

SPONSORSHIP-LINKED MARKETING: OPENING THE BLACK BOX

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ABSTRACT: Sponsorship of sports, arts, and causes has become a mainstream marketing communications tool. A great deal of fieldwork has attempted to gauge the relative effectiveness of sponsorship in a marketing context, but these weakly controlled field studies contribute little to our understanding of how individuals process sponsorship-linked marketing communications. By considering possible underlying information-processing mechanics, individual- and group-level factors, market factors, and management factors, together with theorized sponsorship outcomes, this paper offers a model of consumer-focused sponsorship-linked marketing communications that summarizes and extends theoretical understanding of the topic.

Research on sponsorship-linked marketing spans several literatures, including the marketing subdiscipline areas of advertising, consumer behavior, and strategy, as well as sports management, human movement sciences, and the social sciences. Sponsorship of sports, causes, the arts, and events forms a major portion of the so-called unmeasured media spending for many firms. Unmeasured media is the catchall category for the various other promotional expenditures of firms and nonprofits outside the major media such as television, radio, print, and outdoor advertising (e.g., billboards, transit cards). Moreover, sponsorship spending (estimated to reach \$28 billion worldwide in 2004; IEG 2003) for some firms is now the "tail that wags the dog," with more and more advertising (measured media) being thematically tied to sponsorship investments.

Despite broad-based acceptance and dependence on sponsorship-linked marketing programs as a communications tool, little is known about how individuals process these fragments of information (Pham and Vanhuele 1997). Following a review of corporate sponsorship literature, Cornwell and Maignan (1998) and Cornwell (1999) criticized research in this area for lacking explanatory theoretical frameworks of how sponsorship works in the minds of consumers. Since then, a number of theoretically grounded studies of corporate sponsorship have been published, but the black box of sponsorship information processing is only just being opened. With

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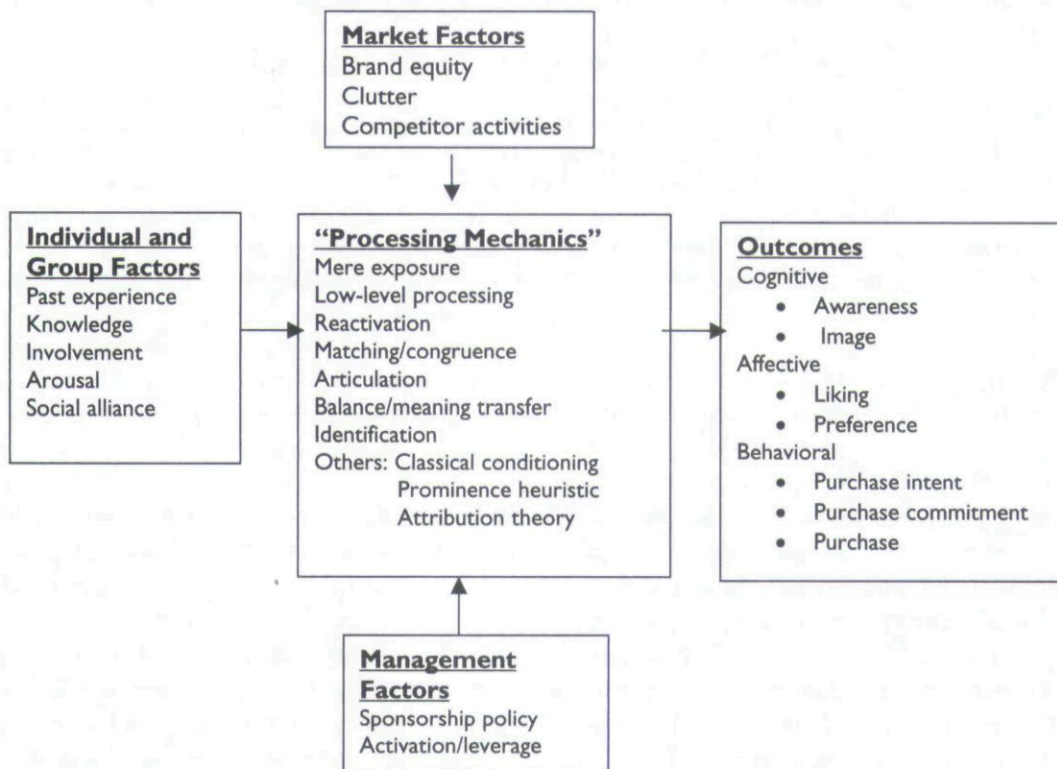
this in mind, this paper has three goals. The first is to provide a meaningful summary of theoretical progress to date regarding how consumer-focused sponsorship works. The aim here is not to provide a comprehensive review of all recent sponsorship research but to focus specifically on those papers forwarding theoretically grounded research. The second goal is to critically examine this research, with an emphasis on psychological processing and measurement. Finally, it is the goal of this paper to integrate disparate research into a theoretical framework to guide future research and to assist in the management of sponsorship outcomes.

CONSUMER-FOCUSED SPONSORSHIP-LINKED MARKETING

Sponsorship has been defined as "a cash and/or in-kind fee paid to a property (typically a sports, entertainment, non-profit event or organization) in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that property" (IEG 2000). Sponsorship-linked marketing, then, is "the orchestration and implementation of marketing activities for the purpose of building and communicating an association to a sponsorship" (Cornwell 1995, p. 15). These two definitions together highlight central differences between advertising and sponsorship. Whereas sponsorship involves a fee paid in advance for future potential communication values, advertising offers a more knowable and more controlled communication. Furthermore, whereas sponsorship requires leveraging (promotional spending in addition to the sponsorship fee) to obtain the greatest value, advertising is often sponsorship's most valuable leverage.

Sponsorships may be directed toward consumers, channel members, financial institutions, government, community, and employees (Gardner and Schuman 1988). The sponsorships themselves may entail sports, arts, causes, or combinations of

FIGURE 1
Model of Consumer-Focused Sponsorship-Linked Marketing Communications



these, such as the Federal Express St. Jude (children's research hospital) Golf Classic. Whereas nonconsumer outcomes can range from the interest of potential investors to esprit de corps, consumer-focused sponsorships typically seek to improve some aspect of awareness, attitude, image, or behavioral intention to purchase products, utilize services (e.g., have a mammogram), or give donations (e.g., time to a cause, money to a nonprofit). The processes by which these outcomes are achieved, and theoretical explanations for them, have only recently received considerable researcher attention. Figure 1 shows a model of consumer-focused sponsorship-linked marketing communications that brings together current theoretical understanding. This model does not consider business-to-business-focused sponsorship or sponsorship-stakeholder communications such as those directed at financial institutions or nonconsumer audiences. The model does consider (1) individual- and group-level factors that influence processing of sponsorship messages and responses; (2) market factors that impact sponsorship outcomes and are largely uncontrollable, at least in the short term; (3) management factors that are controllable and can strongly influence both processing and outcomes; (4) the mechanics of processing; and (5) consumer-focused outcomes of sponsorship. Uncharacteristically, perhaps, we will start our discussion with the middle of the model.

THEORIES OF HOW SPONSORSHIP WORKS

Many investigations of sponsorship effects have not posited any theoretical explanation of how sponsorship works in the mind of the consumer (e.g., Cornwell et al. 2000), or have posited a theoretical process but have not directly investigated it per se (e.g., Speed and Thompson 2000); instead they examine individual and environmental factors believed to influence recall and recognition of sponsorship stimuli. Still, most research on consumer-focused sponsorship states or assumes an associative memory model, as discussed in the marketing literature by Keller (1993). In conceptualizing brand knowledge (in sponsorship we would also be concerned with corporate or firm knowledge), Keller uses a definition based on brand awareness and brand image: "Brand awareness relates to brand recall and recognition performance by consumers. Brand image refers to the set of associations linked to the brand that consumers hold in memory" (1993, p. 2). Brand associations include all types of perceptions held in memory, even those from the distant past. Attributes, benefits, and attitudes developed over time—essentially other informational nodes linked to the brand and containing meaning—can be considered to be brand associations.

Thus, with the above memory model stated or assumed, most sponsorship research has focused on improving the re-

call, recognition, or brand associations held in memory. Selected research exploring theoretical explanations related to the improved processing of sponsorship stimuli are reviewed in the following sections. The center of Figure 1 lists the theoretical "mechanics" of consumer-focused sponsorship communications, and Table 1 briefly summarizes these research contributions. It should be noted that, in the main, these are not competing theories; they could be understood as complementary concepts from a management perspective.

Mere Exposure, Low-Level Processing, and Reactivation

The mere-exposure hypothesis introduced by Zajonc (1968, 1980) suggests that repeated exposure to a stimulus will engender an affective response. Liking and subsequent preference formation is accomplished without awareness of the preference-formation process, and has been found across a wide range of stimuli, including words, pictures, and figures (Bornstein 1989). Impoverished-communication stimuli, such as simple brand logos, which are minimal by nature and cannot carry the wealth or quality of information that more complex communications can, are commonplace in sponsorship-linked marketing situations, and exposure to them may be one way sponsors benefit from this process. Bennett (1999) reported finding mere exposure effects in a field study of U.K. soccer supporters, who had just viewed a soccer match where sponsor information was present. Unfortunately, the lack of exposure control (fans entering games and exiting games were queried for recall of sponsors) did not result in a strong test of mere exposure since any number of extraneous communications may have influenced responses.

Mere exposure was also studied by Olson and Thjømøe (2003), and was contrasted to central and peripheral processing in a controlled setting. Central-route processing refers to high-involvement situations requiring in-depth consideration that leads to brand attitude formation or change (Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann 1983). In opposition to this, the peripheral route refers to low-involvement situations where individuals form or change attitudes without active deliberation or consideration (Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann 1983). Olson and Thjømøe examined sponsorship-like conditions with low involvement and limited processing, and contrasted mere-exposure (brand-name only) conditions to peripheral-route conditions (brand plus some brand information). Findings supported the mere-exposure effect, in that participants appeared to form favorable evaluations simply as a result of exposure to brands (particularly for fictitious brands). Their results regarding low-involvement processing indicated that individuals who had processed additional brand information did have greater attitude change than those who were exposed to the information but had not processed it (those in the brand-

plus-information condition who did not read the additional information). While this study did explore the low-involvement processing of brand information in addition to brand name, the results are essentially a comparison of the central-processing route with mere exposure. Since it used advertisements containing only text without logos or pictures, the study did not have the typical cues used in peripheral processing, so we still know little about peripheral processing in sponsorship.

Communication associated with sponsoring, while impoverished in nature, is also embedded, by design, in some event or activity, which is intended to be of interest to the individual. Thus, in the main, individuals are not expected to be highly involved with sponsorship communications relative to the event experience. Moreover, in their use of signage, title sponsorship announcements, logos, and the like, sponsorship contexts are not able to carry involving messages. These messages have been termed advertising fragments (Pham and Vanhuele 1997). This is very similar to the situation where advertising is embedded in televised communications, and thus theory from advertising has been borrowed. In a study of the potential of advertising fragments to reactivate established brand associations, Pham and Vanhuele (1997) used response time as an indication of the ability to access brand associations stored in memory. Individuals receiving exposures to target brand fragments took less time to verify a statement of a core brand association than those who did not receive target brand exposure. Although the substantive difference between conditions was arguably small (300 to 400 milliseconds), the authors state that this reduced response latency was meaningful given the minimal manipulation undertaken in the experimental context.

While mere-exposure effects are relevant to particular sponsorship situations (and may be influential in the individual's prior experience with the brand), it is perhaps low-level processing and the reactivation of previously held brand associations that have the broadest application in sponsorship communication processes. For example, arena exposures to sponsor messages have been shown to influence memory for sponsors (Cornwell et al. 2000), but the field study in which this was found lacked control for corresponding advertising exposures. From a practitioner perspective, the broadcast audience (rather than the attending audience) and their exposure to peripheral-event signage (e.g., location-based, scoreboard and uniform sponsor identification) and computer-generated graphics (e.g., presenting sponsor logo) may be even more important. It is interesting to note that media exposure to computer-generated logos holds more promise for controlled experiments, but processing of these peripheral cues has not received researcher attention.

Exploration of low-level processing seems fruitful since peripheral cues constitute the mainstay of sponsorship com-

TABLE I
Summary of Literature Supporting Possible Processing Mechanics of Sponsorship

Possible mechanics	Study description	Findings
<i>Mere exposure</i>		
Bennett 1999	Measured brand recall from spectators entering and exiting sporting venues.	Mere exposure and false consensus effects were found.
Olson and Thørmøe 2003	Compared mere exposure of a brand with varying levels of cognitive processing of brands.	Mere exposure enhanced preference for the brand name. Exposure to additional, but unprocessed information did not affect preference.
<i>Low-level processing</i>		
Olson and Thørmøe 2003	[As before]	
Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann 1983	Manipulated level of product involvement, strength of argument, and type of endorser in a magazine advertisement for a product.	Two routes to persuasion were found: central and peripheral. High-involvement consumers were influenced by strength of argument, and low-involvement consumers by type of product endorser.
<i>Reactivation</i>		
Pham and Vanhuele 1997	Experimentally tested for the effects of advertising fragments.	Established brand associations were reactivated by advertising fragments, regardless of whether the fragments were directly attended to, or otherwise.
<i>Matching/congruence</i>		
Becker-Olsen and Simmons 2002	Examined participant responses to high versus low native fit sponsorships involving social causes.	Low-fit sponsorships resulted in less favorable thoughts and attitudes toward the sponsor, and generated less affective and behavioral responses from participants, than high-fit sponsorships.
Cornwell et al. 2003	Manipulated congruence and level of sponsor-sponsee relationship explanation (articulation) via press releases and assessed cued recall.	Recall was better for congruent sponsors than for incongruent sponsors. Recall for incongruent sponsors improved with articulation.
Cornwell, Pruitt, and Van Ness 2001	Examined share price changes of motorsport sponsors. Compared the worth of sponsoring a winner versus just participating in a sponsorship.	Significant gains in share prices were found when congruent sponsors sponsored a winner; little effect on share price was found for incongruent sponsors.
Ferrand and Pages 1996	A sample of participants produced lists of adjectives describing both an event and a product. These were examined for similarities to assess effectiveness of image sponsoring.	A number of similarities were found across adjectives used to describe a tennis event and a brand of mineral water. Event/product-specific elements were also identified.
Gwinner 1997	Outlined a model of how sponsorship can impact brand image. Explained that image transfer is aided by factors such as sponsor-sponsee similarity.	

Gwinner and Eaton 1999	Assessed the extent to which image transfer occurs from brand to event, through event sponsorship depictions.	Participants tended to rate events and brands similarly in terms of "personality," particularly when they were matched on either image or functional bases.
Johar and Pham 1999	Manipulated congruence and perceived market prominence of sponsor, and measured sponsor identification.	Consumers (mis)identified sponsors as being those companies that were congruent with the event being sponsored and were more prominent in the marketplace. Brand-event match-up was suggested to significantly improve attitude toward the advertisement.
McDaniel 1999	Examined how consumers' reactions to advertisements leveraging sports sponsorships can be influenced by preexisting advertising schemas.	Sponsors that were functionally related to the sport were found to have the best levels of perceived fit.
Musante, Milne, and McDonald 1999	Outlined a methodology to assess the level of perceived fit between the image of a brand and that of a sponsor.	High fit between a brand and a cause was more effective in influencing consumer choice behavior than was low fit.
Pracejus and Olsen 2004	Two studies examined how brand-cause fit in cause-related marketing campaigns impacts consumer choice.	Sponsor-cause congruence was associated with attributions of altruistic motives, greater sponsor credibility, and positive attitudes about sponsors. Congruence effects on attitudes about sponsors were mediated by sponsor credibility.
Rifon et al. 2004	Examined how consumer attributions of sponsor motives influence the effects of sponsor-cause congruence on ratings of sponsor attitude and sponsor credibility.	Consumers' responses were influenced by attitudes toward the sponsor, perceived sponsor-event fit, and the perceived sincerity and ubiquity of the sponsor.
Speed and Thompson 2000	Used a classical conditioning framework to examine consumers' attitudes about sponsors and events, and perceptions of sponsor-event fit.	Sponsorship of a well-liked charitable event resulted in enhanced corporate community relations, and in both positive and negative attributions.
<i>Articulation</i>		
Cornwell et al. 2003	[As before]	
<i>Balance/meaning transfer</i>		
Dean 2002	Examined balance theory and attribution theory in relation to sponsorship.	
Gwinner 1997	[As before]	
Keller 1993	A conceptual model of brand equity was presented. An associative memory model was used to explain how brand awareness and brand image might affect brand knowledge.	
McCracken 1989	Presented a conceptual model of how celebrity endorser advertising operates. Suggested meaning is transferred from celebrity to product to consumer.	
<i>Identification</i>		
Cornwell and Coote 2005	Social identity theory was used to examine peoples' willingness to purchase the products of the firms that sponsor nonprofit organizations.	There was a positive relation between consumers' identification with the nonprofit organization and their intention to purchase its sponsor's products.

TABLE I (continued)

Possible mechanics	Study description	Findings
Madrigal 2000	Examined how social alliances between sports fans and preferred sports teams influence consumers' purchase intentions toward a sponsor's products.	Purchase intentions were greater among those who identified with the team being sponsored, and when such intentions were perceived to be the group norm.
Madrigal 2001	Examined how consumers' levels of team identification can influence their attitudes toward a sponsor and their purchase intentions.	Team identification was found to moderate the effect of attitude on intention to purchase.
Other		
<i>Classical conditioning</i>		
Speed and Thompson 2000	[As before]	
<i>Prominence heuristic</i>		
Johar and Pham 1999	[As before]	
Pham and Johar 2001	Extension of the work of Johar and Pham (1999), examining the congruence and prominence heuristics of sponsor identification.	Prominence bias arose when consumers were unable to retrieve the sponsor's name directly from memory, and instead relied on a constructive memory process.
<i>Attribution theory</i>		
Rifon et al. 2004	[As before]	
Dean 2002	[As before]	

munications. Moreover, most brand managers would not introduce a new brand with the impoverished stimuli of the sponsorship context (note the parallel here to the value of mere exposure for fictitious brands). Rather, they might use sponsorship as a reminder for an established brand; most sponsor processing will therefore potentially have a reactivation memory component.

Matching and Congruence

The most frequently investigated theoretical concept related to the improved processing of sponsorship stimuli is undoubtedly the idea of match or congruence (also called fit, relatedness, and similarity) between the sponsor and the event or activity (e.g., Cornwell 1995; Cornwell, Pruitt, and Van Ness 2001; Ferrand and Pages 1996; Gwinner 1997; Gwinner and Eaton 1999; Johar and Pham 1999; McDaniel 1999; Musante, Milne, and McDonald 1999; Rifon et al. 2004; Speed and Thompson 2000). Congruence theory suggests that storage in memory and retrieval of information are influenced by relatedness or similarity, such that viewing a running event, for example, that is sponsored by a running shoe brand seems appropriate and is easily remembered.

One conceptualization of congruence finds that people best remember information that is congruent with prior expectations (Srull 1981), whereas the competing theory is that incongruent information requires more elaborate processing and results in greater recall (Hastie 1980). Thus, finding the running event sponsored by an insurance company might be remembered for its lack of congruence. Researchers in sponsorship have used schema congruity theory (Musante, Milne, and McDonald 1999) and the idea of advertising schemas (McDaniel 1999) to explain match-up effects. While the memory effects of matching have been supported, the effects of incongruence have only been seen as a lack of fit and have not been investigated in their own right.

Across a range of field and experimental studies, congruence is typically found to hold a significant positive relationship with memory for sponsorship stimuli and other sponsorship outcomes (see Table 1). The only potentially negative consequences of congruence suggested thus far relate to heuristics used in recollection. For small brands, a market prominence bias may operate against the true congruent sponsor when a competitor with a large market share is more readily recalled and therefore thought to be the sponsor (Johar and Pham 1999). Although not as yet discussed in the literature, brands at parity, that is, those notably similar in the consumer's mind, may be particularly vulnerable to confusion and misattributions when both major competitors are engaged in similar sponsorship activities. However, given the weight of evidence currently supporting the value of perceived congruence between sponsor and event in support-

ing memory for the relationship, advantages decidedly outweigh disadvantages.

Articulation

The vast majority of sponsorship literature on matching considers the communication value of sponsor-event pairings and suggests that the theoretical development of brand image depends on establishing a link between the two. From a management perspective, the goal has been to establish the best match via examining the overlap in existing images (Ferrand and Pages 1999). Sponsorship research on articulation departs from past studies by moving beyond simple pairing of sponsor and event as under the match-up hypothesis. Here, research considers the relational context and meaning (e.g., Bain and Humphreys 1988) between sponsor and event, and how articulation of this relationship influences memory. This is not a new concept from the perspective of the practitioner. For instance, Texaco's sponsorship of the 1992 Olympic Games was explained by stating in advertisements that the oil company strives for excellence in what it does, just as athletes strive for excellence in their sports. There has also been research attempting to measure how program elements collateral to the sponsorship relationship might "create fit" (Becker-Olsen and Simmons 2002). Research is now showing that communicating a link makes sense from an advertising or leverage perspective, but articulation may also be developed within the basic sponsorship relationship.

Preliminary results of an experimental study of fictitious press releases found memory for sponsorship relationships to be influenced by the nature of the articulated link (Cornwell et al. 2003). In particular, under conditions of an incongruent relationship between sponsor and event, articulation of the reasons for the sponsorship relationship resulted in improved recall for the relationship. These results are in accordance with recent research in psychology by Prior and Bentin (2003) that showed that incidental learning of the pairing of two unrelated nouns was better when they were linked in a meaningful sentence than when presented in isolation.

In addition, although our focus here is on consumers, it is worthwhile to note that articulation of sponsorship relationships may also be beneficial for firms whose target audiences consist of nonconsumers. Research concerning the reactions of financial community members to information regarding new advertising agency-client relations (Mathur and Mathur 1996) and financial-relations advertising (Bobinski and Ramirez 1994) suggests that investors are constantly seeking to find information that better informs their decision making. Thus, articulation of a sponsorship relationship might work to improve consumer memory while at the same time serve as a signal to the financial community of the role and value of the sponsorship to the firm. Sponsorship ar-

tication, if eventually supported by subsequent empirical work, could be a valuable management tool for firms that are marketing products that do not have logically sanctioned links to popular sports, arts, and charity events and activities.

Balance Theory and Meaning Transfer

In the investigation of image change in sponsorship, balance theory has been used to explain attitude change. Heider's (1958) balance theory argues that individuals strive for consistency and avoid perceived inconsistency in behavior and attitude. In sponsorship, the individual will seek a balanced relationship between the event and the sponsor. For example, an imbalance is created when a preexisting positive attitude toward a charitable organization and a neutral, or even negative, attitude toward a firm are combined in a sponsorship. In such a case, the individual may seek harmony by reconsidering the attitude toward the firm and adjusting it in a positive direction (the desired outcome), or the individual could reconsider his or her attitude toward the charity and adjust this in a negative direction. Balance theory has been used by Dean (2002) in the sponsorship context, similar to that just described, to explain attitude change due to sponsorship.

Another approach seeking to explain image effects in sponsorship considers meaning transfer and follows McCracken's (1989) model of the celebrity endorsement process. This implies for sponsorship that "meaning" moves from the event to the sponsor's product when the two are paired during an event, and then to consumers in their roles as spectators or participants. McCracken's model was concerned less with the mechanism of the pairing process and more with the movement of meaning. Likewise, Gwinner's (1997) adaptation of McCracken's work to sponsorship does not specify how the event image transfers to the brand image. However, subsequent empirical work (Gwinner and Eaton 1999) does posit an associative memory process (Keller 1993) where brand associations are formed during sponsorship activities.

No example of potential image transfer effects could be more pronounced than those sought by sponsors of the X Games developed by ESPN. Combining new, perhaps once outlawed sports such as snowboarding, sky surfing, cliff diving, skateboarding, and mountain biking, the X Games target a youth market with an "in-your-face attitude" (Morris 1998, p. 8). The list of sponsors seeking an image transfer effect from such action sports include Taco Bell, Disneyland, Burger King, Levi Strauss, PepsiCo/Mountain Dew, Coca-Cola, Kellogg's, Gatorade, Schick, Reebok, and Activision (Pearson 2003). Corporate sponsors seeking a more youthful image with the X Games seem to follow the image transfer model of McCracken as outlined: Meaning moves from event to sponsor's product to consumer.

Identification

Social identity theory, as found in management, argues that people will place themselves and others into social categories such as sports participant, organizational member, or political group (Tajfel and Turner 1985). Research on identification, as an individual-level process, suggests that people tend to make social classifications because it provides a systematic way to define others and to locate oneself in the social environment. Moreover, when an individual identifies with an organization, he or she becomes vested in its successes and failures (Ashforth and Mael 1989). In their study of college alumni, Mael and Ashforth (1992) showed how organizational and individual antecedents influence organizational identification with the alma mater, and how in turn, organizational identification is linked to support for the organization. Following the work of Mael and Ashforth, Cornwell and Coote (2005) found a similar relation in the sponsorship of a cause. Antecedents led to organizational identification with the cause, and this, in turn, led to purchase commitment for the products of sponsors.

Outside the sponsorship context but within sport, social identity theory has been used to explain sports team identification and its positive social and self-concept consequences (e.g., Branscombe and Wann 1991). Following this research, in a study of adults attending a college football game, Madrigal (2000) found that favorable purchase intentions were positively related to team identification, and were more common when such intentions were perceived as a group norm. In a subsequent study using a random telephone survey, Madrigal found that "team identification moderates the effect of attitude on intention to purchase" (2001, p. 157). In similar research, the perceived prestige of a sports team was shown to influence one's identification with that team and, in turn, influence key sponsorship outcomes such as sponsor recognition, attitude toward sponsor, sponsor patronage, and satisfaction with sponsors (Gwinner and Swanson 2003). In sum, social identification as an explanatory construct has received support across several areas of application and is deserving of additional research. Again, while the current writing is concerned with consumer-focused sponsorship, it is worth noting that identification would also be of central interest in any study of employees as audience for corporate sponsorship.

Other Theoretical Building Blocks

Numerous other theoretical building blocks can be identified in the literature. For example, Speed and Thompson (2000) used classical conditioning as a theoretical framework for sponsorship, but did not examine classical conditioning effects *per se*. Researchers Johar and Pham (1999) used, among

several theoretical concepts, relatedness, semantic overlap, market prominence, and information economics to develop propositions regarding the use of heuristics in sponsor identification. In the context of cause sponsorships, Dean (2002) and Rifon et al. (2004), used attribution theory to explain consumers' causal inferences of sponsors' motives.

These and other studies previously discussed suggest that in addition to simple explicit memory, various other influential variables must be considered, depending on the sponsorship context (e.g., attribution theory may be more important for cause sponsorships, whereas the role of prominence may be more important for large-scale sports). Implicit memory also plays a major role in the processing of sponsorship information. As such, greater consideration in future research must be given to investigating implicit memory for sponsorship information, rather than just using studies involving sponsor recall and recognition tasks tapping explicit memory. Implicit learning in relation to sponsorship may result from classical conditioning as suggested by Speed and Thompson (2000), or perhaps from repetition or perceptual learning (Squire 1987). Implicit memories, which are typically not available to conscious recollection, may nonetheless influence outcomes such as brand awareness, attitudes toward companies and products, and purchase behavior.

MEASURING SPONSORSHIP OUTCOMES

Despite the acceptance and proliferation of sponsorship-linked marketing programs, gross approximations of traditional advertising spending (e.g., second-by-second tallies of clear and in-focus logo exposure during auto racing) are still the main means that practitioners use for measuring sponsorship effectiveness (e.g., consider the "Sponsor's Report" offered by Joyce Julius, available at www.joycejulius.com/index.html). These measures are still, as previously noted by Cornwell (1995), "of apples and oranges": 30 seconds of in-focus logo exposure does not equal a 30-second advertising message detailing brand attributes and benefits, and providing a toll-free number for immediate response. Although one can understand the industry's need for measurement (and quantification) of some kind, these experiences are qualitatively different, and thus work differently in the consumer's mind.

What communication effects are sought when using sponsorship-linked marketing to communicate with consumers? How are they realized? Consumer-focused sponsorship outcomes, as studied using field surveys or experimental designs, can be classified as cognitive, affective, and behavioral. Examples of studies investigating each of these are discussed below, providing a representative (although not comprehensive) picture of the way sponsorship effects are often assessed. While field studies do not make strong contributions to our understanding of sponsorship information processing due to their quasi-

experimental nature, they are discussed to demonstrate how they might be improved by a better understanding of psychological processes and to support overall model development.

Fieldwork

Cognitive Outcomes

The focus of cognitive measures in sponsorship is typically on awareness. Bennett (1999) measured consumer awareness of sponsorship information, both before and after the viewing of a soccer match. On exit, awareness was based on a measure of free recall for "any firms or brands advertised on perimeter posters" (p. 301). Subsequently, awareness was cued by product category, and then by a "fully aided" cue, which asked if attendees recalled specific brands (including foils). Similarly, Nicholls, Roslow, and Dublisch (1999) cued tennis and golf event attendees with product category information and sought their top-of-mind brand awareness. Pope and Voges (1999) sought to measure the relationship between the belief that a company was involved in sponsorship and corporate image. They provided the name of a possible sponsor and asked respondents whether the company was involved in sponsorship, and also asked them to rate dimensions of the company's image.

Perhaps the most comprehensive fieldwork study specifically considering the use of cognitive measures is that of Tripodi et al. (2003). Using telephone survey data collected around the time of the 2000 Olympics, they considered four approaches to measuring recall (p. 447): (1) event sponsorship prompt ("When you think of [Event Z], which sponsors come to mind?"); (2) brand sponsorship prompt ("When you think of [Brand X], what sponsorships come to mind?"); (3) category sponsorship prompt ("When you think of [Category Y, e.g., banks] what sponsorships come to mind?"); and (4) brand recognition recall (I am going to tell you some of Brand X's current or recent sponsorships. For each one, could you tell me whether you were aware, before today, of Brand X sponsoring that event?). Not surprisingly, Tripodi and colleagues found that these different approaches to measurement yielded different estimates of recall.

Affective Outcomes

Affective measures often consider liking, preference, particular attitudes, or favorable thoughts. Examining brand preference, Nicholls, Roslow, and Dublisch provided event spectators with a list of leading brands and asked, "Which of the following brands of [category] do you prefer?" (1999, p. 372). Madrigal (2001) used a telephone survey to ask people about their attitudes toward purchasing products from sponsors of a university sports team. When considering the effects of fit for a

cause sponsorship, Becker-Olsen and Simmons (2002) measured favorable thoughts and attitudes toward the sponsorship. Clearly, affective outcomes may be even more important for cause sponsorships at the brand and corporate levels.

Behavioral Outcomes

Behavior, or intended behavior, has typically been measured with semantic differential or Likert scales. For example, in considering the influence of the act of sponsoring on intention to purchase, Madrigal (2000) used a three-point scale to query attendees at a football game, asking them about their likelihood of buying the products of a hypothetical sponsor. In a later study, Madrigal (2001) used a five-point scale and asked people about their likelihood of purchasing a sponsor's products within a three-month period, and about the amount of effort they put into buying a sponsor's products.

In field studies, it is assumed that indicators of cognitive processing such as correct recall of sponsors are measures of sponsorship communication success. For affective and behavioral outcomes, it is often assumed that people have insight into specific attitudes and intentions about future behavior, and that their responses reflect the influence of sponsorship exposure. If one assumes that a hierarchical information-processing model of advertising applies to sponsorship (see, e.g., Shimp and Gresham 1983), then exposure to and comprehension of marketing communications are foundational to higher-order effects such as preference and purchase intent, and may therefore be relied on when studies are focused at higher levels. These studies tell us very little about the mechanisms underlying sponsorship information processing, however, and are poor at validly isolating cognitive and affective responses, or behavioral outcomes. Moreover, their simplicity and lack of control may count as effective those sponsorships with outcomes that are suboptimal for, or even counter to, long-term marketing objectives.

Experimental Work

Cognitive Outcomes

In experimental designs, a number of recall and recognition measures have typically been used as outcome measures of sponsorship. For example, to examine the influence of sponsor relatedness and prominence on memory, Johar and Pham (1999) asked respondents to match an event with one of two possible sponsors (an actual sponsor and a foil) after exposure to a number of event-sponsor relationships. Pham and Vanhuele (1997) used weak cues in their study of response latency. Here, individuals were asked to verify whether statements regarding a brand were true or false. In their study of the role of articulation in supporting recall for event-sponsor pairings, Cornwell et al. (2003) cued individuals with the

sponsor and asked for the event, after having previously exposed them to a series of fictitious sponsorship press releases. Each of these studies has been able to identify variables that influence recall and recognition.

Affective Outcomes

A number of affective outcomes related to sponsorships, such as attitude, preference, and liking, have also been examined experimentally. Olson and Thjømøe (2003) compared the attitudinal influences of varying levels of brand information processing by using two experimental groups that differed in the number of exposures they received to specific types of brand information. The researchers then queried participants with questions such as "I feel that [brand name] is appealing to me," and provided a seven-point scale for responding (p. 255). In an experiment comparing native high- and low-fit sponsorships, Becker-Olsen and Simmons (2002) found that participants exposed to sponsorships with low fit "generated less favorable thoughts, formed a less favorable attitude toward the sponsorship, saw the firm's positioning as less clear, and generated less favorable affective and behavioral responses to the firm" (p. 287). McDaniel (1999) administered pre- and posttest attitudinal measures around exposing participants to variations of advertisements depicting sponsorship information. In this way, changes in the participants' attitudes (toward the brand, for example) could be attributed to viewing the sponsorship information in the advertisement. In an effort to better understand processing in relation to multiple-sponsor events (as is typical of many sponsorship situations), Ruth and Simonin (2003) investigated not only attitudes toward a specific sponsor, but also attitudes toward cosponsors and the event being sponsored. Clearly, research considering both cognition and affect is preferable, especially when the potential for high recall but negative affect is possible.

Behavioral Outcomes

Measurement of behavioral effects of experimental sponsorship manipulations has also been attempted. As part of an experiment examining the effects of sponsors' usage of varying degrees of promotional efforts, McCarville, Flood, and Froats (1998) questioned participants about their intention to purchase a sponsor's products. Pracejus and Olsen (2004) provided consumers with information about cause-related marketing campaigns, similar to sponsorships, and examined how a consumer's choice of service was influenced by whether the campaign involved high or low congruence between brand and cause.

Although experimental designs like these provide greater control than field studies, several issues regarding the nature of the dependent measures used have yet to be examined. For

example, there has not been a specific analysis of the nature or direction of cued recall. In what circumstances would cuing with the sponsor for the event be appropriate and in what circumstances would cuing with the event for the sponsor be appropriate? As mentioned previously, Tripodi et al. (2003) found radical differences based on cues, but these results may be context-dependent. In what instances is free recall or category-cued recall preferred?

It is argued here that directional cuing is appropriate for corporate or brand image (e.g., that created in corporate sponsorship of charity events), in that the marketing manager is concerned that individuals know the event-sponsor relationship. Accepting an associative symmetry hypothesis of memory (Asch and Lindner 1963), where each member of a pair is suggested as being capable of recovering the entire pattern or relationship, knowing that "this type of event is sponsored by this firm" or that "this firm sponsors this type of event" are equally valuable to the marketing manager.

In examining brand awareness, as is typically sought by fast-moving consumer goods in their sponsorship of popular sports, free recall or category-cued recall would be appropriate. However, field studies and some experimental designs have an implicit cuing direction from the event or event exposure to the sponsor. For example, this happens when top-of-mind awareness, immediately following exposure to an event, is sought by supplying product categories and measuring sponsor mentions. Furthermore, in such situations, the potential for demand characteristics is high, as is the potential for a market prominence bias, as suggested by Pham and Johar (2001).

Eventually, measures of sponsorship outcomes must also deal with the age-old problem of isolating effects, or as Keller describes it, locating the "main effects" of a marketing communication's contribution (2001, p. 832). This is true for all three types of sponsorship outcomes—cognitive, affective, and behavioral. Some studies have attempted to control for or explicitly consider the influence of prior knowledge of the product as well as prior knowledge of the event before assessing sponsorship effects (e.g., Roy and Cornwell 2004), and as will be discussed in greater detail in the section on leveraging, a few studies (e.g., Lardinois and Derbaix 2001; McCarville, Flood, and Froats 1998) have also considered collateral promotions and communications. However, no study as yet has considered either the incremental effect of sponsorship over existing advertising or the synergistic potential of sponsorship and concurrent advertising. This is an area where future sponsorship research will undoubtedly prove useful.

In addition, as suggested previously, if implicit learning is engendered in sponsorship exposures, alternative measures not requiring conscious recollecting must be devised. These could incorporate word fragment (Duke and Carlson 1993) and word-stem completion tasks (Tulving, Schacter, and Stark

1982), or include a divided-attention task to measure the respective contributions of explicit and implicit memory (for details, see Jacoby, Toth, and Yonelinas 1993).

INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP FACTORS

An increasing amount of attention is being given to the mechanics of processing sponsorship messages and resulting outcomes (Crimmins and Horn 1996; Gwinner and Eaton 1999; McDaniel 1999; Speed and Thompson 2000). A great number of individual factors also influence information processing of sponsorships, however. Four individual factors typically of interest in sponsorship research are presented here, namely, arousal, prior experience, knowledge, and involvement. In addition, for many types of sponsorships, group-level variables such as social alliances are relevant. This list is only used to illustrate the role of individual- and group-level factors in the processing of sponsorship stimuli, since a full treatment of such variables is beyond the scope of this paper.

Arousal

The extent to which a target audience processes a brand-event linkage created via sponsorship may be influenced by the level of arousal elicited by the sponsor or event, or both. When a person experiences increased arousal, processing of stimulus-related information increases, and in turn, increased attention to processing results in greater acquisition and storage of information (Kroeber-Riel 1979). This is called the processing efficiency principle. In contrast, the intensity principle suggests that increased arousal focuses so much attention on the arousal-inducing stimulus that processing of peripheral information is inhibited (Pavelchak, Antil, and Munch 1988). Studies of television viewing support this perspective. In a study of advertisement recall for Super Bowl XXXIV, a game in which the outcome was not decided until the last play, recall was greater during the first half than during the more intense second half (Newell, Henderson, and Wu 2001). It is argued that the intensity created during the second half led viewers to attend more to the game and less to the embedded commercials. In other studies, arousal created by a television program has even been found to impair processing of stimuli subsequent to the program (Mundorf, Zillmann, and Drew 1991; Scott and Goff 1988).

Another view is that arousal and consumer responses should be examined in terms of an inverted-U rather than a linear relationship. Low levels of intensity are insufficient to create desired consumer responses, whereas high levels of intensity result in a focus on the stimulus driving the intensity (Park and McClung 1986). Thus, a moderate level of intensity is thought to be optimal for creating arousal, and has been found to result in greater advertisement memory and more favor-

able attitudes toward advertisements (Tavassoli, Schultz, and Fitzsimmons 1995). In the sponsorship context, Pham (1992) found that arousal related to viewing an exciting event significantly decreased the recognition of embedded sponsorship stimuli.

Presenting individuals with marketing messages when they are in an aroused state could therefore detract from communication goals, or could result in an assimilation effect, where peripheral cues become assimilated with the central cues, and are thus associated with the arousal (Broach, Page, and Wilson 1995). In the case of sponsorship, an assimilation effect could occur if the positive association one holds for an event becomes related to the associated sponsor. In sum, arousal seems to be an important individual-level variable, but we still have a poor understanding of its potential influence related to various sponsorship contexts (e.g., sports, arts, causes).

Prior Experience

A consumer's prior experience with a sponsor or event, or both, can trigger cognitive and affective responses that can impact the processing of sponsorship messages. In marketing, Alba and Hutchinson (1987) propose that increased product familiarity enables consumers to remember brand and product information and develop more refined cognitive structures. The benefit provided by familiarity is that more elaborate cognitive structures emerge from an increasing number of product-related experiences (Söderlund 2002). In turn, more elaborate cognitive structures enable more efficient processing of product-related stimuli to occur when the product is encountered in the future. The tendency is for new associations to be of the same valence as existing associations (Grush 1976). Thus, familiarity not only increases the number of associations held in memory; it positively impacts the perceived relations between new stimuli and existing associations.

High levels of familiarity with a product or brand have been found to result in more positive consumer reactions, such as product satisfaction, word-of-mouth recommendations, and repurchase intentions (Söderlund 2002). Several studies have found that one of the primary objectives firms have for entering into a sponsorship is to increase brand awareness, or familiarity (see, e.g., Marshall and Cook 1992; Quester 1997; Shanklin and Kuzma 1992). Positive affect associated with an event can transfer to a sponsor, thus creating the possibility that future exposures to the brand will be positively influenced.

Despite the obvious importance of prior experience in the processing of additional information regarding the brand, few studies in sponsorship have considered it, and none have done so directly. Dean (2002) considered the ability of sponsoring a cause (Special Olympics) to enhance perceptions of a local

food store chain (Food Lion) and found that differing prior attitudes toward the firm influence the magnitude of attitude change. More extensive consideration of past experience is warranted within the sponsorship context.

Consumer Knowledge

Knowledge is a cognitive-based individual-level variable that can influence information processing of a brand-event linkage presented via sponsorship. In the case of event sponsorship, this is examined in terms of a consumer's knowledge of the product category of the sponsoring brand, as well as of the event being sponsored. In a study of the influence of consumer knowledge on consumer behavior, Sujan (1985) examined how experts and novices differ in the processing of product information. When information consistent with product knowledge is encountered, both experts and novices engage in category-based processing. When presented with information that is discrepant from category-based knowledge, however, experts engaged in longer, more analytical thought processes, referred to as piecemeal processing, whereas novices relied on category-based processing. Also, expertise has an impact on comprehension processes and the stimulation of product-related inferences (Celsi and Olson 1988). That is, as a consumer goes from relatively automatic processing to more focused processing, his or her knowledge level of the product category becomes increasingly influential in the types of thoughts stimulated.

Consumer knowledge is argued to influence the development of consumer responses to event sponsorships through its impact on information processing. Roy (2000) and Roy and Cornwell (2004) have found that consumers with higher levels of knowledge about the product category of the sponsoring brand, the sporting event, or both, have the ability to make more judgments about sponsor-event congruence and elicit more thoughts pertaining to the sponsorship than consumers with less knowledge in those areas. For example, individuals with expertise in golf might know about past sponsors of golf events and about the expense of sponsoring such events, and bring this knowledge to their assessment of any new sponsor.

Involvement

Mitchell (1979, 1981) views involvement as "an individual level, internal state variable that indicates the amount of arousal, interest, or drive evoked by a particular stimulus or situation" (1979, p. 194). Involvement is often conceptualized as a two-dimensional construct comprised of cognitive and affective dimensions (Park and McClung 1986; Zaichkowsky 1994). In a consumer behavior context, the cognitive dimension reflects personal relevance of the message

content based on functional performance, while the affective dimension reflects personal relevance of the message based on emotional or aesthetic appeals to a person's desire to express an actual or ideal self-image (Zaichkowsky 1994). Due to the limited message content of sponsorship communications, the affective dimension is of most interest here.

Research into the nature of the involvement-behavior relationship for advertising messages suggests an inverted-U relationship, similar to findings in research on arousal (Park and McClung 1986). According to Pham (1992), an inverted-U relationship exists between felt involvement and recognition of embedded sponsorship stimuli (e.g., billboards lining the fence of a soccer field). Lardinois and Derbaix (2001) found a significant influence on unaided recall among those with high-enduring involvement (with the game of basketball).

Involvement has been theorized to moderate the persuasion effectiveness of advertising messages (Petty and Cacioppo 1981). Of particular interest to sponsorship, Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann (1983) found that under low-involvement conditions, the presence of peripheral cues, such as celebrity endorsers, was an important determinant of product evaluations. It is interesting to note that additional research has shown that high-involvement consumers hold more favorable brand attitudes when they perceive a match between endorser and brand (Schaefer and Keillor 1997).

In a study of the effects of match-up between a brand and event on responses toward sponsorship advertising, McDaniel (1999) explained the importance of considering involvement. This study used advertisement stimuli depicting sponsor-event pairings that differed in terms of perceived level of match-up and the form of media vehicle (genre of magazine) in which they were presented. Event involvement differed across the three events tested, and the sponsor's product category was considered high involvement for the participant sample. Results suggested that match-up effects were present, with more positive attitudes toward the sponsorship advertisements reported when there was a greater perceived match-up between the sponsor and event. Although perceived match-up varied with involvement, McDaniel noted that involvement is likely to be an important moderator in the relation between sponsor-event match-up and sponsorship advertising responses.

In sum, since sponsorships have few central messages, most of what is communicated can be considered peripheral cues. With this in mind, felt involvement (in general) and enduring involvement with the sponsored event are variables that may influence the information processing of a sponsorship and are expected to influence consumers' perceived congruence between sponsor and event. It seems reasonable that other forms of involvement (e.g., with the product category of the sponsor) warrant further investigation, however; at least one study examining purchase decision involvement found that

this did not co-vary with corporate image effects stemming from sponsorship (Pope and Voges 1999).

Social Alliances

We must also recognize that sponsorship audiences at a group level can be expected to have any number of preexisting social alliances that will influence receptivity to sponsorship-linked marketing communications and that these social alliances can vary greatly in their importance, duration, and influence. Social alliances are considered here as social categories (Tajfel and Turner 1985). With respect to the current discussion, the most obvious and perhaps well researched social alliances would relate to fans in sports contexts (e.g., Gwinner and Swanson 2003; Madrigal 2000; McDonald, Milne, and Hong 2002; Wann and Dolan 1994), but even here, a great deal of variability exists when one evaluates the role of sponsorship. For example, consider the nature of the fan relationship with a team like the Dallas Cowboys (www.dallascowboys.com) and contrast this with the fan relationship with an America's Cup team like Oracle-BMW Racing (www.oraclebmwracing.com). The Dallas Cowboys have sponsors including Ford Motors, MasterCard, and Miller Lite beer, just to name a few. The fan relationship, however, is held with the Dallas Cowboys, not the sponsors. In contrast, America's Cup teams tend to be one with their sponsors, because many of the competing teams in each race are established through sponsorship. Naturally, social alliances are also found in the arts and with causes, and with similarly varying degrees of importance.

The goal here is not to simply reoffer already established social group theories (even though they may apply), but rather to say that whether fan behavior in arenas or cohesiveness of private arts groups is considered, social alliances can play a potential role in motivating individual variables such as involvement and arousal, and in swaying "group think" regarding sponsorship response. Moreover, many sponsorships come with particular social alliances that must be considered, especially when sponsorship deals are contrary to the desires of established groups, as was seen in a number of stadium-naming sponsorships in the 1990s (Clark, Cornwell, and Pruitt 2002). On the positive side, existing strong alliances may support sponsorship goals when sponsors are accepted via the identification process and fan loyalty is translated to brand loyalty.

In summary, four individual-level variables are presented as influences on how consumers evaluate sponsorship messages: arousal, prior experience, involvement, and knowledge. It is individual differences such as these that impact how a consumer processes a brand-event stimulus in a sponsorship context. In addition, the potential influence of group-level variables, such as social alliances, was also discussed. There

are also market and situational factors that might influence an individual's processing. Examples of these follow.

MARKET AND SITUATIONAL FACTORS

Brand Equity

Brand equity refers to how a brand is perceived or positioned in the marketplace. Both sponsors and properties hold equity of a sort, and while this might be developed by sponsorship in the short run, the various brand equities of concern are given and are thus considered here as market or situational factors for a firm. At least eight brand equity measures (drawn from Aaker 1996) have been investigated in the sponsorship context and were reported by managers as being supported by sponsorship (Cornwell, Roy, and Steinard 2001). While sponsorship was perceived to make a greater contribution to general elements of brand equity (brand awareness, corporate image, and brand image) than to distinctive elements (brand personality, differentiating the brand from competition, image of quality, and brand loyalty), both general and distinctive elements were ranked above the midpoint on average. Thus, experience with sponsorship-linked marketing communications is argued to develop brand equity in the mind of the consumer; however, the brand equity a sponsor brings into an association influences information processing of that association. Substantial investments in marketing communications can serve as a signal of brand quality (Kirmani and Wright 1989). Differences in processing sponsorship stimuli between events with high-equity sponsors and low-equity sponsors is attributed to consumers having more accessible brand associations for high-equity brands than for low-equity brands.

The effect of a sponsor's brand equity on consumer memory for sponsorships has been termed a prominence bias (Johar and Pham 1999). This implies that low-equity sponsors may not reap the benefits (e.g., sponsor recognition and more positive brand image) that high-equity sponsors of similar events enjoy (Pham and Johar 2001), with this being more pronounced for sponsorships of major events (Johar and Pham 1999). The role of brand equity in sponsorship response has also been examined in terms of its effect on perceptions of sponsor-event congruence (Roy 2000). High-equity sponsors in three different product categories were perceived as being more congruent sponsors than low-equity competitors for major events such as the Summer Olympics, United States Open Men's Golf Tournament, and the National Basketball Association All-Star Game. In turn, persons with a high level of perceived sponsor-event congruence had a more positive attitude toward the sponsor and a stronger relationship between event attitude and brand attitude than persons having a low level of perceived congruence. High-equity sponsors enjoy an advantage over their low-equity counterparts in terms

of greater cognitive responses (e.g., recognition and recall), but not greater levels of attitudinal change (Lardinois and Quester 2001). Many benefits of brand equity are afforded a firm when it has a strong brand. Among these benefits is increased effectiveness of marketing communications (Keller 1998), including sponsorships. The advantages enjoyed by high-equity sponsors, together with disadvantages, deserve additional researcher attention.

Clutter

In early discussions of the managerial value of sponsorship, communication within a low-clutter environment (i.e., one where there is a low level of competing communications) was cited as an advantage (Gardner and Shuman 1987). As the popularity of sponsorship has increased, so too has clutter. One study has attempted to model the influence of individuals' perceptions of sponsorship clutter on consumer response to sponsorship (Cornwell et al. 2000). The measure used in the field setting was not an objective measure of messages observed or remembered but was instead derived from self-reported perceptions. Despite having only a two-item measure of clutter, results indicated a negative influence of the perception of clutter on recall and recognition of sponsors.

Recent research on the influence of multiple sponsors for an event goes beyond simple consideration of a cluttered environment and examines consumers' attitudes related to the specific characteristics of sponsors for the same event (Ruth and Simonin 2003). Arguing that the pairing of products and events is a reciprocal relationship where events influence the perception of sponsors and sponsors influence perceptions of events, Ruth and Simonin (2003) show, for example, that the presence of a controversial product (e.g., tobacco) can negatively impact event impressions. Thus, not only can the presence of other sponsors influence communication processing; it can influence image, and potentially, image transfer. While the number and visibility of sponsors and advertisers for a particular event is set largely by financial and media requirements of the sport, art, or cause seeking sponsorship, clutter resulting in an oversubscribed event can at least be avoided by managers, as can controversial cosponsors.

Competitor Activities

While any number of actions by rival competitors could influence the sponsorship mechanics of a true sponsor, one of the most discussed behaviors of competitors in sponsorship is ambushing (for a review, see Crow and Hoek 2003). Sandler and Shani (1989) discuss ambushing as the efforts of an organization to associate itself indirectly with an event in the hope of reaping the same benefits as an official sponsor. As observers of sponsorship note, this has become an art form with all

manner of high jinks being used to attract attention (e.g., streakers with competitors' names tattooed on their buttocks, competitor hot air balloons drifting over stadiums). The specifics of ambush marketing—what is and is not deemed ambushing from a legal perspective—are still debated (Hoek 2004), but from an information-processing perspective, the potential interference is all that matters. The intrusion of competitor information will likely have detrimental effects on memory for the true sponsor. Moreover, since most of the ambushing tactics are whimsical or fun, few, except the true sponsors, are likely to hold negative opinions of the ambusher. This observation is, however, open to empirical investigation.

MANAGEMENT FACTORS

The effectiveness of sponsorship-linked marketing communications is largely dependent on the response processes of consumers. Sponsorship managers, however, are able to influence the outcome of a sponsorship program, and some preliminary observations regarding managerial influence on sponsorship mechanics can be made.

Creating an environment of proactive sponsorship management is essential in ensuring that all activities ultimately contribute to enhancing clear and memorable communications. A commitment to managing sponsorships in such a manner is consistent with the view that sponsorship is a resource that can be a source of competitive advantage for a firm (Amis, Slack, and Berrett 1999). Sponsorship managers who actively manage their sponsorships believe that they have succeeded in differentiating their brands from competition and have added financial value to their brands (Cornwell, Roy, and Steinar 2001). Two management factors known to play a role in the outcome of sponsorships are a firm's sponsorship policy and the extent to which a sponsorship is leveraged once rights to commercial association have been obtained.

Sponsorship Policy

Establishment of a comprehensive sponsorship policy for potential and existing sponsorships is necessary to ensure that consumers are able to build a web of connectivity among a firm's various sponsorship activities. This is done through determining what types of events should be sponsored, which audiences should be targeted, the number of sponsorships that should be undertaken, and the level of sponsorship that should be sought for given events.

Often events are chosen because of significant overlap between the target audience for the event and the target market of the brand, or because of functional similarity between the brand and event (e.g., a swimming event and a brand of swimwear). With this in mind, managers undertake sponsorships with the expectation that mechanics such as mere expo-

sure and low-level processing will play a role in promoting consumer-focused outcomes such as brand awareness, preference, or purchase intent. Research on event-sponsor congruence and balance theory suggests that memory will be facilitated and image transfer enhanced for those pairings that seem more logically sanctioned to consumers, and that managers should thus aim to sponsor those events perceived to be related to their field of business (e.g., Cornwell, Pruitt, and Van Ness 2001; Gwinner 1997; Gwinner and Eaton 1999; Johar and Pham 1999; McDaniel 1999; Speed and Thompson 2000). Articulation research, however, also reveals that incongruent event-sponsor pairings may be used to achieve desirable sponsorship outcomes, provided that a reason for the sponsorship is explained by the sponsor (Cornwell et al. 2003).

The research by Johar and Pham (1999) and Pham and Johar (2001) on the prominence bias is pertinent in deciding which events to sponsor. This bias suggests that companies perceived to be more prominent in the marketplace can often be credited with a sponsorship regardless of whether they are an actual sponsor. Pham and Johar recommend that prominent brands take advantage of this, but they also suggest wariness when evaluating the effectiveness of a sponsorship through measures of memory, since consumer recollections may be based on prominence rather than actual sponsorship exposure. They advise that nonprominent brands may find sponsoring prominent events less effective in enhancing brand awareness and that greater value may be obtained through sponsoring less prominent events.

Policy must also address the portfolio of sponsorships that a firm holds. Multiple sponsorships have the potential to reach more consumers, such as Gatorade's sponsorship of football (NFL), basketball (NBA), Major League Baseball, golf (PGA), stockcar racing (NASCAR), and U.S. Soccer; however, there are risks involved with a portfolio of sponsorships (Ruth and Simonin 2003). From the consumer perspective, there is the risk of being associated with too many events, which can lead to confusion, diverse and unsupported memory networks, and potentially negative sponsorship response (Speed and Thompson 2000).

The level of sponsorship undertaken may also affect the various cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes that sponsors might seek. Sponsors can take on a variety of forms—title sponsor, presenting sponsor, category-exclusive sponsor, or sponsor with no special rights—with each form dictating how prominent the sponsor will be at the event. Mere exposure, low-level processing, and memory reactivation may be more relevant to those sponsors relying on on-site signage alone, whereas processes such as identification may be more relevant to those with exclusive or title contracts. Exclusive sponsorships, which often provide a sponsor with additional branding opportunities such as media advertising and on-site

hospitality, should increase the likelihood that more effective sponsorship processing will occur by setting the brand apart from others (Amis, Slack, and Berrett 1999; Gwinner 1997).

Research by Ruth and Simonin (2003) suggests that companies undertaking non-exclusive sponsorships may also need to consider which other brands will be present at the event, since the presence of controversial products could promote negative attitudes toward the event, and possibly toward related sponsors. Cornwell et al. (2000) have also noted that marketing clutter at events can have a negative impact on memory for sponsors, as discussed previously. This has implications for the sponsorships that managers decide to pursue, as well as the level of sponsorship undertaken. Clearly, such decisions could be informed by more research in the area.

Sponsorship Activation/Leverage

One of the keys to achieving desired consumer impact through sponsorship is to forge a link, or association, between a sponsor and the sponsored property. Mere exposure to a brand through such vehicles as on-site signage may create awareness, but awareness alone may not capture a unique position in consumers' minds. A challenge faced by many sponsors is that a large percentage of their target market may not recognize them as a sponsor of a particular event. Even worse, consumers may incorrectly identify a competitor that is not a sponsor as an event sponsor (Crimmins and Horn 1996; Johar and Pham 1999; Pham and Johar 2001).

Collateral communication of a brand's relationship with a property is referred to as activating, or leveraging, a sponsorship. While both terms are in use, we will use the term "leverage" to avoid any possible confusion with the term "spreading activation" found in discussions of network memory models. Sponsorship leverage can be achieved through a variety of marketing communication tools. For example, United Parcel Service touted its Olympics sponsorship by placing signage on its delivery vehicles. Beverage marketer SoBe leveraged its title sponsorship of the Summer and Winter Gravity Games (annual extreme sports competitions) by using media advertising, regional and national sweepstakes, local radio promotions, venue signage, and on-site sampling (Brockington 2003).

Higher levels of sponsorship leverage have been associated with perceptions of sponsorships succeeding in differentiating a brand and adding financial value to the brand (Cornwell, Roy, and Steinard 2001). Crimmins and Horn provide a blunt assessment of sponsors that fail to invest adequately beyond payment of rights fees: "If the brand cannot afford to spend to communicate its sponsorship, then the brand cannot afford sponsorship at all" (1996, p. 16). This implies the need to examine combined effects of sponsorships and other promotional tools.

A few studies in sponsorship have examined combined effects. Lardinoit and Derbaix (2001) considered individuals' levels of enduring involvement with basketball, television sponsorship, and field sponsorship in a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ factorial design. They found a weak positive interaction between television and field sponsorship on unaided recall under conditions of high involvement, but a negative interaction when testing for aided recall no matter the involvement level. Thus, their research suggested that the typically employed strategy of combining television and field sponsorship might not be cost-effective.

McCarville, Flood, and Froats (1998) used a five-group study with differing cumulative exposures to sponsorship-related communications: (1) control; (2) cause sponsorship exposure; (3) cause sponsorship plus detailed sponsor information; (4) cause sponsorship, sponsor information plus coupons; and (5) cause sponsorship, sponsor information, coupons plus product sample (pizza). Individuals who received product samples gave higher ratings for product quality, consistency, and intention to purchase, than those who received none. While the findings regarding a popular food among college students might be questioned for demand characteristics, the lack of variance for the other message groups suggests that more research is needed to better understand sponsorship leverage in integrated marketing programs.

In yet a third study of this type, Becker-Olsen and Simmons (2002) report two experiments examining the influence of fit as developed by collateral program activities. In their experiments, participants read news clippings containing an announcement of a firm's on-line store with the presence or absence of information regarding the firm's sponsorship of a nonprofit organization (with high or low fit). Results showed that individuals exposed to a low native fit condition, Alpo (brand dog food) sponsoring the Special Olympics (athletic event for the mentally disabled), versus a high native fit condition, Alpo sponsoring the Humane Society (charity supporting humane treatment of animals), reported less favorable thoughts and less favorable affective and behavioral responses to the firm. In the second experiment, created fit derived from program details (e.g., Alpo sponsoring the Special Olympics and also donating a pet to participants and publicizing evidence that caring for pets increases the self-esteem of the mentally disabled) resulted in positive outcomes parallel to those found with native fit (p. 287).

Obviously, both the weight and the nature of leveraging activities are central to communication effects achieved in sponsorship. One logical extension of the current research on leverage is to consider thematically tied advertising. One would expect that collateral advertising that not only notes the sponsorship relationship, but as Crimmins and Horn (1996) suggest, strengthens the link creatively, would create stronger traces in memory.

SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This paper concerns itself primarily with exploration of theoretical explanations of how sponsorship works. Even though a good deal of literature is reviewed in this process, this paper cannot be considered a comprehensive review of sponsorship research since it mainly focused on works positing a theoretical explanation of sponsorship, to the exclusion of many that did not. In addition to the centerpiece of sponsorship processing mechanics, a number of factors influencing these and the nature of sponsorship outcomes were examined. Again, we must disclaim comprehensive coverage, with the goal being illustrative rather than exhaustive consideration of potential variables of interest. For example, in addition to the factors of past experience, knowledge, involvement, arousal, and social alliances, tens, if not hundreds, of individual- and group-level variables might be considered in any empirical work on sponsorship effects.

Thus, while this model of consumer-focused sponsorship-linked marketing communications could be criticized for merely being a sketch, it is the first to account for the theoretical progress to date, bringing together important variables such as individual (and group) factors, as well as market and management factors, with the aim of understanding their influence on sponsorship processing mechanics and related outcomes. Several research directions have already been mentioned, but additional future research areas stemming from this paper deserve emphasis and some expansion.

Need for Experimental Studies

First, it is clear that additional well-controlled experimental studies are essential to better understand processing of sponsorship communication stimuli. As Pham and Vanhuele state, "Without a rigorous methodology for studying how consumers process advertising fragments, any conclusion about their effectiveness or ineffectiveness seems premature" (1997, p. 408). Related to this point, dependent measures should be carefully designed to correspond to the communication issues at hand. Ecological validity needs to be reexamined. If cued-recall or recognition tasks are used, they should parallel the recall and recognition needed by individuals to navigate in the marketplace. Extending this idea suggests that we must consider nonconscious processing more thoroughly in future research.

Implicit Memories

Additional research on implicit memories—those not available to conscious recollection—implies a need for research into the unconscious and automatic sponsorship-linked influences on consumer behaviors. Research by Bargh (2002) in

social cognition finds a substantial role for nonconscious processes, and moreover, a central and modifying role of needs and goal pursuits in psychological and behavioral phenomena (p. 281). In the sponsorship context, this suggests that not only are brand names or logos processed without conscious awareness, but that within the sponsorship or its leveraging, goal pursuits (e.g., health-related goals, competitive goals) might be activated. Bargh argues that when health-related goals are activated, "the person should evaluate groceries in terms of his or her health values and their implications," while "competition goal operation should cause one to evaluate status-oriented products more positively" (2002, p. 282). Bargh warns that the demonstrated powerful influence of simple goal priming on nonconscious processes implies a great responsibility for researchers because of the potential for abuse.

Resolving Imbalance

We have discussed balance theory as one mechanism useful in understanding sponsorship effects. Recent theorizing by Woodside and Chebat (2001) suggests that storytelling as a methodology can help us understand how consumers resolve imbalanced states. Storytelling refers to explaining the related concepts and motivations that underlie actions and events, so that the entire situation can be better understood, rather than just superficial elements of it. The authors cite an example of Barq's brand root beer sponsoring heavy metal music to target teenage boys. In their analysis, given that parents tend to view this music as rebelling against parental authority, the authors state that the company must embrace parents as consumers (presumably by discontinuing the sponsorship) or the parents must start to dislike Barq's. This approach to balance analysis describes not only imbalanced relationships, but also how the main actors resolve the tension found in an imbalanced state. Further investigation is warranted.

Multiple Sponsors

We have also mentioned clutter as a potential influence on consumers' processing of sponsorship-related information. It seems that the investigation of balance theory via storytelling might also help unravel any imbalanced relationships in the case of multiple sponsors. Companies are already sensitive to combining their sponsorship activities with those of tobacco or alcohol, but additional sensitive or incongruent relationships, perhaps less obvious, could be considered with this approach. It is assumed here that individuals would perceive harmonious relationships as less competitive and chaotic, and thus less cluttered. This could also hold implications for the concept of articulation. If various sponsors for a single event are perceived to be harmonious in their relational context, this might support memory for these sponsors within an as-

sociative memory model. One must also recognize that this approach might reduce sponsor distinctiveness; thus, empirical research is needed. In short, research examining integrated marketing communications programs should be extended, again, with well-controlled experiments. Furthermore, we must ask how closely related the various communications strategies employed in sponsorship-linked marketing should be for optimal learning.

Sponsor Distinctiveness

Sponsorship has been found by managers to be useful in differentiating the brand from competitors (Cornwell, Roy, and Steinard 2001), the idea being that brand image is enhanced through sponsorships of exciting, image-defining events, making the brand stand out from others. From an associative network perspective, sponsorship is adding a unique and potentially strong link to the brand in memory. It is interesting to note that competitive pressures and the success of sponsorship as a communications tool find direct marketplace competitors to be direct competitors for sponsorship opportunities. For example, Pepsi and Coke divide the NASCAR sponsorship pie in the soft drink category (Pedicini 2003), and while the nature of their sponsorship commitments are constantly in flux, sponsoring drivers, teams, and particular races, both brands hold links to the concept "sponsor of NASCAR" in the consumer's mind. This phenomenon seems even more problematic when one major competitor replaces another as an official product or service. According to Henderson, Iacobucci, and Calder (1998), when sets of nodes become structurally equivalent, brand parity follows. Additional research is needed to understand information processing for brands in parity and their special need for distinctiveness when using a sponsorship-linked marketing strategy.

New Approaches to Congruence

Although the value of congruency between sponsor and event is relatively well established now, this notion offers little to those sponsors with few natural links to sports, the arts, or charities. Previous research has focused on examination of high and low fit, and on improvement of fit via articulation. Yet another theoretical perspective on congruence, that of Mandler (1982), considers the "value" of congruity, arguing that congruence "gives rise to valuations of familiarity, acceptability, and a basic sense of liking" (p. 3). The predictability of congruent relationships, however, means that they are less interesting; they may therefore receive less extensive processing and be less positively valued. Mandler further argues that moderate levels of incongruence result in additional processing, namely, that required to resolve the incongruence, and that when this processing is successful, it too is positively valued. In

other words, people find resolving moderate incongruence to be a rewarding and valued experience. Highly incongruent items may receive additional processing, but Mandler theorizes that this produces frustration, and is therefore negatively valued. In summary, Mandler predicts an inverted U-shaped relationship between incongruity and valuations. His theoretical predictions have been supported in studies of the relationships between a product and a product category (Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989) and between new brands and companies with existing brands (Meyers-Levy, Louie, and Curren 1994).

In accordance with Mandler's (1982) congruity theory, Jagre, Watson, and Watson (2001) have put forward several specific research propositions. They proposed that extremely low-fit sponsors would produce greater levels of recall than either high-fit or moderate-fit sponsors, due to the higher level of processing required to resolve the sponsor-event incongruity. In terms of attitude, they suggested that moderate-fit sponsors would experience higher attitudinal ratings and more favorable sponsor evaluations than either high- or low-fit sponsors since, as Mandler outlined, incongruity is more interesting than congruity, but too much can lead to frustration and negative evaluations. It was further proposed that low-fit sponsors would result in lower attitudinal ratings from consumers and less favorable sponsor evaluations than either high- or moderate-fit sponsors. Although these propositions may be justified in terms of Mandler's theory, empirical validation in a sponsorship context is clearly needed before firm conclusions can be drawn.

Mandler's (1982) value of congruency theory is not inconsistent with past findings in sponsorship, since typical research investigates congruent and incongruent sponsor-event pairs but does not discuss the additional processing required for resolution and the resulting positive values. With this theoretical perspective in mind, we must ask whether a lack of congruence is truly problematic from an information-processing perspective. Moreover, we must ask whether the emphasis on congruence as a central promoter or inhibitor to information processing and subsequent memory of sponsorship stimuli has overshadowed other factors of potential interest (such as a person's persuasion knowledge, discussed below).

Persuasion Knowledge in Sponsorship

Friestad and Wright (1994) developed the Persuasion Knowledge Model to explain theoretically how people develop and use persuasion knowledge to cope with persuasion attempts. Of particular importance in the sponsorship area is their "change-of-meaning principle" (p. 12), where viewing an agent (sponsor) as using a tactic during a persuasion attempt holds an influence on the persuasion episode. Though clearly commercially driven in recent times, sponsorship still retains some philanthropic meanings in some contexts. For example, spon-

sorship of a race to support breast cancer research and mammogram screening is a choice of the firm, and while commercially motivated, is still seen as benefiting the community. If, however, the sponsor engages in some additional tactic aimed at leveraging the sponsorship, such as attempting to sell a product to those people on a mailing list for the event, there may be a change-of-meaning for the sponsorship that is related to the additional selling message. Individuals may now perceive the sponsorship as a tactic and discount any previously held positive feelings toward the firm associated with its philanthropic sponsorship.

A number of papers have questioned the commercialization of sponsorships (e.g., Weiner 2000) and have investigated the perceptions of individuals, but none have considered how individuals perceive sponsorships and related collateral communications as persuasion attempts. This is a potentially valuable area of future research, particularly for cause-related sponsorships and community-based sponsorships that seek to develop goodwill. It seems that if concurrent or subsequent leveraging of the sponsorship involves tactics viewed as more commercial in nature than the original sponsorship, a change-of-meaning may be triggered and the image and goodwill developed in the consumer's mind might be revisited.

Particular Sponsorship Models

We have presented a general model of mechanisms found in consumer-focused sponsorship. Marketing practitioners and researchers alike would benefit from further consideration of the relations between the information-processing mechanics of particular sponsorships in sports, the arts, and causes, and desired sponsorship outcomes. For example, sponsorship of a team-based sport with a large fan base would probably be most concerned with the process of identification, whereas sponsorship of a charitable event might be more concerned with image transfer and the development of goodwill. The relationship between sponsorship type, mechanisms, and outcomes suggests even more careful consideration of sponsorships combining two of the main categories (e.g., sports and causes).

Sponsorship is a fast growing marketing tool. In line with this growth, research into sponsorship has increased substantially in recent years. To improve the standard of future research, critical synthesis and periodic stocktaking, such as that offered in this paper, are clearly needed. This paper provides a model of consumer-focused sponsorship-linked marketing communications that can serve as a foundation on which future research directions can be considered and developed.

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