Does Sponsorship Work in the Same Way in Different Sponsorship Contexts?

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Abstract

Research Paper

Purpose

The development of a comprehensive model of high-level sponsorship effects that works well in both sports and cultural sponsorship contexts.

Design/Methodology/Approach

The sponsorship model is tested using survey data from target market representative samples in two professional sports contexts and two cultural contexts.

Findings

The model works almost equally well in both contexts. Furthermore, a more parsimonious mediated effects model provides virtually the same results as the full model. Improving attitude towards the sponsorship and object equity are found to be the most important factors for improving sponsor equity. The model also confirms earlier research on the importance of sponsor sincerity and sponsor-object fit in determining sponsorship effects.

Research Limitation

The explained variance of the sincerity and object equity constructs was not as high as for other constructs in the model.

Practical Implications

Sponsorship managers should pre-test potential objects and sponsorship communications to make sure that constructs in the model such as fit, sincerity, sponsorship attitudes, and object equity are maximized to provide optimal sponsor equity.

Value

The model combines constructs from various literatures into a comprehensive model of high-level sponsorship effects. Furthermore, while most previous sponsorship research have used convenience samples and/or fictional and/or single sponsorship contexts, the comprehensive model tested here is shown to have high external validity by its consistently good performance in predicting sponsorship effects using four real sponsorships and representative samples.

Key Words: Sponsorship Effects Model, Sports Sponsorships, Cultural Sponsorships

Introduction

Sponsorships are a growing communication form, and are defined by a sponsor (i.e. brand or firm) providing cash and/or other compensation in exchange for access to an object's commercial potential (i.e. exposure and association with the cause, event, organization or individual related to a sport, cultural, and/or non-profit entity) (Cornwell et al., 2005). Annual world-wide spending on sponsorships has grown rapidly to an estimated $33+ billion (Akaoui, 2007), due in part to such factors as increasing restrictions on advertising, higher advertising costs, zapping, and increased media coverage of sponsored events (Quester and Thompson, 2001; Speed and Thompson, 2000; Verity, 2002). The increased media coverage is also one reason that approximately two-thirds of all sponsorship spending is directed at sporting events, leagues, teams, and players (Crompton, 2004; Verity, 2002), although there is also increasing interest in cultural sponsorships (Irwin et al., 2003; Menon and Kahn, 2003; Polonsky and Wood, 2001; Quester and Thompson, 2001; Rifon et al., 2004; Ruth and Simonin, 2003; Simmons and Becker-Olsen, 2006). While sponsoring is an increasingly important communication tool, relatively few attempts have been made to measure and understand the effects of sponsorship (Cornwell, et al., 2005; Meenaghan, 2001; Quester and Thompson, 2001; Thjømøe et al., 2002). Indeed the most common type of sponsorship effects research is the simple measurement of sponsor logo exposure time during coverage of a sponsored event (Cornwell et al., 2005; Meenaghan, 2001), which is clearly inappropriate for evaluating high-level sponsorship effects such as attitude and/or behavioral change (Currie, 2004; Speed and Thompson, 2000; Thjømøe et al., 2002).

A difficulty in developing tools that are appropriate for high-level communication goals is the belief that sponsorship effects may depend on such things as the type of object and/or the

type of sponsor (Becker-Olsen and Simmons, 2002; Cornwell et al., 2005; Simmons and Becker-Olsen, 2006). While Cornwell et al. (2005) and Rifon et al., (2004) speculate that different effect models might be required for cultural sponsorships, a review of the sponsorship literature does not find any direct comparisons between sports and cultural contexts, making it impossible to determine if this assertion is correct. The contribution of the current research is the development of a comprehensive model of high-level sponsorship effects based on a compilation of predictor constructs from the sponsorship and cause-related-marketing effects literature published since the last sponsorship special issue in the *European Journal of Marketing* in 1999. The resulting model is then tested in a comprehensive fashion using representative samples covering two real sports and two real cultural sponsorships to determine if one model can effectively explain high-level sponsorship effects in both contexts.

Previous Research

One of the most frequent criticisms of the sponsorship industry has been the lack of attention paid to measuring sponsorship effects relative to the investments made (Crompton, 2004; Currie, 2004). Although sponsorship and cause-related-marketing managers frequently have high-level goals for their programs that can include favorable image transfer, attitude enhancement, higher sales, and improved brand equity (Cornwell et al., 2001a; Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Miyazaki and Morgan, 2001; Polonsky and Speed, 2001), recent surveys of major sponsors have found that large portions spend little or nothing on the measurement of effects and/or use measures that are inappropriate to their communication goals (Thjømøe et al., 2002; Crompton, 2004).

---Exhibits 1 & 2 about here---

Exhibits 1 and 2 provide summaries of 28 important empirical articles published since 1999 dealing with the high-level sponsorship effects that many sponsorship managers have as goals, with exhibit 1 focusing on sports sponsorships and exhibit 2 focusing on cultural and/or cause related marketing. Cause-related-marketing literature is included in the review because it shares many similarities with sponsorships, particularly in terms of hoped for high-level effects, and it is frequently the model for cultural sponsorships that are increasingly of interest to sponsorship managers (Polonsky and Speed, 2001; Rifon et al., 2004; Simmons and Becker-Olsen, 2006). A comparison between the exhibits indicates that empirical research in both the sports and cultural/cause-related-marketing areas have frequently used or tested similar predictor and outcome constructs.

While the studies summarized in the exhibits have yielded valuable findings regarding specific theoretical relationships on important aspects of high-level sponsorship effects, most of the existing studies suffer from one or more limitations that reduce their external validity and make them less useful for managerial decision-making. As the exhibits show, the first limitation is a frequent focus on a very limited number of causal relationships, with only 12 of 28 studies using a multivariate approach in which the effects of multiple factors are analysed simultaneously (i.e. MANCOVA, multiple regression, structural equation modelling). Of the 17 significant predictors of high-level sponsorship effects investigated by the exhibit studies, no single study has investigated more than 5 in a multivariate fashion (among the most comprehensive were studies of sports sponsorships by Speed and Thompson (2000) and Martensen et al. (2007)). The exclusion of potentially important constructs can lead to under-specified models that explain less variance in the dependent constructs and/or attribute too much predictive power to the included predictor constructs (Hair et al., 1998).

A second external validity limitation is that just over half the studies use student subjects (15 of 28 studies), while a few others use data that offers limited applicability to the study of sponsorship effects on consumer markets (e.g. Cornwell et al., 2001a, and Miyazaki and Morgan, 2001 use sponsor stock price data, and Cornwell et al., 2001b uses managerial perception data). A third limitation is that half the studies use fictional sponsorships (14 of 28 studies), typically providing only a few moments of respondent exposure to artificial sponsorship stimuli such as "press-releases". This provides very little time for high-level effects such as image transfer or attitude change to take place in comparison to real world settings that might include multiple exposures via event attendance and/or television and print media coverage over many days to years. As Johar et al. (2006) note, fictional sponsorship contexts and use of convenience samples do not provide a strong test of the robustness of predicted construct relationships in messier "real-world" settings, making it important to replicate laboratory studies in "real world" settings.

The literature summarized in the exhibits also support Polonsky and Speed's (2001) contention that there has been no boundary spanning research comparing sports sponsoring and cultural sponsoring/cause-related-marketing. Only Quester and Thompson (2001) examined high-level sponsorship effects using more than one real sponsorship (three art festival events), while all other multi-sponsorship research used fictional sponsors representing sports OR cultural/cause-related-marketing contexts, but not both. This is potentially a major problem when some speculate that cultural sponsorships might require a different approach (Cornwell et al., 2005; Rifon et al., 2004). Quester and Thompson (2001) also note that cultural sponsorships are seen as less commercial, lucrative, and accessible than sports sponsorships, which suggests that audiences might view them differently. This untested speculation, however, does not discuss how or why construct relationships might differ in sports versus cultural contexts

although this is an important issue for sponsorship managers that are under increasing pressure to choose objects and manage sponsorships in a manner that will maximize returns on investment (Currie, 2004; Fahy et al., 2004; Polansky and Wood, 2001; Thjømøe et al., 2002; Verity, 2002).

Conceptual Model

Figure 1 displays the direct effects and mediated indirect effects sponsorship models that will be compared. The constructs and their expected relationships are derived from the review of research on high-level sponsorship effects highlighted in exhibits 1 and 2. Relatively few attempts have been made to model sponsorship effects (Fahy et al., 2004; Martensen et al., 2007), and both the direct effects and mediated effects models combine more construct and construct relationships than any previous attempt. Both models are identical in all respects except for mediating model's treatment of Sincerity and Sponsorship Attitude as mediating constructs that channel the indirect impact of the Fit, Involvement, and Prior Attitude constructs on sponsorship effects. Putting all the direct relationships into the comprehensive model depicted in figure 1 creates a messy situation due to the large number of paths. Therefore, the major reason for the testing of the second mediated effects model is to determine if a more parsimonious solution can be utilized.

---Figure 1 about here---

The criteria used for choosing the model constructs from the literature included several facets, with the first being a theoretical based understanding of their explanatory power. This eliminated some non-construct variables such as sponsorship Awareness, sponsorship Leverage, event Attendance, and respondent Gender, which did not explain why sponsoring works. Second, the constructs needed to be conceptually unique. For example, after examination of the measures used and factor analysis on pre-test data, Credibility, Altruism and Scepticism were

found to be indistinct from the Sincerity construct. Third, it was desirable to have validated measures available that could be adapted to the modelling of sponsorships effects in both sports and cultural contexts. This eliminated constructs such as Corporate Social Responsibility (which was not really appropriate for many sports and cultural sponsorships) and Emotions/Image (which required a huge number of items to capture all likely dimensions and/or was found to be conceptually indistinct from Fit when an "overall" Fit measure was used as a substitute). Fourth, the constructs needed to be meaningful in understanding sponsorship effects on consumer perceptions in natural settings. This eliminated non-consumer constructs such as sponsoring firm Share Price and managerial perceptions of Brand Equity, and laboratory manipulated constructs such as Elaboration.

Favorable attitudinal change (both affective/cognitive and conative) was chosen as the model's high-level sponsorship effect because it is often advocated as the most important sponsorship effect (Irwin et al., 2003; Martensen et al., 2007; Speed and Thompson, 2000; Verity, 2002). Furthermore, 18 of the 28 studies summarized in exhibits 1 and 2 use some form of attitudinal change towards the sponsor as the dependent sponsorship construct (which might or might not include purchase intentions). With only a few exceptions (e.g. Martensen et al., 2007; Ruth and Simonin, 2003), sponsorship theory and research has almost entirely focused on the effects that the sponsorship has on the sponsor, while ignoring the potential effects on the object. This gap in the literature is potentially very important as sponsorship is big business for the object as well as the sponsor, and there is some evidence that an object's reputation might be damaged by accepting support from potential sponsors that have poor fit and/or negative reputations (Basil and Herr 2003; Gwinner and Eaton, 1999; Menon and Kahn, 2003; Ruth and Simonin, 2003). While the sponsorship literature is limited on this issue, the co-branding model

developed by Simonin and Ruth (1998) used attitudinal effect constructs for each co-brand, and this idea was adapted as part of the current model because sponsorship creates a linkage between; 1) the sponsor brand, and 2) the object brand. Thus both the direct effects and mediated effects models use attitudinal effects on the sponsor (including purchase intentions using the construct name Sponsor Equity) and object (construct name: Object Equity) as its ultimate high-level effects. As the exhibits indicate, the other constructs in the model are not new to sponsorship research, and the quick summary discussion that follows will show they have generally been used as direct positive predictors of high-level sponsorship effects.

Model Constructs:

Pre-Attitude towards the Sponsor and Object are included in the models because previous research has found that prior attitudes will cause the creation or adjustment of sponsorship related attitudes and feelings of the same valence through such mechanisms as information integration theory, balance theory, and classical conditioning (Alexandris et al., 2007; Dean, 2002; Martensen et al., 2007; Speed and Thompson, 2000; note: Grohs et al., 2004 and Roy and Cornwell, 2004 use a similar construct but refer to their pre-attitude measures as “Image” and “Consumer Based Equity” respectively).

Sponsor category and Object Involvement have been used most frequently in predicting sponsor recall, since higher involvement levels tend to be associated with increased exposure opportunities (i.e. football fans watch more sponsored football games) (Crimmins and Horn, 1996, Olson and Thjømøe, 2003; Sandler and Shani, 1989). Involvement is also associated with higher levels of category expertise that makes the processing of category information more efficient and accurate, which is important in sponsorship applications due to the peripheral nature of sponsorship stimuli exposures (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987; Cornwell et al., 2005). Research

has also generally found a positive relationship between Involvement and high-level sponsorship effects (Alexandris et al., 2007; Close et al., 2006; Madrigal, 2000; Martensen et al., 2007; note: Roy and Cornwell, 2004 used the related concept of Sponsor Category Knowledge).

Fit between the sponsor and object (also called Congruence or Relatedness), has been the most used construct in sponsorship research (Cornwell et al., 2005), and was also the most popular predictor construct in exhibits 1 and 2 (used in 10 of 28 studies). Sponsorship research has almost universally found that higher Fit is related to higher effects in both sports and non-sports contexts, which is generally attributed to less questioning or counter-arguing of the sponsor's motives (Becker-Olsen and Simmons, 2002; Cornwell et al., 2005; Menon and Kahn, 2003; Rifon et al., 2004; Simmons and Becker-Olson, 2006; Speed and Thompson, 2000). The only exception is the negative relationship found by Hamlin and Wilson (2004) in a cause-related-marketing context, where this unexpected result was attributed (but not tested) to a likely scepticism about the sponsor motives if the Fit was "too" good.

Sponsor Sincerity (also called Altruism by Dean, 2002 and Rifon et al., 2004 and Scepticism by Alexandris et al., 2007) has generally been found to have a positive relationship with high-level sponsorship effects (Alexandris et al., 2007; D'Astous and Bitz, 1995; Dean, 2002; Rifon et al., 2004; Speed and Thompson, 2000; Stipp and Schiavone, 1996). This result is generally attributed to perceptions that sponsoring is a less commercial communication channel (or even philanthropic in cause-related-marketing and cultural contexts) relative to advertising, but this "feel good" aspect is reduced when sponsoring firms are viewed as insincere (Quester and Thompson, 2001; Speed and Thompson, 2000). While Sincerity has been found to be an important predictor of higher-level sponsorship effects, virtually no previous research has attempted to understand the basis for Sincerity perceptions. Only Rifon et al. (2004) have used

Sincerity as a dependent construct, where Fit was found to be a positive predictor. The models to be tested add several additional constructs as predictors of Sincerity.

The Sponsorship Attitude construct has only been used by Simons and Becker-Olsen (2006) in a sponsorship context, where they found it to be a significant predictor of Firm Equity (i.e. post-sponsorship attitudes and purchase intentions towards the sponsor). A similar concept, "Attitude Towards the Alliance" has been shown to predict high-level attitudinal effects in the co-branding literature (Simonin and Ruth, 1998). The explanation for this finding is based on information integration theory, in which the attitude towards the alliance will influence post-relationship attitudes towards the allied brands in the direction of the valence of the attitude towards the alliance (Simonin and Ruth, 1998; Simons and Becker-Olsen, 2006).

The next section discusses the methodology employed to test the models, using a wider variety of real sponsorship contexts (crossing the boundaries of sports and cultural sponsorships) and target market representative samples than any previous sponsorship effect models.

Method

To provide a test of the models in both sports and cultural contexts, a cross-sectional Internet-based survey was conducted covering two major sponsorships for each of two large firms in the Scandinavian market (a major brewery and a major financial services firm). One sponsorship for each firm was a professional sports object and the other a large cultural object. The sponsors are the flagship brands for each firm and the objects included a prominent professional soccer club, a professional team-handball league, an annual national art and music festival, and a national opera company. All the sponsorship relationships in the current study had been in place for several years prior to the data collection.

Subjects were 1149 Norwegian and Danish citizens representing the overall target market populations of the sponsors in the markets sampled (Norway and Denmark). Subjects were recruited from a large consumer panel of a Scandinavian market research firm whose members had agreed to participate in certain number of surveys on various topics per year that made them eligible for prize drawings. Table 1 shows the 23 items used to measure the model's 9 constructs on a 7-point Likert scale. All the construct measures were adopted from empirical literature where they had been demonstrated to have good measurement characteristics. Product class (i.e. beer and financial services; 3 items for each) and object category class (i.e. handball, opera, etc.; 2 items for each) Involvement items were adopted from Mittal and Lee (1989). Pre-Attitudes (3 items for sponsor and 2 items for object), Fit (3 items) and Sincerity (2 items) measures were adopted from Speed and Thompson (2000). Measures for Sponsorship Attitude (3 items), and Object (2 items) and Sponsor Equity (3 items) were adopted from Simonin and Ruth (1998) and Becker-Olsen and Simmons (2002). Due to the size of the model and the use of representative samples, the number of construct measures was reduced to the bare minimum necessary for the testing of construct validity and reliability in order to lower subject dropout rates. Subjects were first asked attitude and involvement questions for a number of brands and categories including dummy ones not part of the study except for their use in the sponsor identification question which followed. They were then asked to identify the sponsor of a particular object using a 1 out of 4 multiple choice format similar to that employed by Johar and Pham (1999), followed by questions regarding the model's remaining constructs pertaining to the particular sponsorship in question. Since high-level sponsorship effects are not likely to be realized if audience members are not able to accurately identify the sponsor (Johar et al., 2006), the model was tested using only the subjects who correctly identified the sponsor.

---- Tables 1 and 2 about here ----

Table 1 presents the Cronbach Alpha levels for all constructs, which were at .7 and above indicating good reliability (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). Confirmatory factor analysis using the maximum likelihood method on the overall sample covariance matrix showed clear and distinct constructs based on the fit measure results (RMSEA = .057, GFI = .93, Adjusted GFI = .93; NFI = .95; chi-square was not used to assess fit due to its sensitivity to sample size and number of constructs) (Hair et al., 1998). High discriminant validity is indicated when the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for a construct is higher than the construct's correlation with other model constructs (Chin, 1998; Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The AVE square roots and construct correlations reported in table 2 suggest high discriminant validity and no multi-collinearity problems for the subsequent path modelling (correlations all at or below .60) (Hair et al., 1998).

Results

A comparison was made between the full model and the simplified mediating model (see figure 1) using structural equation (LISREL) analysis (maximum likelihood) on the covariance matrix for all four sponsorship contexts. The results presented in table 3 (top) suggest that both models fit the data very well, with identically good scores on GFI (.92), Adjusted GFI (.90), NFI (.95), and IFI (.96) and virtually the same scores on RMSEA (.59 versus .57) (Hair et al., 1998). Furthermore, the explained variance of the endogenous constructs (displayed on the bottom of table 4) remains virtually the same ranging from 22% for sponsor Sincerity (versus 21% for the full model), to 52% for Sponsor Effect (versus 53%). These similarities suggest that the simplified mediated model is fully as functional as the direct effects model, and hence is preferred due to its greater parsimony.

---- Tables 3 and 4 about here ----

The bottom of table 3 presents a comparison of model fit measures between the two sports contexts and two cultural contexts using the mediated effect model. The results show that the model fits the data very highly in both contexts, while differences between the contexts are very small. RMSEA (.59), GFI (.93) and NFI (.96) are the same for both contexts, while Adjusted GFI was .89 for sports and .90 for culture, and IFI was .94 for sports and .95 for culture. In addition, explained variance was significant and meaningful for all endogenous constructs, ranging from 18% for the cultural sponsor Sincerity, to 57% for sports Sponsor Equity (see bottom of table 4). This similarity in results suggests that the model fit both sports and cultural sponsorships almost equally well, and that different constructs, construct measures, and/or predicted relationships are not required for different contexts.

---Figure 2 about here---

Figure 2 shows the full sample path results for the mediated model, while table 4 (top) adds the sports context and cultural context results, and reveals great consistencies in both the hypotheses confirming paths and the relative strength of construct relationships. For the overall sample and sports contexts, 14 of the 16 paths are significantly ($p < .05$) in the predicted positive direction, while for the cultural contexts 13 of 16 paths support the predictions. All the non-supported paths originate from the Involvement constructs. Object Involvement was not a significant predictor of Sincerity, and Sponsor Involvement was not a significant predictor Sponsorship Attitude in either context, while Object Involvement was not a significant predictor of Sponsorship Attitude for the cultural context only. The most important predictor of Sincerity was sponsor-object Fit for the overall sample and for sports contexts (coefficients .31 and .42 respectively), while it was second most important after Sponsor Involvement for cultural

contexts (.18 for Fit and .22 for Sponsor Involvement). Fit was also the most important predictor of Sponsorship Attitude, and Sincerity was the most important predictor of Object Equity in all contexts. Sponsorship Attitude or Object Equity were the first or second most important predictors of Sponsor Equity in all contexts. These consistent results provide further evidence that separate models are not necessary for sports and cultural contexts, and that the strength of relationships between constructs are quite similar across contexts.

Discussion

The majority of empirical research on sponsorship has used sports as the context (Crompton, 2004; Quester and Thompson, 2001; Verity, 2002). This is not surprising since sports have been the dominant sponsorship context in modern times, but there is increasing interest in cultural contexts that also make it an important area for empirical investigation. This study is the first to compare a sponsorship model across both sports and non-sports contexts and test the assertion that different sponsorship models might be required for different contexts (Cornwell et al., 2005; and Rifon et al., 2004). The current findings suggest that one model can work very well in both sports and cultural contexts with similarly high levels of fit and explained variance.

Another contribution of the current research is its comprehensive examination of sponsorship effect predictors, where the construct relationships previously tested in fictional sponsorship contexts, single sponsorship contexts and/or with convenience samples were mostly confirmed. Unlike much of this previous research that has tended to focus on only a small number of potential predictors, however, the comprehensiveness of the current model allows a better assessment as to the relative importance of the various constructs in explaining sponsorship effects. Higher levels of Pre-Attitudes (of Sponsor and Object), Fit, and Sincerity

were shown to have positive effects on Sponsorship Attitude. Pre-Attitudes and Fit were also found to be significant predictors of Sincerity. Since Sincerity was found to be an important predictor of both Object and Sponsor Equity, the model's greater illumination as to the sources of Sincerity perceptions is another important contribution. The conclusion that the same construct measures and relationships can be used for both sports and cultural sponsorships is reinforced by the robustness of the results across multiple real sponsorships with samples that represented the sponsor's target audiences. This provides strong proof of the model's external validity.

Although constructs such as Sponsorship Attitude and Object Equity have rarely been used in previous sponsorship effects research, the addition of these constructs not only provided a more complete picture of how sponsorship works, but also contributed to the 52% explained variance of Sponsor Equity which compares favorably to the 30 to 40% common in most other sponsorship models (Martensen et al., 2007). This result is particularly noteworthy, since most previous efforts have used homogeneous convenience samples and/or single sponsorship contexts for model testing, while the current research used messier representative samples and multiple sponsorship contexts that can lead to higher levels of error variance.

Although some past empirical research has found direct relationships between some of the model's exogenous constructs (pre-attitudes, involvement, and fit) and sponsor/alliance effects (e.g. Martensen et al., 2007; Speed and Thompson, 2000, Simonin and Ruth, 1998), the mediated model results show that these direct relationships were not necessary for explaining sponsorship effects and achieving good model fit. Comparisons between the direct effects and the mediated effects models found virtually identical results on explained variance and measures

of model fit. The end result is a far simpler and more parsimonious model that also explains a higher portion of sponsorship effects than most previous attempts.

Managerial Implications:

One general managerial implication of this research is the relative lack of differences found in the way sponsorship works between sports and cultural contexts. Since the overwhelming majority of sponsorship effect predictors were significant in both contexts, managing a sports sponsorship will not likely require a radically different approach than managing a cultural sponsorship. This further suggests that sponsorship managers working in cultural contexts can be fairly confident that the research findings in sports contexts are also relevant to their own situation. Since the measurement of sponsorship effects has been found to be of interest to managers (Thjømøe et al., 2002), the use of a common model for all sponsorship contexts provides a good starting point for the better allocation of resources to various sponsorships.

One of the most important contributions of the model is the inclusion of the Object Equity construct, which proved to be an important predictor of Sponsor Equity in both contexts. The results indicate that sponsors in all contexts should be nearly as concerned with the sponsorship's effects on the object as they are with the benefits they receive themselves, as the findings of this research indicate that Sponsor Equity is enhanced when the object benefits from the sponsorship. Sponsorship managers need to think of communications and promotions that will not only publicize their sponsorship, but also create positive attitudes towards the object.

The results for both contexts also suggest that the way to increase the Object Effect is to make certain that the motivation for sponsoring is perceived as Sincere and that there is a positive Sponsorship Attitude. The similarity in the importance of Sincerity in predicting Object

Equity in both contexts indicates that the sponsor needs to consider communications and promotions that will not be perceived by the target audience as overly "commercial", even in sports contexts where this has not always been of high concern. A possible implication of this finding is that sponsorships might be more effective by shifting efforts to grassroots/minor sports and/or cultural contexts that are seen as more needy or worthy of support by their devoted followers/supporters, and away from "mass-market" or "professional" sponsorship contexts such as high level football or auto racing.

The model results also suggest that the most important way to achieve higher scores on Sincerity and Sponsorship Attitude is to sponsor organizations, events, or individuals where the target audience will perceive a good fit between the sponsor and object, or where the basis of fit can be explained or articulated to the target audience if "natural" fit is not present (Cornwell et al., 2005; Simmons and Becker-Olsen, 2006). Sponsors and objects that the target audience has positive pre-existing attitudes about will also enhance Sincerity and Sponsorship Attitude evaluations. Involvement in both object and/or sponsor categories could also be significant in predicting Sincerity and Sponsorship Attitude, although this is one of the few areas where results did vary somewhat between contexts. Together, these results suggest highly devoted fans/supports of an object are likely to be favorably disposed towards seeing the "fit" between the object and its sponsors.

Both sports and cultural related Objects would thereby benefit by undertaking research that determines the Fit perceptions, pre-Attitude and Involvement levels of their key audience/market to better target firms/brands which would most benefit the object because of the positive effect this would also provide them as sponsors. This type of research would also be a helpful sales tool for objects to help sponsors and potential sponsors justify their investment in

the sponsorship, and is something many firms increasingly expect (Currie, 2004). If this information is not provided by the object, the results also suggest that sponsors should do pre-testing of potential objects prior to signing sponsorship agreements to determine such things as the audience involvement levels and the degree to which the target market perceives they fit together in a sponsorship arrangement. Sponsors might also benefit from pre-testing various sponsorship related communications and promotions to determine if they are perceived as sincere efforts by the target market. Unfortunately, this type of testing is not frequently done by sponsors prior to setting up sponsorships (Gwinner and Eaton, 1999; Thjømøe et al., 2002).

Future Research:

While Sincerity and Object Equity were shown to be important constructs in predicting Sponsor Equity, their respective 22% and 24% explained variances (mediated model full-sample) were not as high as the 52% explained variance for Sponsor Equity. This should not be surprising, given the very limited previous literature that has attempted to predict or understand the basis of these constructs, and thus offered little theoretical or empirical guidance for the development of predictor constructs that might increase the explained variance. While the current model provides a good start to the process of better understanding these important constructs, future research might make further attempts to the better understand how perceptions of Sincerity and Object Equity are formed by sponsorship audiences.

By testing the model using a wider variety of real sponsorship contexts than most previous research, the external validity of the final mediated effects model is high. None the less, there remain other contexts that might be tested by future researchers. For example, how might the relationship between constructs change in a new sponsorship setting or with a less prominent sponsor and/or object? Perhaps with less existing knowledge about the sponsoring

brand, exposure to the brand in a sponsorship context might provide higher levels of image and attitudes transfer from object to sponsor. Future research might also test the model in charitable or cause-related sponsorship settings to see if the any differences emerge with the sponsorship effects found for the two cultural contexts in the current research. These are questions for future research, but the current results indicate that the model has good predictive abilities and measurement characteristics across multiple contexts with samples that represent the target audiences of the sponsor.

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TABLE 1
Construct Confirmatory Factor Analysis & Reliability
n = 1149

	Factor Loadings (t-value)
(Pre) Sponsor Attitude (Alpha = .91)	
1. I think that (brand) has a very good reputation.	.88 (33.80)
2. I think that (brand) has a positive profile.	.93 (36.87)
3. I can highly recommend this (brand).	.84 (31.29)
(Pre) Object Attitude (Alpha = .93)	
4. I think that (object) has a very good reputation.	.95 (29.89)
5. I think that (object) has a positive profile.	.91 (29.71)
Sponsor Category Involvement (Alpha = .88)	
6. I am very interested in (Sponsor Category) questions and issues.	.78 (28.00)
7. The (Sponsor Category) is very important to me.	.96 (37.22)
8. I think there are big quality differences among brands in the (Sponsor Category)	.79 (28.27)
Object Category Involvement (Alpha = .94)	
9. I am very interested in (Object Category).	.93 (33.49)
10. The (Object Category) is very important to me.	.96 (34.09)
Fit (Alpha = .87)	
11. There is a logical connection between the (Sponsor Object) and (sponsoring brand).	.87 (32.21)
12. (Sponsoring brand) and the (Sponsor Object) stand for similar things.	.79 (28.07)
13. It makes sense to me that (brand) sponsors (Sponsor Object).	.84 (30.60)
Sincerity (Alpha = .71)	
14. The main reason the (sponsor brand) would be involved with with (Object) is because is because they believe (Object) deserves support.	.77 (16.37)
15. (Sponsor Brand) likely has the best interest of (Sponsor Object) at heart.	.75 (13.58)
Sponsorship Attitude (Alpha = .94)	
16. My feeling about (Brand's) sponsoring of (Sponsor Object) is favorable.	.84 (32.16)
17. My feeling about (Brand's) sponsoring of (Sponsor Object) is good.	.97 (40.85)
18. My feeling about (Brand's) sponsoring of (Sponsor Object) is positive.	.95 (39.87)
Object Equity (Alpha = .93)	
19. (Brand's) sponsorship of (Sponsor Object) makes me like (object) more.	.95 (35.82)
20. (Brand's) sponsorship of (Sponsor Object) will increase my watching of (object) more.	.92 (34.21)
Sponsor Equity (Alpha = .92)	
21. (Brand's) sponsorship of (Sponsor Object) makes me more positive towards (brand).	.95 (39.25)
22. (Brand's) sponsorship of (Sponsor Object) makes me like (brand) more.	.96 (40.47)
23. (Brand's) sponsorship of (Sponsor Object) makes it more likely I will do more business with them.	.78 (28.72)

Confirmatory Factor Analysis Measures of Fit: RMSEA=.051; GFI=.94; AGFI =.92; NFI = .96

TABLE 2
Discriminant Validity Among Constructs

	satt	oatt	oinv	sinv	fit	sincere	spoatt	oeq	speq
satt	**0.88**								
oatt	0.26	**0.93**							
oinv	0.21	0.34	**0.85**						
sinv	0.02	0.00	0.12	**0.85**					
fit	0.36	0.23	0.34	0.09	**0.83**				
sincere	0.28	0.25	0.13	0.18	0.37	**0.80**			
spoatt	0.34	0.35	0.27	0.12	0.54	0.40	**0.92**		
oeq	0.18	0.17	0.23	0.16	0.34	0.43	0.36	**0.93**	
speq	0.20	0.26	0.20	0.17	0.37	0.47	0.60	0.56	**0.81**

Note: Diagonal values (**bold**) are square root of the average variance extracted (AVE), off-diagonal values are correlations between constructs.

Construct Abbreviation Index:
satt = pre-Sponsor Attitude
oatt = pre-Object Attitude
oinv = Object Category Involvement
sinv = Sponsor Category Involvement
spoatt = Sponsorship Attitude
oeq = Object Equity
speq = Sponsor Equity

TABLE 3
Model Comparisons on Fit Measures

	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	IFI	NFI
All sponsors: n=1149					
Direct Effects Model	.057	.92	.90	.96	.95
Mediated Effects Model	.059	.92	.90	.96	.95
Sports Sponsors: n=639					
Mediated Effects Model	.059	.92	.89	.96	.94
Cultural Sponsors: n=518					
Mediated Effects Model	.059	.92	.90	.96	.95

TABLE 4

Mediated Effects Model

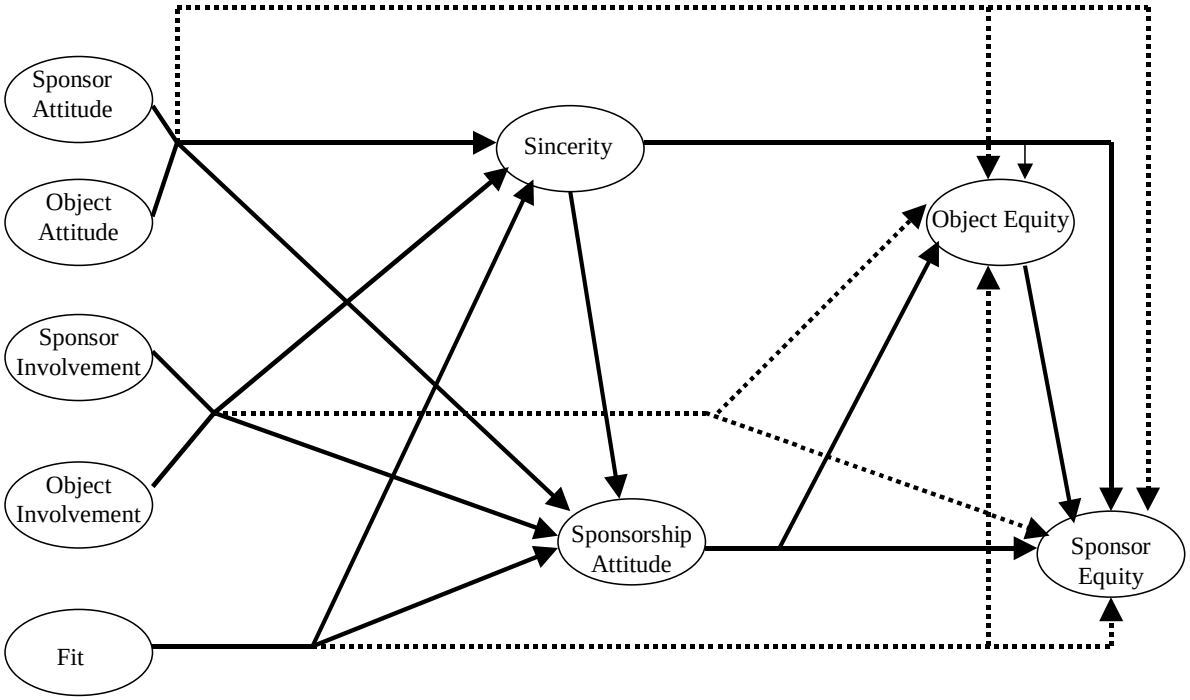
Hypothesized Path Coefficients, T-Values, and Explained Variance

Path Coefficients (t-values)	**all sponsors**	**sports**	**cultural**	**result summary**
n =	1149	639	518	
H1: Sponsor Attitude will positively influence Sincerity:	.13 (3.26)	.13 (2.73)	.15 (2.50)	confirmed
H2: Object Attitude will positively influence Sincerity:	.16 (4.26)	.12 (2.46)	.12 (2.38)	confirmed
H3: Sponsor Attitude will positively influence Sponsorship Attitude	.10 (3.53)	.09 (2.53)	.11 (2.44)	confirmed
H4: Object Attitude will positively influence Sponsorship Attitude	.17 (5.88)	.14 (3.69)	.16 (3.91)	confirmed
H5: Sponsor Involvement will positively influence Sincerity	.18 (4.93)	.09 (1.97)	.22 (4.10)	confirmed
H6: Object Involvement will positively influence Sincerity	-.04 (1.08)	.00 (0.05)	.00 (0.03)	not confirmed
H7: Sponsor Involvement will positively influence Sponsorship Attitude	.04 (1.53)	.05 (1.43)	.04 (0.92)	not confirmed
H8: Object Involvement will positively influence Sponsorship Attitude	.06 (2.27)	.13 (3.63)	.00 (0.01)	partly confirmed
H9: Fit will positively influence Sincerity	.30 (6.96)	.42 (1.96)	.18 (2.71)	confirmed
H10: Fit will positively influence Sponsorship Attitude	.37 (10.90)	.48 (10.04)	.35 (6.48)	confirmed
H11: Sincerity will positively influence Sponsorship Attitude	.16 (4.40)	.09 (1.96)	.20 (3.69)	confirmed
H12: Sincerity will positively influence Object Equity	.35 (8.53)	.35 (6.36)	.34 (5.68)	confirmed
H13: Sincerity will positively influence Sponsor Equity	.16 (4.71)	.10 (2.33)	.20 (3.91)	confirmed
H14: Sponsorship Attitude will positively influence Object Equity	.22 (6.65)	.19 (4.06)	.24 (4.98)	confirmed
H15: Sponsorship Attitude will positively influence Sponsor Equity	.42 (14.34)	.40 (10.65)	.45 (10.01)	confirmed
H16: Object equity will positively influence Sponsor Equity	.34 (11.36)	.46 (11.32)	.24 (5.64)	confirmed
Endogenous Construct Explained Variance				
Sincerity R^2	22%	28%	18%	
SponsorshipAttitude R^2	38%	44%	35%	
Object Effect R^2	24%	21%	24%	
Sponsor Effect R^2	52%	57%	49%	

Note: t-values higher than 1.65 are significant at $p < .05$

Figure 1:

Competing Sponsorship Effects Models

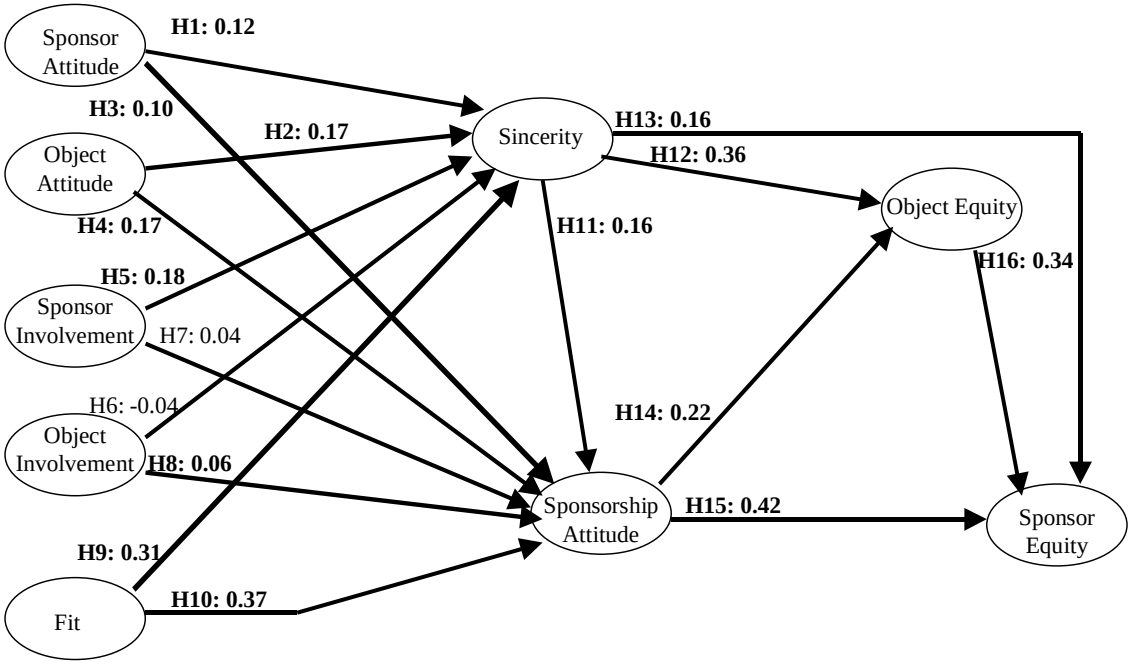


Direct Effects Model = solid line + dotted line paths

Mediated effects Model = only solid line paths

Figure 2:

Mediating Effects Sponsorship Model Path Coefficients



Note: **BOLD** coefficients = significant paths at p <.05

Exhibit 1: Sport Sponsorship Studies with Higher Level Effects since 1999

Authors (year)	**Data Source & Method**	**Sponsorship Context(s)**	**Sponsorship Effects Studied**	**Significant Sponsorship Effect Predictors**
Gwinner & Eaton (1999)	student experiment with cell mean differences	fictional sponsorships of car racing, golf, soccer	Image transfer	Fit (+)
McDaniel (1999)	student experiment with MANCOVA	fictional sponsorships of bowling, hockey, Olympics	Sponsor Attitude and Purchase Intentions	Involvement based Fit (+), Ad Placement based Fit (+)
Pope and Voges (1999)	student experiment – mean differences	major real sports sponsors	Purchase Intentions	Sponsorship Awareness (+)
Madrigal (2000)	college football game audience survey with structural equation modeling	"generic" sponsor of football team	Purchase Intentions	Object Involvement (+)
Speed & Thompson (2000)	student survey with multiple regression	fictional sports sponsors	Sponsor Attitude & Purchase Intentions	Fit (+), Sincerity (+), Event Status (+), pre-Sponsor Attitude
Cornwell et al. (2001a)	secondary financial data – event study analysis	Real sponsors of Indy 500 winners	Sponsor Equity Price	Winning Indy 500 (+)
Cornwell et al. (2001b)	sponsorship managers survey – mean differences	Biggest sponsorship (mostly sports)	Consumer-Based Sponsor Brand Equity	Length of Sponsorship (+), Sponsorship Leverage (+)
Lardinoit & Quester (2001)	student experiment - MANCOVA	Sponsored Basketball game TV coverage	Sponsor Hedonic & Utilitarian orientation	Sponsor Prominence (-), communication medium (TV ad and sponsor) (both +)
Miyazaki & Morgan (2001)	secondary financial data – event study analysis	1996 Olympic sponsors	Sponsor Equity Price	Public Announcement of Olympic Sponsorship (+)
Verity (2002)	target market surveys – mean differences	Shell Formula 1 sponsorship	Sponsor Attitude & Purchase Intentions	Sponsorship Awareness (+)

Roy & Cornwell (2003)	student experiment – mean differences	fictional sponsors of NBA, PGA, Olympics	Sponsor Attitudes	Sponsor Ad Spending (+), Fit (+)
Grohs et al. (2004),	skiing championship audience survey - regression	Alpine World Championship	Sponsor Image	Pre-event sponsor image (+), unaided recall (+), and object image (+)
Roy & Cornwell (2004)	student experiment – means differences	fictional sponsors of NBA, PGA, Olympics	Thoughts about Fit and Sponsorship	Sponsor Category Expertise (+), Sponsor Brand Equity (-)
Carrillat et al. (2005)	student survey – structural equation modeling	fictional Olympic sponsorships	Sponsor Attitude & Purchase Intentions	Sponsor Prominence (-), multiple sponsors (0).
Close et al. (2006)	bike race audience survey – structural equation modeling	Tour de Georgia professional bike race	Sponsor Attitude and Purchase Intentions	Object and Sponsor Involvement (+), Sponsor Community Involvement (+)
Alexandris et al. (2007)	basketball game audience survey – multiple regression	All-Star Professional Basketball game	a) Sponsor Image, b) Recommendation, c) Purchase Intentions	Sponsorship Beliefs (+, +, +), Object Involvement (+, +, +), pre-Object Attitude (x, +, +)
Martensen et al. (2007)	golf tournament survey – structural equation modeling	Amateur golf tournament	Sponsor Attitude & Purchase Intentions	Sponsor Involvement (+,x), Sponsor Emotions (+,+), Event Attitude (+,x), Sponsor Attitude (x,+)

Note: (+) or (-) next to predictor constructs indicates a significant positive or negative relationship with the dependent constructs studied. (x) = relationship not studied, while multiple (+,+) indicate relationship of predictor to multiple dependent constructs in order listed in column 4.

Exhibit 2: Non-Sports Sponsorship Studies with Higher Level Effects since 1999

Authors (year)	**Data Source & Method**	**Sponsorship Context(s)**	**Sponsorship Effects Studied**	**Significant Sponsorship Effect Predictors**
Barone et al. (2000)	student experiment - mean differences	fictional cause-related-marketing programs	Purchase Intentions	CRM motivation (sincerity) (+), cost to consumer (-)
Harvey (2001)	online sample experiment – mean differences	Real Internet Site Sponsors	Sponsor Attitude & Purchase Intentions	Sponsorship (+)
Quester & Thompson (2001)	market representative sample – field experiment –mean differences	Three Real Art Festival Events	Sponsor Attitude	Attendance (+), Sponsor Leverage (+)
Becker-Olsen & Simmons (2002)	student experiment, mean differences	fictional sponsors of Humane Society and Special Olympics	Sponsor Attitude	Natural or Created Fit (+)
Dean (2002)	student survey – structural equation modeling	fictional sponsor of Special Olympics	post-Corporate Community Relations	pre-Sponsor Attitude (+), Altruism (+)
Irwin et al. (2003)	golf-tourney audience survey – mean differences	FedEx St.Jude Classic gold tournament (fund raiser for hospital)	Sponsor Attitude & Purchase Intent	Gender (women+), Sponsor Awareness (+)
Menon and Kahn (2003)	student experiment – mean differences	fictional CRM program for American Cancer Society	Corporate Social Responsibility	Elaboration (-), Fit with focus on sponsor (+), Fit with focus on object (-)
Ruth & Simonin (2003)	student experiment – mean differences	fictional sponsors of parade	Object Attitudes	Fit between co-sponsors (+), level of sponsor controversy (-)
Hamlin & Wilson (2004)	mall intercept experiment – mean differences	fictional sponsorship of 3 CRM programs (heart association, children's aid society, endangered	Sponsor Attitude	Fit (-)

		species program)		
Rifon et al. (2004)	student survey – mean differences and MANCOVA	fictional sponsors of fictional Internet Health site	Altruism, Credibility, Sponsor Attitude	Fit for altruism and credibility (+), Credibility for sponsor attitude (+)
Simmons & Becker-Olsen (2006)	student experiment – structural equation modeling, mean differences	fictional sponsors of Heart Association, Humane Society, and Special Olympics	Firm Equity (sponsor attitude and purchase intentions)	Fit on sponsorship attitude and positioning clarity (+), Sponsorship Attitude & Positioning Clarity on Firm Equity (+)

Note: (+) or (-) next to predictor constructs indicates a significant positive or negative relationship with the dependent constructs studied. (x) = relationship not studied, while multiple (+,+) indicate relationship of predictor to multiple dependent constructs in order listed in column 4.