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Identifying the underlying dimensions of sincerity in sponsorship

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Sincerely,

Khongphat Prasarnthong

Thomas Bernhard Hvitstein

Summary

Sincerity perception between a sponsor and object has been identified as a key determinant of sponsorship effects. However, previous literature in understanding dimensions of sincerity in sponsorship has been limited. This paper aims to fill the knowledge gap by clarifying the underlying dimensions formed by the audience on sincerity perception. An exploratory study is performed to discover relevant elements. Then, the result from the first study is tested for its validity by a quantitative study. Three significant determinants of sincerity were found; Fit, social cause, and scandal events. Sincerity was also found to be a significant positive predictor of sponsorship attitude, which positively effects object equity and sponsor equity. We conclude that by choosing a sponsorship that has a natural fit with the company and includes a social cause, it will increase the success of the sponsorship both for the firm and the sponsored object.

Introduction

Sponsorship sincerity, altruism, or scepticism has been widely mentioned as one of the key predictors of sponsorship effects (Speed and Thompson, 2002; Olson, 2010; Rifon et al., 2004; Alexandris et al., 2007). Sincerity refers to whether the relationship between the sponsor and the object is perceived as real. It relates to the perception of philanthropic and less commercial of consumers toward sponsorships (Quester and Thompson, 2001; Speed and Thompson, 2002). For example, Olson (2010) asks consumers to determine to what extent sponsor brand believes sponsor object deserves support and to what extent sponsor brand has the best interest of object at heart. This “feel good” aspect (Olson and Thjømmøe, 2011) has been discovered to have a positive relationship on the effectiveness of sponsorship such as sponsorship awareness, attitude toward sponsorship, and purchase intention (Olson, 2010; Rifon et al., 2004; Biscaia et al, 2013). In addition, previous literature shows that the positive perception decreases when sponsoring firms are perceived as insincere (Quester and Thompson, 2001; Speed and Thompson, 2002). Thus, it can be concluded that the sincerity construct is an important determinant on the effectiveness of sponsorship.

Defined by Meenaghan (1983), sponsorship refers to "provision of assistance either financial or in kind to an activity by a commercial organization with the purpose of achieving commercial objectives." It comes in many categories such as sports, entertainment, causes, festivals, and events. With today's excessive amount of advertising, it is a huge challenge for companies to make their promotion strategies stand out. Several firms choose sponsorship as a strategy to overcome this challenge. Clear evidence can be seen from the increasing budget spent in the sponsorship industry. The largest market of sponsorship is in North America with a market size of \$22.4 billion in 2016. Substantial amounts of sponsorship expenditures have also been spent in Europe (\$15.9 billion), Asia Pacific (\$14.8 billion), and Central/South America (\$4.6 billion). Yet, this \$60-billion industry has been growing with a constant average of 4 percent annually since 2011 (IEG, 2017). It is obvious that the sponsorship industry is expanding all over the world. Therefore, firms should be aware of how to optimize their sponsorship strategy in order to maximize their investments.

To successfully leverage on sponsorship, the basic understanding of how sponsorship works toward consumers is required. Sponsorship provides secondary associations which can fulfill favorable, strong, and unique associations that otherwise may not exist in the brand itself (Keller, 1993). Previous literature has attempted to identify the determinants of sponsorship effects. For example, Speed and Thompson (2002) suggests that there are four key factors which generate favorable response from sponsorship including sponsor-event fit, perceived sincerity of the sponsor, perceived ubiquity of the sponsor, and attitude toward the sponsor. Olson (2010) confirms that the same predictors can be applied in both sports and cultural contexts to predict sponsorship equity. Fit and attitude toward the sponsor in sponsorship contexts have been researched and well-addressed by previous researchers (Olson and Thjømmøe, 2011; Biscaia et al, 2013). Nevertheless, sincerity and ubiquity remain to be further studied for their underlying dimensions. This paper will focus on exploring sincerity construct in an attempt to discover dimensions which form the basis of sincerity perception.

Although sincerity has been shown to be an important determinant of sponsorship effect, academic research in understanding the basis of the sincerity construct has been limited. Only Rifron et al. (2004) have treated sincerity as a dependent variable and Olson (2010) has attempted to discover the predictors of sincerity. However, there were just fit and pre-existing attitude between sponsor and object found to be significant predictors yet with low-explained variance. This knowledge gap restrains managers from fully capitalizing on marketing efforts through sponsorships. Olson (2010) and Demiral and Erdogmus (2016) also call for future research to better understand how sincerity perception is formed by sponsorship audiences. This paper aims to fulfill this knowledge gap and to provide brand managers a guideline of how to achieve high sincerity perception in order to help them manage sponsorships more effectively. Two studies will be used to discover the underlying dimensions of the sincerity construct. The first study is an exploratory study using a cognitive mapping technique to uncover what forms the basis of sincerity perceptions. Then, the second study will be carried on to test whether the uncovered dimensions can predict the sincerity perception.

Literature review

Previous studies have found that sincerity is a key predictor of sponsorship effects. Originally, D'Astous and Bitz (1995) discovered that philanthropic sponsorship has a more positive impact on corporate image than commercial sponsorship. Speed and Thompson (2000) finds that sponsors regarded as engaged in sponsorship with sincere motives for supporting the sponsored object are more likely to receive superior responses to their sponsorship. Those superior responses include the great level of interest to the sponsor and its other promotions, the favorability toward the sponsor, and the willingness to consider the sponsor's product. In addition, Stipp and Schiavone (1996) suggest that stronger pro-social perception on sponsorship leads to more favorable impact on the sponsor's image from consumers. It has been found that sincerity also has a role of carrying the psychological connection between a fan and the sport team to a sponsor and it is also a significant predictor of intentions to purchase products of the sponsor (Kim et al., 2011). These similar findings from previous literature provide us with a clear understanding that higher sincerity perceptions contribute to higher positive outcomes of sponsorship activities.

Although it is apparent that sincerity is an important construct in predicting positive sponsorship results, Olson (2010) points out that the literature attempting to understand the basis of sincerity perception has been limited. A few previous studies suggest that fit is a good predictor of sincerity. Rifon et al. (2004) finds that a good fit between a company and the cause it sponsors generates consumer attributions of altruistic sponsor motives and enhances sponsor credibility and attitude toward the sponsor. Furthermore, Demiral and Erdogmus (2016) shows similar finding from a study with football fans in the arena before the beginning of a professional football match. The results reveal that sport consumers who see a fit between the sponsor and sports team are more likely to believe that the sponsor's motives are sincere. These sincerity perceptions contribute to favorable attitudes toward sponsor and intentions to purchase sponsor's products. These findings do not only apply in sports sponsorship context but they can also be generalized to cultural sponsorship contexts as well (Olson, 2010). In the next section, sincerity will be elaborated on how it relates to other constructs in the sponsorship context.

Table 1: Sincerity Research in Sponsorship Contexts

Authors	Sincerity-related findings	Sincerity-related measures
D'Astous and Bitz (1995)	Philanthropic sponsorship was found to have more positive impact on corporate image than commercial sponsorship.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I think this sponsorship will improve its image (not at all/ certainly) 2. The impact of this sponsorship on the success of the event will be (very negative/ very positive) 3. I believe the link between the company and the event is (very weak/ very strong) 4. Globally, my evaluation of this sponsorship is (very negative/ very positive)
Speed and Thompson (2000)	Sincerity was found to have a positive relationship on sponsorship effects. The most important predictor of sincerity was fit.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The sport would benefit from this sponsorship at the grassroots level. 2. The main reason the sponsor would be involved in the event is because the sponsor believes the event deserves support. 3. The sponsor would be likely to have the best interest of the sport at heart 4. The sponsor would probably support the event even if it had a much lower profile
Rifron et al. (2004)	Sincerity was found to have a significant role in determining sponsor credibility perceptions. Congruent sponsorship was rated more sincere than noncongruent sponsorship.	<p>5-point Liker scale items</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cares about customers 2. No concern for welfare of consumers 3. Cares about getting information to consumers
Olson (2010)	Sincerity was found to have a positive relationship on sponsorship effects. The most important predictor of sincerity was fit.	<p>Measures from Speed and Thompson (2000)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The main reason that company sponsors objects is because it believes they deserve support 2. The company has the best interest of objects at heart.

Authors	Sincerity-related findings	Sincerity-related measures
Kim et al. (2011)	Sincerity was found to be correlated to positive attitude toward sponsorship, sponsorship awareness, and purchase intention.	Measures from Speed and Thompson (2000) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The sport would benefit from this sponsorship at the grassroots level. 2. The main reason the sponsor would be involved in the event is because the sponsor believes the event deserves support. 3. The sponsor would be likely to have the best interest of the sport at heart 4. The sponsor would probably support the event even if it had a much lower profile
Demirel and Erdogmus (2016)	Perceived sincerity was found to have an impact on attitude toward sponsor which could lead to purchase intention. Perceived fit was confirmed to be a precursor of sincerity perception while team attachment was found to have no significant impact on sincerity.	Measures from Speed and Thompson (2000) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The sport would benefit from this sponsorship at the grassroots level. 2. The main reason the sponsor would be involved in the event is because the sponsor believes the event deserves support.

Table 1 summarizes the core studies of the sincerity-related sponsorship literature during the past 25 years in a variety of contexts, including (1) perceived fit (D'Astous and Bitz, 1995; Rifron et al., 2004; Speed and Thompson, 2000; Olson, 2010; Demirel and Erdogmus, 2016), (2) pre-attitudes toward sponsored object (Olson, 2010; Kim et al., 2011), (3) attitude toward sponsorship (D'Astous and Bitz, 1995; Speed and Thompson, 2000; Rifron et al., 2004; Kim et al., 2011; Demirel and Erdogmus, 2016), (4) sponsorship awareness (Kim et al., 2011), and (5) purchase intentions (Speed and Thompson, 2000; Rifron et al., 2004; Kim et al., 2011; Demirel and Erdogmus, 2016)

Perceived fit and sincerity

Fit, relatedness, or congruence can be briefly described as an “overall” basis using measures that ask respondents the “sense” or “logic” of a particular brand sponsoring a particular object such as an organization, cause, event, or individual being sponsored (Olson and Thjømmøe, 2011). Fit has been widely mentioned as the most important predictor of sponsorship effects (Cornwell et al., 2005; Speed and Thompson, 2000). In addition, a large portion of previous studies have discovered that the perceived fit of sponsorship is a key predictor on sincerity (D'Astous and Bitz, 1995; Rifron et al., 2004; Speed and Thompson, 2000; Olson, 2010). Consumers who perceive a fit between the sponsor and the sponsored object are more likely to believe that the motives of the sponsor are sincere (Demirel and Erdogmus, 2016). Therefore, sponsorship with high relatedness between the sponsor and the object has a higher tendency to achieve high sincerity perceptions.

Pre-attitudes toward sponsored object

Pre-attitudes toward sponsored object or object equity can be described as the consumer's feelings toward the object before sponsorship takes place. Olson (2010) demonstrates that pre-attitudes toward sponsored object is another significant precursor of perceived sincerity. Furthermore, Kim et al. (2011) shows that consumers who have stronger relational bond with the sponsored team are more likely to believe the sponsor motives for supporting their team are sincere. This finding aligns with Meenaghan (2001) who mentions that the strength of relationship between the consumers and a sponsored object have a positive

influence to consumers' reaction to sponsorships. Therefore, the pre-existing attitudes towards the sponsored object has an impact on sincerity perception.

Sincerity and attitude toward sponsorship

Attitude toward sponsorship refers to a fan's overall impression of a sponsor (Gwinner and Swanson, 2003). Attitude toward sponsorship has been identified as a key measurement on the effectiveness of sponsorship (Mitchell and Olsen 1981; Shimp, 1981; Petty et al., 1983; Biscaia et al., 2013). Javalgi et al. (1994) and Stipp and Schiavone (1996) suggest that sponsorship with favorable attitudes receive more positive response to their sponsorships than those who do not. Interestingly, there is also a connection between sincerity and attitude toward sponsorship. Previous literature discover that perceived sincerity can lead to positive attitude toward sponsorship (Kim et al, 2011; Demirel and Erdogmus, 2016). It can be considered as an outcome from gaining sincerity perception in sponsorship.

Sincerity and sponsorship awareness

Sponsorship awareness is defined as the extent to which customers recall and recognize sponsorship (Walsh et al., 2008). Keller (2013) defines brand recall as the consumer's ability to retrieve from memory when given product category, while brand recognition deals with the consumer's ability to confirm prior exposure to the brand when given brand cues. Several studies have used sponsorship awareness as evaluation criteria on the effectiveness of sponsorship (Crompton, 2004; Miloch & Lambrecht, 2006; Biscaia et al., 2013). More importantly, there is also a connection between sincerity and sponsorship awareness. Kim et al. (2011) posits that when the consumers believe a sponsor's motives are sincere, they are more apt to receive and process marketing communication. Thus, sincerity perception can impact the level of awareness on sponsorship.

Sincerity and purchase intentions

Purchase intention in the context of sponsorship refers to an individual's motivation to make a specific purchase behavior or the person's conscious plan in exerting an effort to purchase a brand (Dee et al., 2008; Spears and Sign, 2004). It is important to note that purchase intentions are different from actual purchase behaviors where the transaction actually occurs. However, purchase intentions are crucial in guiding consumers' behaviors (Ajzen, 2001). Crompton (2004) acknowledges purchase intentions as the most useful indicator of sponsorship effectiveness because of its impact on future sales. When it comes to a connection between sincerity and purchase intentions, Kim et al. (2011) finds that consumers who perceive the motive of a sponsor as sincere are more likely to purchase the product of the sponsor. This finding aligns with several previous studies that also discover a positive relationship between consumer's sincerity perception and a willingness to consider a sponsor's product (MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989; Speed and Thompson, 2000; Rifron et al., 2004). Therefore, it can be concluded that sincerity has a direct effect to consumer's purchase intentions.

In summary, sincerity has been widely accepted as one of the key determinants for the effectiveness of sponsorship. There are three confirmed relationships between sincerity and sponsorship effectiveness indicators including attitude toward sponsorship, sponsorship awareness, and purchase intentions. Fit and pre-attitudes toward sponsored object have been found as the two precursors of sincerity perception. However, the two constructs only combine for a low-explained variance. Therefore, there is a research gap to identify other underlying dimensions in the sincerity construct. The paper will fulfil the knowledge gap by exploring those missing dimensions.

Methodology and Results

The methodology is adopted from Olsen and Thjømmøe (2011) which successfully discovered the underlying dimensions of the fit construct in sponsorship contexts. Since sincerity is also regarded as an important determinant of the sponsorship effects, similar procedures are relevant. There are two studies conducted to explore the sincerity construct. The first study is an exploratory study using cognitive mapping technique to uncover what forms the basis of sincerity perception. Then, the second study will be carried on to test whether the uncovered dimensions can predict the sincerity perception.

Study 1: The Basis of Sincerity Perceptions

The first study was aimed to uncover the determinants of sincerity perception by applying a cognitive mapping technique used in previous literature (Loken & Ward, 1985; Olson & Thjomoe, 2011). Nine graduate students were asked to rank pictures representing twelve sponsorships in an order from what they perceived as the most sincere to the least sincere. The respondents were between 24 and 28 years old, 5 males, 4 females, of which 7 were Norwegian, one Singaporean, and one from Thailand. The respondents were recruited through convenience sampling from our master of science department.

The pictures were selected to represented brands across industries in both sport and non-sport sponsorships. Sport sponsorships included football, tennis, swimming, skiing, racing, bowling, boxing, golf, baseball, basketball, American football, and ballet. Meanwhile, non-sport sponsorships involved concert, food festival, and soda. Picture selection was aimed to cover several characteristics of sponsorships existing in the market. The following table summarizes the attributes covered by the selected sponsorship pictures.

Table 2: Sponsorship Selection Criteria

Non-sport	Sport
Amateur/youth sport	Professional sport
Single entity	Multiple entity
Short-term sponsorship	Long-term sponsorship
Promoted sponsorship	Non-promoted sponsorship

Regarding Table 2, the selection criteria were developed from previous literature in sponsorships. Varity (2002) points out that approximately two-thirds of sponsorship spending is involved in sporting events, leagues, teams, and players. This implies that sponsorship can be categorized as sport and non-sport and it can range from amateur to professional level (Crompton, 2004). Cornwell et al. (2005) also mentions that the most common type of sponsorship research deals with logo exposure, which suggests that the presentation of sponsorship (promoted and non-promoted) matters in sponsorship effectiveness. In addition, Meenaghan (2001) adds that duration of sponsorships can also be a factor in sponsorship perceptions. Furthermore, Speed and Thompson (2002) finds that the number of involved entities affect sincerity perception as firms sponsoring with a limited number of entities tend to be perceived as more sincere.

Each session lasted between 20 and 30 minutes, and each respondent was given the 12 sponsorship pictures with a brief description regarding the sponsoring firms, the sponsored objects, the duration of sponsorship, and the amount of money in sponsorship. After the respondents ranked the pictures from the most sincere to the least sincere, they were asked why they positioned them where they did. Probing technique was also applied to gain further insight on the criteria used in picture selections.

Results

Content analysis was carried on by two graduate students on the interview transcripts in order to extract the underlying dimensions on sincerity perception. Disagreements were resolved through discussion and eight consolidated dimensions of sincerity explanation emerged; (1) the fit between sponsoring firms and sponsored objects, (2) the professionalism level of event either an amateur/youth event or a professional event, (3) the duration of sponsorship, (4) the scandal on the sponsored objects, (5) the presentation of sponsorship either promoted or not-promoted sponsorship, (6) the social impact, and (7) the number of entities.

Table 3: Dimension Summary

Dimensions	Description
1. Fit	A level of connection between a sponsor and an object in terms of brand equity and sponsorship activity.
2. Professional level	A characteristic of sponsored objects which can be ranked from amateur to professional.
3. Sponsorship duration	The length of sponsorship
4. Scandal on objects	Tarnished reputation that comes with sponsored objects.
5. Sponsorship presentation	A communication strategy of sponsorship which can be mainly categorized as promoted sponsorship such as a print-ad, and non-promoted sponsorship such a logo on athletes' jersey.
6. Social impact	A degree of changes that sponsorships contribute to society.
7. Number of entities	The number of objects which are sponsored by a firm.

According to the interviews, 8 out of 9 agreed that higher fit would signal higher sincerity. For example, one participant gave a reason for ranking the most sincere sponsorship as “The connection is tight. The sponsors really sponsor on the events which relate to their product.” However, there was one participant who introduced a contrast perspective on fit aspect. He provided his argument in ranking the least sincere sponsorship as “It seems that the sponsor and the object expect mutual benefit from each other. There should only be a willingness to give support, not an expectation on what to get back in sincere sponsorship.”

For professional level, all of the participants shared a common opinion that amateur sponsorship would be perceived as more sincere than professional sponsorship. One participant ranked a picture of amateur sponsorship as the most sincere and elaborated that “Even though it can be assumed that there should be financial gain behind it, but they also make something happen for kids. I don’t believe that they target the kids because they expect commercial benefit from them.” Furthermore, there was also similar agreement toward the length of sponsorship. The participants mentioned that the duration of sponsorship positively correlated with sincerity perception. One of them said that “Long-term sponsorship signals genuine support which shows a true commitment from a sponsor on an object.” The longer a sponsorship is, the more sincere it would be perceived.

Regarding scandal on objects, there were different opinions among the participants. Some of them believed that firms should stop providing support for objects with scandal. For instance, one participant stated that “A continuation of sponsoring objects with scandal suggest that firms do not care about ethical issues. They only seem to be obsessed with how they can gain the most benefit from those objects.” On the contrary, some of the participants viewed that firms should continue to support objects with scandal. One of the interviewees reflected that “Firms that remain with objects throughout difficult time show that they do not only care about the benefits from sponsorship but also the well-being of the objects, especially when they need support the most.”

Most of the participants concurred that sincere sponsorship should be non-promoted in terms of sponsorship presentation. For example, one mentioned that “A promoted sponsorship looks way to commercial and it is unlikely that this sort of sponsorship would only aim to support the athletes.” Meanwhile, non-promoted sponsorship such a logo on jersey would be perceived as less commercial and show more sincerity. For example, one participant stated that “Non-promoted sponsorship allows audience to focus on the sponsored objects while the sponsor’s logo can still be seen.”

Social impact was also raised by several participants as a strong indicator of sincere sponsorship. A few of them prioritized this factor as one of the key criteria to rank the most sincere picture. For example, it was mentioned that “A feeling of supporting community does make a sponsorship look more sincere. It convinces me that a sponsor is willing to see a society grow by providing source of funds for development.” Another participant added that “Sponsorship for superstars just seems to serve as a commercial purpose. Piggy-back sort of relationship.”

Lastly, the participants had several points of view on the number of entities in sponsorship context. Some of them believed that a small number of entities indicated that sponsoring firms had clear objectives to provide support for specific targets which made the sponsorship more sincere. For instance, a participant said that “I think firms should not support too many objects. Otherwise, it would seem to me that they do not really give much thought on consideration but only try to leverage from several objects.” Meanwhile, a few participants had different opinion on this factor. They viewed that firms should offer support to several numbers of objects. One reflected that “Support should not be limited to just a few objects. The more sponsorship a firm provide, the more willingness it has in supporting for others.”

Study 2: Predicting Overall Sincerity Perceptions

Study 2 aimed to determine how well the dimensions in study 1 would predict overall sincerity perceptions using a survey-based experiment. The format followed previous studies in sponsorship contexts by giving respondents fictional, but realistic press releases and asking the respondents to express their opinions toward the press releases (Johar and Pham, 1999; Cornwell et al., 2006; Olson & Thjomoe, 2011). The survey was distributed online through several student communities. The sample involved 129 internet users between 22 to 54 years old, 54 males and 75 females, with at least a bachelor's degree or beyond education level. The respondents were recruited through social media where posts were created by the authors asking our respective networks to complete a survey to help with our master thesis.

Each respondent was randomly assigned to read 2 of 6 press releases announcing an upcoming sponsorship agreement between a sponsoring brand and a sponsored object (See Table 3). After reading each press release, the respondents were asked to answer questions using a seven-point Likert scale. The questions contained the seven dimensions discovered in Study 1.

The scenarios were developed with guidance from our thesis advisor and inspiration was taken from (Olson and Thjømmøe, 2011) where similar scenarios were used to test dimensions identified for fit. It was decided to use sports scenarios except for one non-sport related scenario as sports sponsorships are the most common and people are more likely to have been exposed to these sponsorships in recent times. International athletes and brands were used in order to increase likelihood of familiarity with the respondents. Adidas and Nike were the main brands used in the scenarios. As we had six scenarios we designed them such that the identified dimensions of sincerity from study 1 were both present and not present in at least one scenario. For example, study 1 identified the duration of the sponsorship contract to signify sincerity as a long contract duration shows that the sponsoring brand believes in the athlete and wants to support them for a long time into the future. The scenarios were checked to ensure that all dimensions had been included and were coded as dummy variables after the collection of results to test for significance with regards to sincerity.

Table 4: Stimuli examples**Study 2****Press release 1: Nike's sponsorship with Women's Tennis Association**

Nike announces a new 5-year sponsorship contract with women's tennis association (WTA) star Maria Sharapova, who has agreed to use Nike equipment and shoes during competitions when she returns to the sport after completing her two-year ban from professional tennis due to a positive doping test.

Press release 2: Adidas's sponsorship with amateur sports organizations

Adidas announces a new 1-year sponsorship contract with several amateur sports organizations, including the Amateur Tennis Association (ATA), the Amateur Football Associations (AFA), and the Amateur Basketball Association (ABA). The sponsorships will support each association's development program for inner city youth. As part of the contract, Adidas will supply tennis equipment and shoes for children that cannot afford them.

The main reason Nike would be involved with Maria Sharapova is because they believe Maria Sharapova deserves support.

Strongly Disagree ← 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 → *Strongly Agree*

Adidas likely has the best interest of the amateur associations at heart.

Strongly Disagree ← 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 → *Strongly Agree*

Results

Dimension Reliability

The five dimensions used in the study were Fit, Sincerity, Sponsorship Attitude, Object Equity, and Sponsor Equity. They were composed as follows:

Table 5: Dimension Reliability

<p><i>Dimension 1: Fit</i> – Chronbach’s alpha = .831</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is a logical connection between the (Sponsor Object) and (sponsoring brand). 2. It makes sense to me that (brand) sponsors (Sponsor Object). <p><i>Dimension 2: Sincerity</i> – Chronbach’s Alpha = .641 – items used separate in analysis</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The main reason the (sponsor brand) would be involved with (Object) is because they believe (Object) deserves support. 2. (Sponsor Brand) likely has the best interest of (Sponsor Object) at heart. <p><i>Dimension 3: Sponsorship Attitude</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. My feeling about (Brand’s) sponsoring of (Sponsor Object) is positive. <p><i>Dimension 4: Object Equity</i> – Chronbach’s Alpha = .726</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. (Brand’s) sponsorship of (Sponsor Object) makes me like (object) more. 2. (Brand’s) sponsorship of (Sponsor Object) will increase my watching of (object) more. <p><i>Dimension 5: Sponsor Equity</i> – Chronbach’s Alpha = .718</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. (Brand’s) sponsorship of (Sponsor Object) makes me more positive towards (brand). 2. (Brand’s) sponsorship of (Sponsor Object) makes it more likely I will do more business with them.
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As the sincerity construct does not satisfy the minimum acceptable level (.7) the two sincerity questions will be used separately in the analysis. Where “The main reason the (sponsor brand) would be involved with (Object) is because they believe (Object) deserves support.” Is Sincerity 1 and “(Sponsor Brand) likely has the best interest of (Sponsor Object) at heart.” Is Sincerity 2.

Linear Regression for Sincerity 1

	β	<i>t</i> - value	<i>p</i> - value
<i>Fit</i>	0.352	3.799	0.000
<i>Sport</i>	0.044	0.107	0.915
<i>Single Entity</i>	-0.206	-0.854	0.394
<i>Charity</i>	1.517	6.283	0.000
<i>Scandal</i>	0.248	0.776	0.438
<i>Big sports fan</i>	0.042	0.596	0.552
<i>Strong interest in food</i>	0.231	2.648	0.009
<i>Strong interest in sports equipment</i>	0.121	1.483	0.140
<i>Gender</i>	0.303	1.326	0.186
<i>Age</i>	-0.003	-0.141	0.888
<i>Education</i>	-0.100	-1.191	0.235

The model for Sincerity 1 was significant ($p < .000$) with an adjusted explained variance of .229. *Fit* ($p = .000$), *Charity* ($p = .000$), and respondents having a strong interest in food ($p = .000$) were all significant predictors of Sincerity 1.

Linear Regression for Sincerity 2

	β	<i>t</i> - value	<i>p</i> - value
<i>Fit</i>	0.358	4.274	0.000
<i>Sport</i>	0.000	-0.001	0.999
<i>Single Entity</i>	-0.214	-0.980	0.328
<i>Charity</i>	0.908	4.158	0.000
<i>Scandal</i>	0.571	1.975	0.049
<i>I am a big sports fan</i>	-0.031	-0.490	0.625
<i>I have a strong interest in food</i>	0.014	0.184	0.854
<i>I have a strong interest in sports equipment</i>	0.136	1.853	0.065
<i>Gender</i>	0.013	0.062	0.950
<i>Age</i>	0.001	0.034	0.973
<i>Education</i>	-0.135	-1.791	0.075

The model for Sincerity 2 was significant ($p < .000$) with an adjusted explained variance of .147. *Fit* ($p = .000$), *Charity* ($p = .000$), and *Scandal* ($p = .000$) were all significant predictors of Sincerity 2.

In order to assess whether the results fit with previous research, linear regression was done using Sponsorship Attitude, Object Equity, and Sponsorship Equity as dependant variables:

Linear Regression for Sponsorship Attitude

	β	<i>t</i> - value	<i>p</i> - value
<i>Fit</i>	.328	4.824	.000
<i>Sincerity I</i>	.146	2.913	.004
<i>Scandal</i>	-.700	-3.110	.002

**Only significant variables shown in table*

The model is significant ($p < .000$) with an adjusted explained variance of .384.

Linear Regression for Object Equity

	β	<i>t</i> - value	<i>p</i> - value
<i>Fit</i>	.174	2.135	.034
<i>Charity</i>	.749	3.496	.001
<i>Sponsorship Attitude</i>	.254	3.325	.001

**Only significant variables shown in table*

The model is significant ($p < .000$) with an adjusted explained variance of .253.

Linear Regression for Sponsorship Equity

	β	<i>t</i> - value	<i>p</i> - value
<i>Sponsorship Attitude</i>	.406	6.900	.000
<i>Object Equity</i>	.296	5.882	.000

**Only significant variables shown in table*

The model is significant ($p < .000$) with an adjusted explained variance of .508.

These regressions are of interest because they show how sincerity is important to how sponsorships are perceived. Both sincerity constructs had significant contributions to predicting sponsorship attitude which previous literature has showed to be an important dimension that can lead to higher object equity and higher sponsorship equity. This is further backed up by our results that show sponsorship attitude to be a significant predictor of both object equity and sponsorship equity and object equity also being a significant predictor of sponsorship equity.

Discussion

As summarized in table 1, previous literature has identified sincerity to have an effect on the effectiveness of sponsorships. It has been shown to have a significant effect on sponsorship attitude, object equity, and sponsor equity. However, our understanding of what dimensions sincerity is built up of has been limited and the main aim of this paper was to identify these dimensions in order to get a more thorough understanding of what sincerity is.

Using a cognitive mapping technique in study 1, we were able to identify numerous dimensions that respondents identified as important to them with regards to sincerity. Study 2 was then conducted to test for significant effects of the identified dimensions. Three out of the seven tested variables were found to be significant. Overall fit, Charitable activity, and sponsorships involving a scandal. Pre-existing attitudes towards food was also found to have a significant effect on sincerity perceptions, possibly due to one scenario including a sponsorship of the Oslo food festival. Fit was found to be a significant predictor to both sincerity constructs. Charitable activity was also significant for both sincerity constructs.

It is interesting that the scandal variable is significant for Sincerity 2 but not for Sincerity 1. This may suggest that there are several dimensions of sincerity and the explaining variables differ as the question or definition of sincerity differs. For Sincerity 1, Scandal may not have been significant because the question asked whether they thought the sponsor believed that the sponsored object deserved support. When going through a scandal (a doping scandal in this case) respondents might believe that the sponsor doesn't think the object really deserves the support because it is the object's own fault. Whereas, for Sincerity 2 respondents were asked whether they thought the sponsor had the best interest of the sponsored object at heart. Supporting someone through a scandal may then show that the sponsor really does think about and care for the sponsored object.

Unlike previous literature, it was the first time that social impact was identified as a key predictor of perceived sincerity, in this case charitable activity was used to demonstrate social impact of the fictional cases. According to study 1, half of the participants mentioned this dimension as one of the reasons which convinced them

that the sponsorship was sincere. Social impact was referred to the incremental gain on the sponsored object from the sponsoring firms. Ideally, it would give a “cannot happen without the support of the sponsor” feeling. This simply showed that an event could not take place without being sponsored.

Sponsorships with a low perceived fit can be seen as less sincere (Olson and Thjømmøe, 2011) even though it was seen as helpful. If the consumers could not see a natural link between the sponsor and sponsored object, their rating of the sponsorship was generally lower. Therefore, fit is an important factor to consider alongside sincerity when designing a sponsorship agreement.

Furthermore, fit and pre-existing attitudes were also found to be significant predictors as previous literature suggested (Speed and Thompson, 2002; Olson and Thjømmøe, 2011, Demirel and Erdogmus (2016). With our addition of the charity variable, the explained variance on perceived sincerity has improved which shows progress in an attempt to understand the sincerity construct in sponsorship. However, the explained variance of sincerity is still not very high (.229 and .147). One could therefore wonder if study 1 could have identified more dimensions of sincerity. Therefore, future researchers may want to further develop study 1 by including more respondents and using different sponsorship examples for the respondents. As we only used one set of sponsorship examples, there may be unidentified dimensions of sincerity that were not present or did not provoke that thought with the examples our respondents were presented.

One of the limitations with the paper is the two sincerity questions didn't have a high enough internal reliability to be combined into a single sincerity dimension. This may suggest that there are more dimensions to sincerity than discussed by this paper. Furthermore, the sample size of study 2 (n= 129) may be on the small side. As this is a thesis assignment done without funding the sample size was naturally constricted to our own networks. Study 1 suggested seven dimensions to sincerity, and a bigger sample size may have yielded more results.

Additionally, we would recommend setting up a study with different sponsorship context, not just sport and non-sport as the two major categories in order to identify more possible explanatory variables for sincerity. Study 1 may suggest that the concept of sincerity is highly subjective and dependent on the respondents own experiences and feelings toward a brand or athlete. For example, one respondent in study 1 believed a low natural fit was more sincere than when there was a high natural fit because it showed that the company cared for the athlete/event as they have no obvious commercial connection with the athlete/event.

Therefore, we suggest future researchers to look more closely at sincerity and use more questions in order to find a reliable sincerity dimension. It would be interesting to explore sponsorships outside of a sports context in order to identify whether sincerity is as important for differing sponsorship contexts. By adding more sponsorship contexts to study 1, one may uncover more dimensions one can test in study 2. For study 2 we would suggest using more scenarios and obtaining a larger sample size. When designing the scenarios we suggest keeping them as similar and uniform as possible, only changing the dimensions tested in order to avoid differences based on the wording of the scenarios.

One could also look at the size of the effects of a scandal with regards to it increasing sincerity but decreases overall sponsorship attitude in order to devise a method in which to calculate the net effects of supporting an athlete during a scandal.

Conclusion

Suggested by previous literature as a key determinant of sponsorship effect (Speed and Thompson, 2002; Olson, 2010; Kim et al., 2011), this paper has uncovered the underlying dimensions which form sincerity perception in sponsorship contexts. Three variables were found to be the key predictors of perceived sincerity including perceived fit between sponsors and objects, pre-existing attitudes, and social impact. This is the first time that social impact factor has been introduced as a key predictor. Based on our exploratory study, social impact can be described as the extent to which sponsorship make positive change to the society. However, this sponsorship activity should be aligned with what firms do, or else it can be viewed as insincere as a result.

The social impact dimension is as we understand it, charitable contributions by the sponsor where they don't expect anything in return. In the scenarios given to respondents this included: "A portion of the proceeds from the sponsorship will also be used to provide food aid to war-torn Syria", "As part of the contract, Adidas will supply tennis equipment and shoes for children that cannot afford them." This suggests that using a sponsorship to better the lives of less fortunate people can significantly increase the perception of a sincere sponsorship. In addition to having a direct effect on sincerity, the charity variable had a positive effect on object equity meaning that the object being sponsored also benefits from a sponsorship agreement that includes a social cause, not only being attributed towards sincerity.

Furthermore, with regards to scandals our results for Sincerity 1 and 2 may suggest that the wording of a press release regarding an athlete involved in a scandal may have implications on the perceptions of sincerity. The scandal had a positive and significant contribution to sincerity perceptions when respondents thought that the sponsoring company was doing it because they had the best interest of the sponsored object in mind. This is an important factor for managers to keep in mind when dealing with a potential scandals involving one of their sponsored athletes. Furthermore, we see that the scandal variable has a significant negative effect on sponsorship attitude, but a positive effect on one of the sincerity dimensions. This suggests that showing support to an athlete during a scandal may increase your sincerity perception, but it may decrease overall sponsorship attitude.

As demonstrated in the results section sincerity and fit were significant and positive contributors to sponsorship attitude, which in turn had a positive and significant effect on sponsorship equity and object equity. Therefore, by increasing the perception of sincerity one can expect greater value from the sponsorship agreement.

Hence, managers managing sponsorships should consider the drivers of the overall perceived sincerity as suggested in this research, in order to capitalize from launching sponsorships. It is recommended that they look into having a clear overview of their brand portfolio and identifying what their brand is associated with. Secondly, they should study about their potential sponsor objects in order to evaluate the consumer's attitude toward that object. Lastly, they can narrow down the list of objects by taking the social impact factor into account. To maximize perceived sincerity, all three steps should be done together. Perceived sincerity has been proven to be a key determinant of sponsorship effect and having high perceived sincerity would put sponsorship closer to success.

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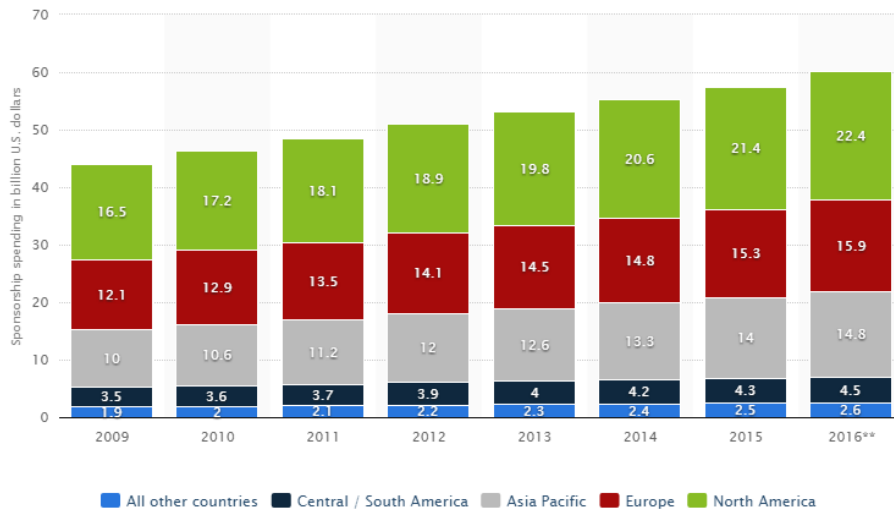
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Appendices

Global sponsorship spending by region from 2009 to 2016 (in billion U.S. dollars)*



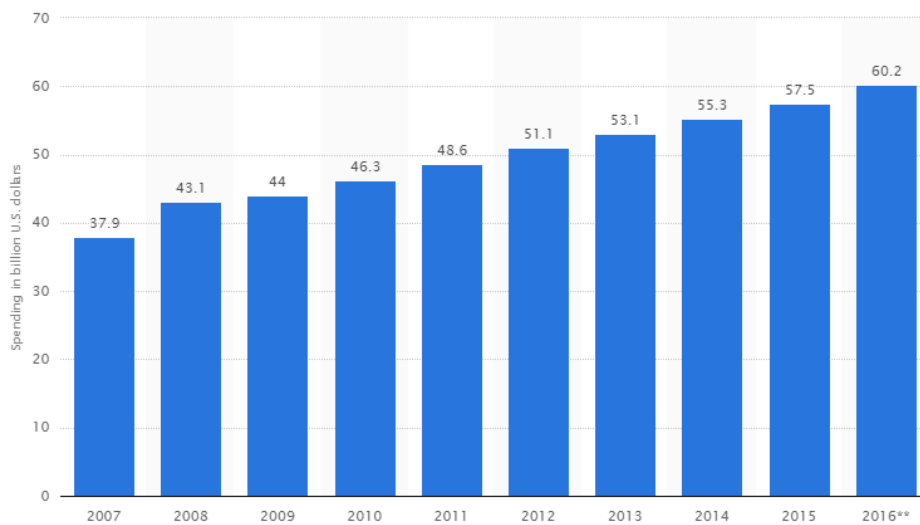
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Additional Information:
Worldwide; IEG; 2009 to 2015

Source:
IEG

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/196898/global-sponsorship-spending-by-region-since-2009/>

Global sponsorship spending from 2007 to 2016 (in billion U.S. dollars)



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Additional Information:
Worldwide; 2007 to 2015

Source:
IEG

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/196864/global-sponsorship-spending-since-2007/>