to Spanish La Liga, the English Premier League, the German Bundesliga, the Italian Serie A and the French Ligue 1 all around the world. Fans watch because they are interested in experiencing the best quality of play.
- (3) Some people consume football through the domestic leagues and clubs: here, everyday football is experienced the most. These are the clubs and tournaments fans experience every week at home. They have grown up with their clubs and they deeply identify themselves based on their colours. Tribalism, identity and belonging are at the core of this passion connector.
- (4) Some people consume football through the player celebrities: thanks to social media platforms, footballers have become even bigger celebrities capable of attracting millions of fans. In many countries, people follow players more than clubs or leagues. They are attracted not only by their sport's skills but also by their lifestyle. A player transfer has the potential to "drag" with him or her their many fans to the new club social media accounts.
- (5) Some people consume football through other social media influencers: similar to the player celebrities, other forms of Instagram, TikTok and YouTube influencers attract a lot of interest from some fans. While football is part of the conversation, their main motivation is the personality of the influencers.
- (6) Some people consume football through gaming: one of the most popular ways to experience football today, particularly among the youth, is gaming. It is not uncommon that kids will know the full line up of the most obscure teams, names of stadia and details of leagues that even experienced professionals are unaware thanks to their playing and watching activity. Young people spend hours playing and watching other better players play online in channels like Twitch.
- (7) Some people consume football through grassroots football: in many countries, playing football, especially at a younger age, is the most popular way to experience football. Boys and girls as young as four years old are playing in organized youth leagues as a way to exercise and learn how to be part of a group, despite the lack of interest from the adults in the sport itself.
- (8) Some people consume football through organized leagues: for teenagers and young adults, playing football is still very important and one of the most common ways to be connected with the sport. In Western Europe and the USA, there are many leagues and tournaments that attract thousands of players every weekend. Regardless of



their interest for the professional sport, they gather for play motivated by the belonging and the achievement provided by football.

- (9) Some people consume football through betting: one of the connectors that have developed the most in recent years has been betting. Despite it still being illegal in many countries, the participation, interest and investments are among the highest of all connectors. In some countries, this happens through fantasy games (no money involved), while in others, where legal, money is the driver.
- (10) Some people consume football through collectibles: motivated by the passion to collect or by the financial interest of a potential appreciation overtime, many fans invest time and money collecting cards (very popular for decades in the USA), stickers (like the Panini albums for the FIFA World Cups), figurine and bobbleheads. One of the new forms of collectibles are the “Non-Fungible Tokens” (NFTs), digital goods that are traded based on blockchain technology.

If you are passionate about football, you might recognize yourself consuming football through one or more of these passion connectors.

No matter how you do it, the passion connectors are our entry doors to our passion point.

Passion Point #2: Entertainment, Music

The most global passion point is not a sport. Music reigns among all the global passions. It is also the hardest to use, as it varies a lot from person to person. Music is like a fingerprint; we all have one and each one is different from all the others.

The passion connectors are as diverse as the music taste itself.

Here are some of the most popular ways people interact with it:

- (1) Some people consume music through live events: attending concerts is one of the most popular ways to interact with music. They are looking for the excitement of the crowds and the experience of being there—in bars, clubs, stadia, etc., when the music is performed.
- (2) Some people consume music through streaming: enabled by digital technologies and endless collections of songs, players like Apple Music and Spotify took the world of listening to music by storm in the last 15 years. The low entry price for the consumption of music online (sometimes for free) pushed music lovers to spend hours of their days connected.
- (3) Some people consume music by attending festivals: festivals, while a form of live music, are more than music itself. Music is the reason to gather and celebrate. Festivals have been particularly popular in the European summer for decades. Today, events like Lollapalooza, Burning Man, Coachella, Bonnaroo and Rock in Rio attract hundreds of thousands of people in the USA and Latin America as well.



- (4) Some people consume music through music production: playing an instrument has always been a popular way to experience music. Kids in their bedrooms and garages have dreamed about becoming rock stars for as long as rock has existed. More recently, thanks to the digital tools for editing and publishing, music fans have become producers as well.
- (5) Some people consume music through remixing and DJing: the interest for electronic music has never been stronger. Thanks to the availability of vast digital music libraries, the democratization of hardware for remixing and recording and the celebrity status of some DJs, remixing has become a strong hobby and a viable profession for many.
- (6) Some people consume music through music celebrities: similar to what is experienced in sports, many follow musicians for their lifestyle. They are attracted by their craft but also by their views on all sorts of areas of life. In platforms like Instagram, music celebrities have some of the largest following accounts.
- (7) Some people consume music through dancing: dancing as a hobby is not new, but thanks to platforms like TikTok, some unknown teenagers in all corners of the world have become global celebrities thanks to their moves. Today they play a critical role when launching new trends and new tracks.
- (8) Some people consume music through gaming: music-based gaming is one of the most popular forms of videogames. One of the best examples is Ubisoft's Just Dance, where "players mirror a dance performed by actors on the screen, following commands that appear on the screen, and are awarded for their accuracy" (Just Dance, 2021).
- (9) Some people consume music through curation: a modern form of influence is music curation. Creating playlists for some of the music platforms previously discussed can attract millions of fans and give celebrity status to some of its curators. One of the best examples is Spotify's RapCaviar with its thirteen million followers (as of April 2021).

The list on music goes on and on. There are collectables, reality shows, award shows, radio listening, etc. As much as in any other passion point, connectors are not exclusive, and every fan combines their choices their own way. Fans of video games and dancing will play Just Dance while following some influencers and artists online and attending festivals during the summer.

It is the perfect "build your own connection" approach to your passions.

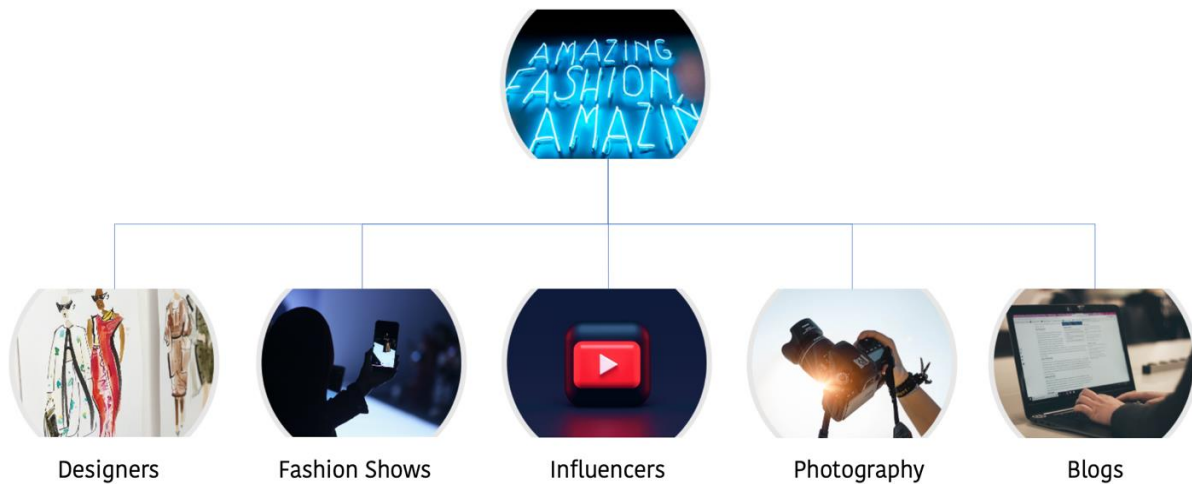
Let us take a look at other passion points and their most popular connectors in other categories of sports and entertainment.

Passion Point #3: Lifestyle Fashion



Fashion is not only a large industry. It is one of the most powerful consumer passions. Sizable as it is, we can also expect many different ways for fans to experience it. Here are some of the most popular ways:

Figure 3: Lifestyle Fashion



Author's own elaboration.

Passion Point #4: Sustainability

Sustainability has risen to the top tier of consumer interest in the past decade. Aware of the environmental challenges caused by modern life, many engage, advocate and push governments and the corporate world to take action to protect the planet for future generations. Sustainability is not a sponsorship area yet, but it is an important component of sports and entertainment sponsorships. Here are some of its most popular expressions:



Figure 4: Sustainability

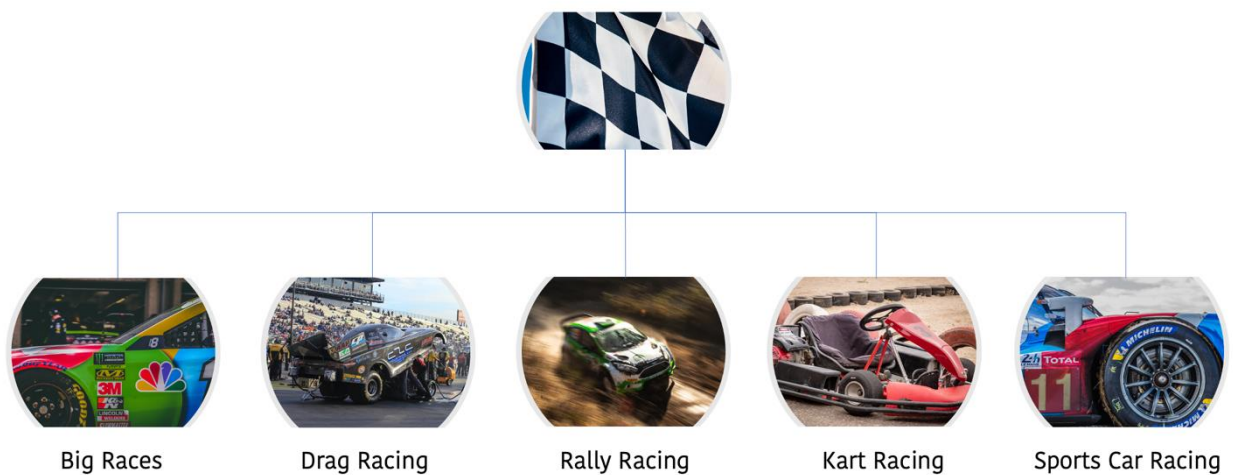


Author's own elaboration.

Passion Point #5: Motorsports

One of the most diverse passions in the world is motorsports. There is a great variety of ways to engage with it, ranging from electric cars to bikes, from city to dust, from organized to amateur. No matter what fan's like, there are races for their taste. Here is a small sample of the most popular ways to consume motorsports:

Figure 5: Motorsports



Author's own elaboration.

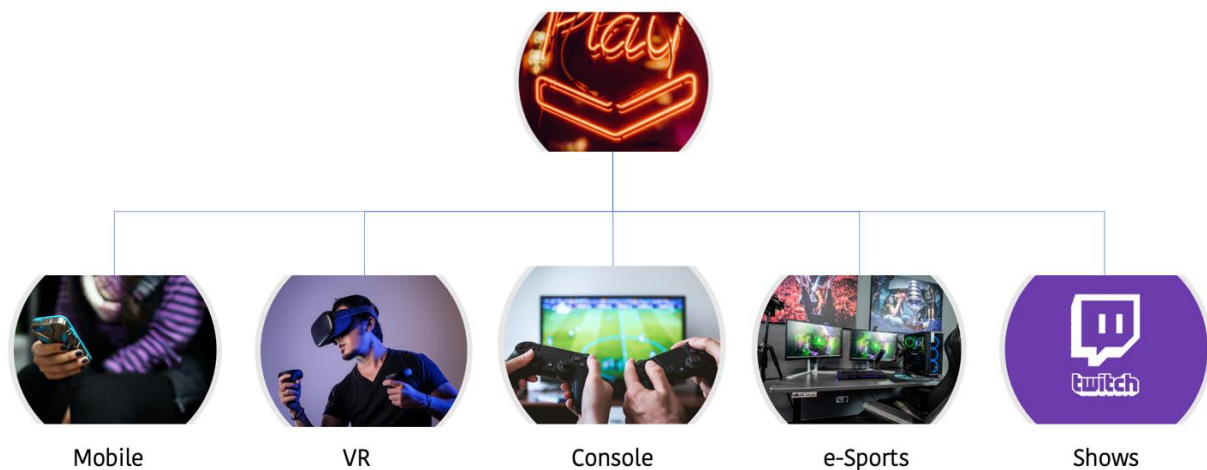
Passion Point #6: Gaming

The interest in gaming has exploded over the past years thanks to technology advancements. Mobile and connectivity expansions have been critical factors to allow



more fans to engage with gaming in a casual or competitive fashion. Here are some of the most popular ways to experience this passion:

Figure 6: Gaming



Author's own elaboration.

Challenge to Find Out the Right Passion Connector at the Right Passion Point

One of the biggest challenges for the sponsorship professionals when researching for the best way to invest is identifying the best passion connector for the right passion point.

The examples above are just the tip of the iceberg. The consumer passions, as discussed in module 1 of this course, are numerous and diverse. When brands consider investing in sponsorships, they have the difficult task of selecting one of the 50+ options of passion points and then, one of the 12+ options of passion connectors.

Do the maths! The odds of succeeding are low... very low.

Very often we see brands attempting to develop global campaigns using sponsorships, in every FIFA World Cup, UEFA Champions League, Olympic Games, etc. These are large multinationals that have business around the world and need the scale some passion points can offer to develop meaningful work and drive their business growth. More often than not, they chose sports, particularly football.

Every time a brand launches a football campaign (the passion point) using the likeness of a player (the passion connector), for example, they made a conscious or unconscious choice to talk to a very narrow segment of their consumers. As you know now, some fans could not be less interested in players. They might be consuming football through video games or influencers, just to name a few options. Even among those attracted to players, there are no guarantees that the one (or few) your brand hired are actually appealing to the audience.

The result is a worthless investment and a missed opportunity to create value.



In order to overcome this reality, brands need to develop a precise understanding of who they are talking to in each specific region. In order to do it well, brands need access to the right information.

It all starts with a survey of how people consume their different passions by country. Investing in studies like that is probably one of the best uses of budgets for sponsorship professionals.

There are many off-the-shelf studies that attempt to answer these questions. Commissioning an exclusive study is also an alternative for brands interested in specific passion points and/or regions. Here are a few sources for information worth consulting before deciding to spend your precious sponsorship dollars:

Table 1. Sources for information to consult before spending sponsorship

Approach	Pros	Cons	Example
Acquire the data from an agency	Less expensive Much faster Most work as tracking reports sold as subscription and are constantly being updated	Not necessarily offers all the passion points data Offers limited possibilities of customization (although in many cases you can add <i>ad hoc</i> questions)	Octagon, one of the largest and best international sports and entertainment marketing agencies, offers reports detailing many of the most common passion points by country in over 30 countries around the world.
Access data available at the International (sports) Federations (IFs)	Deep understanding of the fans. (Most likely) free	Not comparable across sports IFs have a commercial interest to showcase their sport only in the best possible light.	Football: FIFA, UEFA, CONMEBOL Olympic Sports: IOC, FINA (aquatics), WA (World Archery), etc.
Developing your own study	Tailor to your own needs.	Expensive Time-consuming Difficult to update	Many international research agencies have the capabilities to develop these studies.

The output of the work is usually a set of spreadsheets, website and graphics that show how each passion point and passion connector perform. The best studies are capable of answering questions like these:

- What are the most relevant global passion points for teenagers (or adults)?
- For each of these passion points, what are the top 5 to 10 passion connectors?



- What are the most relevant passion points in Brazil?
- For each passion point in Brazil, what are the top 5 to 10 passion connectors?
- What are the most relevant passion points for Brazilian teenagers?
- For each passion point in Brazil among teenagers, what are the top 5 to 10 passion connectors?

If you can answer all these questions, you are off to a great start in defining what to sponsor. But this is a topic we will address later on, when we talk about the marketing assets.



Unit 2.2 Marketing Assets

Once you have decided the passion point that makes most sense for your consumers and customers, evaluated all the possible passion connectors to associate your brand with, the tie finally comes to look at the marketing assets.

In the same way that every passion point can be accessed by multiple passion connectors, most passion connectors can be executed via multiple marketing assets. We will discuss the standard cases and the exceptions to the rule later in this chapter.

The use of the term “asset”—while accepted by the industry—is not totally accurate. In financial language, an asset is, according to Barone (2021), a “resource with economic value that an individual, corporation, or country owns or controls”. It is something that, “in the future, can generate cash flow, reduce expenses or improve sales, regardless of whether it is manufacturing equipment or a patent” (Barone, 2021).

When it comes to assets, more often than not, the sponsor is not the owner, it belongs to a rights holder (as the name properly describes it). Sponsors are simply borrowing the assets for the duration of the contract.

Another common way to describe a marketing asset is by calling it a “property”. This is usually the way their owners (the rights holders) will refer to it. In this course, we will use the more usual way to refer to it by calling them marketing assets or simply “assets”.

In simple terms, marketing assets are associations brands create in which they borrow equity from someone else. If every time that a person thinks about something they love, they think about a specific brand, this brand will be in a much better place. Think about it as hanging out with the coolest kid in school. Everyone that sees you two together will automatically think you are also cool (even when you are not, which is the case for most brands).

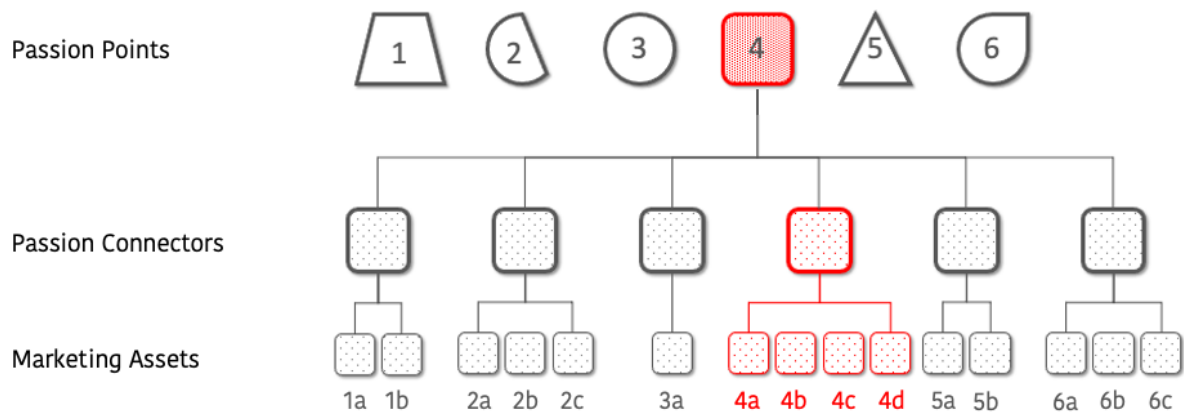
In times when consumers are not paying a lot of attention to most brands, the only way for them to stand out and to be visible is by borrowing this cool factor from sports and entertainment. This is the motivation behind this multi-billion-dollar industry.

But the main reason for acquiring an asset is not simply to be cool. Brands invest in sponsorships to grow their businesses. Sometimes it comes in the shape of more evident volume, revenue and profit growth. In others, it can be by establishing a connection with an important customer, the government or an NGO.

Marketing assets are the actual people or organizations brands sponsor. They are the rights holders that will ultimately sell companies the rights they are looking for. They can have multiple forms, like leagues, clubs, athletes, events, etc. Here is how your decision tree looks like:



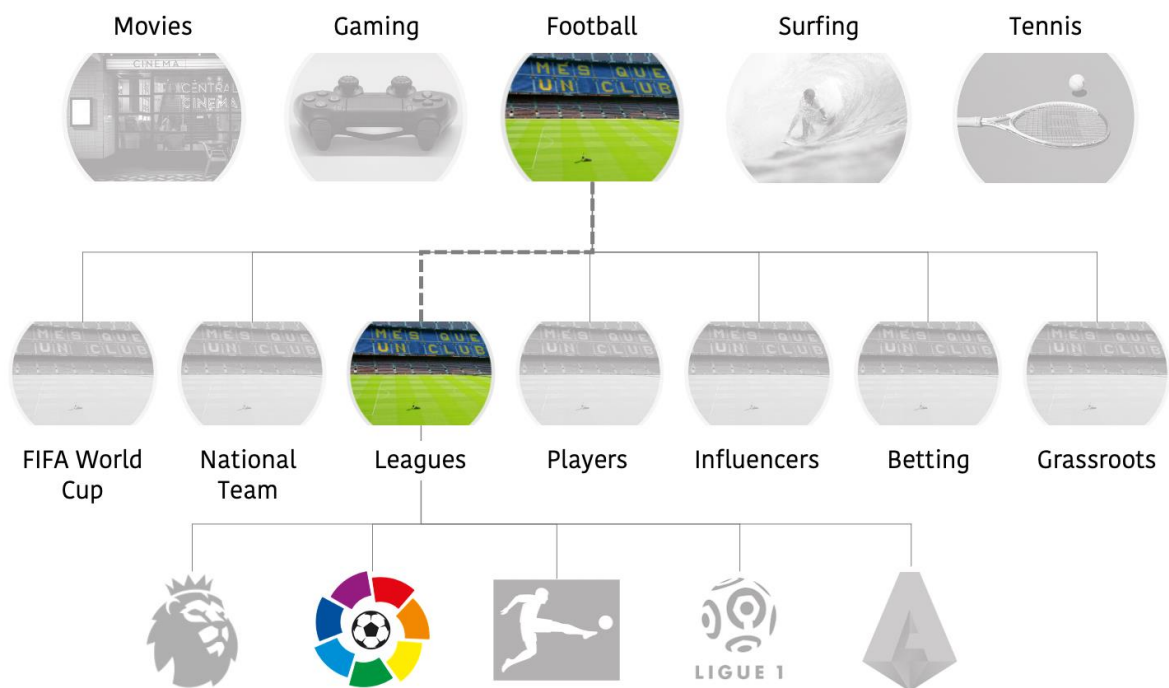
Figure 7: Marketing Assets - Generic decision tree



Author's own elaboration.

Translating the generic decision tree above to football, this is how it would look:

Figure 8: Marketing Assets - Football decision tree



Author's own elaboration.

There are three steps:

1. Passion point: after evaluating the passion points that are more appropriate to the target group of the brand, the sponsorship manager decided that football was the best one to explore.



2. Passion connectors: based on the data available and the needs of the business, the company decided to evaluate further the alternative of investing in leagues.
3. Marketing asset: taking it all into account, the brand decided to pursue a sponsorship deal with La Liga.

While most of the internal preparation work and research happen in the top two steps, it is at the level of marketing assets where professionals end up investing most of their time. In order to land on a marketing asset, it is necessary to have dozens of exploratory meetings with different organizations to better understand the possibilities, what is available in the market and whether the asset is affordable for the company. All of that happens before you sign any deal. Only then come the negotiation and the actual legal work in writing contracts.

Another important consideration is that, in many cases, companies will opt to acquire multiple assets associated with the same passion connector, in order to develop better work. This is a very common approach for the larger sponsors involved with global events.

Let us look at some examples of how brands use this process to select their investment targets in sports and entertainment.

Visa and the Olympics

Visa is one of the most competent and traditional sponsors in the world. Their work with the Olympics is second to none and a reference to many in the industry. Looking back at the beginning of their association with the games, this is what we can infer based on their decisions and the literature available:

- Step 1: The business challenge. Michael Payne, the former International Olympic Committee Marketing Director and one of the leading forces in the creation of the IOC's global sponsorship program (called The Olympic Program–TOP) perfectly described the business case for Visa in late 1985 in his book "Olympic Turnaround":

The new management team at Visa was exploring how to move Visa upmarket. It was looking at ways to enhance its image in the upscale travel and entertainment markets – a consumer franchise long dominated by arch-rival American Express. Despite being accepted in three times as many locations around the world than Amex, Visa did not have the cachet of Amex. It wanted to become the corporate card for high-spending business expense accounts and reinforce its image of international acceptability. To do so, Visa wanted to create a unified international programme that all of its 20,000 member banks across 150 countries could use. (Payne, 2005, p.85)

- Step 2: The passion point. Visa needed a global platform to deploy its campaign at scale. Back in the 1980s, the number of global platforms was limited. Sports was a natural answer to the problem, and the only other alternative was the FIFA World Cup.



Given the limited interest for soccer in the United States, Visa's main market: the Olympic Movement, became an excellent alternative. Other cultural events did not provide the same scale.

- Step 3: The passion connector. The timing was perfect for the Olympics and "BBDO, Visa's ad agency, immediately saw the potential of an Olympic partnership. They relished the idea of an advertising campaign showing Olympic venues and athletes, ending with the tag line, 'and bring your Visa card, because the Olympics don't take American Express'" (Payne, 2005, p.85).
- Step 4: The marketing asset. If the goal was to be global, there were not many alternatives than the Olympics itself. Federations and athletes could have been alternative marketing assets, but none of them offered the scale of a deal with the IOC.

Visa has been a committed partner of the Olympic movement since 1986. Over the past decades their portfolio expanded to one of the most impressive across all the companies supporting the Olympic movement, incorporating multiple marketing assets like the International Paralympic Committee, US Federations like the U.S. Ski and Snowboarding Teams and dozens of athletes.

Figure 9: Visa and the Olympics



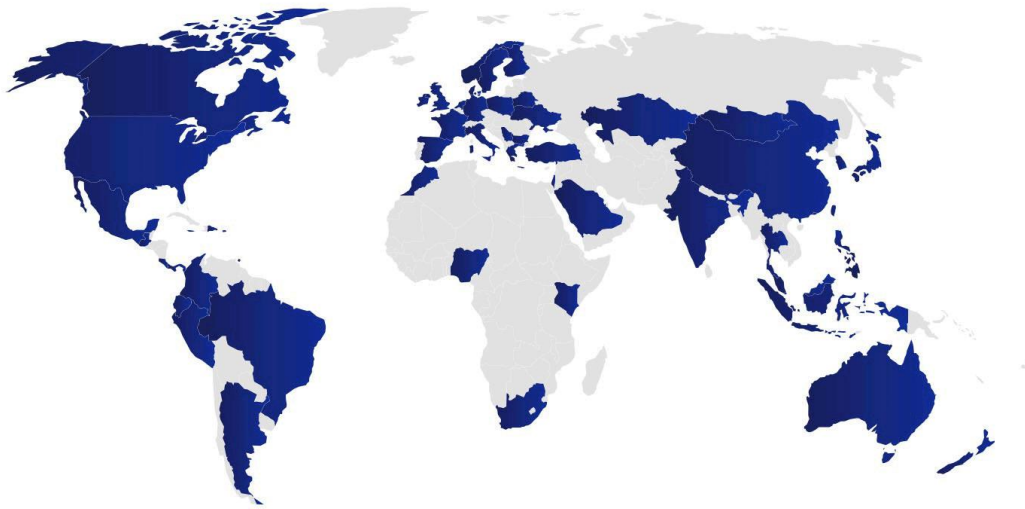
From Visa Makes Payments at Olympic Games Seamless, by Dipo Olowookere, 2018. *Business Post*. <https://businesspost.ng/world/visa-makes-payments-at-olympic-games-seamless/>

Figure 10: Team Visa athletes span the globe

102
athletes

54
countries/regions

28
sports



From Map of the world highlighting the markets from where Team Visa athletes hail to participate. By VISA, 2020. https://www.visa.com/ge/en_GE/visa-everywhere/meet-team-visa.html

Coca-Cola and the FIFA World Cup

Figure 11: Coca-Cola Bottles



From Coca-Cola love, by Emilia Ruiz, 2014. Pinterest. <https://ar.pinterest.com/pin/511299363917828453/>



The Coca-Cola Company's association with football dates to the beginning of the last century. In 1958, at the peak of the international expansion of their business, the Company made its FIFA World Cup debut in Sweden. During the following events, the local business unit of the company in Chile (1962), Switzerland (1966), Mexico (1970) and Germany (1974) also sponsored the event in the host country.

Desperate for more resources and aware of the growing interest for football around the world, FIFA created their global sponsorship program in the early 1970s. Coca-Cola and Adidas were the first two partners to commit to the new project in 1976 ahead of the FIFA World Cup in Argentina in 1978. Their financial and marketing support allowed FIFA to grow and invest in the global game, creating the successful FIFA World Cup as we know it today.

According to the press release issued on May 13, 1976, Coca-Cola had 4 objectives with their sponsorship, all of them related to football development and grassroots events:

1. Create the FIFA/Coca-Cola World Soccer Development Program—an international coaching and instructional project unique in sports designed to raise the knowledge and proficiency levels of the game in developing soccer countries.

Figure 12: FIFA World Cup Trophy Tour



From by FIFA World Cup Trophy Tour Coca-Cola and AFFA to arrive in Azerbaijan, by AFFA, 2018. AFFA. <https://www.affa.az/index.php/news/fifa-world-cup-trophy-tour-by-coca-cola-and-affa-to-arrive-in-azerbaijan/61126>

2. Support a new world competition for young players—The FIFA World Youth Tournament for The Coca-Cola Cup.
3. Introduce a soccer skills competition aimed at testing and improving the individual skills of youngsters throughout the world.

4. The United States, in partnership with the United States Soccer Federation, supports the youth development program, the first major commercial sponsorship of soccer in the United States.

If we were to look back and apply our decision tree, this is how it would look:

Similarly, the FIFA sponsorship enabled Coca-Cola to create its first global marketing program. The access acquired via the FIFA partnership played a critical role in the expansion of the Company's business in Africa and the Middle East.

- Step 1: The business challenge. Born in the United States, Coca-Cola took twenty years to start its international expansion. By the 1970s, with their product available in countries around the world, the Company was looking for a marketing platform that would allow it to accelerate its growth, particularly among young consumers.
- Step 2: The passion point. Having been involved with football for decades and with the FIFA World Cup in every host country since 1958, Coca-Cola was aware of the power of football to reach its business objectives, particularly in Africa, Middle East and Asia, regions where its business was as established as in the West.
- Step 3: The passion connector. A program that could offer global rights was the ideal solution for a global company like Coca-Cola. In the mid-1970s, such a property did not exist. Brands that aimed at being involved with football in multiple countries would need to work with clubs and repeat the same formula around the world, a costly and complex operation that even large multinationals were not ready to perform.
- Step 4: The marketing asset. The timing was perfect for FIFA. The FIFA World Cup was born as the perfect solution to Coca-Cola's problems. When the idea was presented to Coca-Cola executives, it was quickly approved, making the beverage company the second company to support FIFA's international plans.

Over the years, the objectives of the partnership changed from expanding the business to creating awareness of the brand in new territories, to engaging with the youth for developing football related digital content. The number of other football marketing assets has also increased on all fronts, but the FIFA World Cup remains as a central pillar in the work developed by the company in football sponsorships.

Now that you understand how the passion connectors bridge fans and their passions and understand the marketing assets that make that possible, it is time to look at another important topic: the different kinds of marketing assets. This is the topic of the next course.



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