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# Building Brand Image Through Event Sponsorship: The Role of Image Transfer

Kevin P. Gwinner and John Eaton

*Past sponsorship research has primarily focused on awareness building strategies, and has virtually ignored brand image issues. As a result, little guidance is available for firms that seek to use sponsorship opportunities to aid in brand positioning. This study reports the results of an experiment using undergraduate student subjects, who assessed the degree to which a sporting event's image was transferred to a brand through event sponsorship activity. Subjects in the sponsorship pairing treatment were more likely to report similarities on brand-event personality components than subjects who were not exposed to the event-brand sponsorship link, thus supporting the notion that sponsorship results in image transfer. Further, we found that when event and brand are matched on either an image or functional basis the transfer process is enhanced. Management implications for sporting event sponsorship and future research directions are discussed.*

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While firms enter into sponsorship arrangements for a variety of reasons, two of the most common are: (1) to increase brand awareness, and (2) to establish, strengthen, or change brand image (Cornwell and Maignan 1998; Crowley 1991; Gwinner 1997; Marshall and Cook 1992; Meenaghan 1991; Meerabeau et al. 1991). Typically, strategies aimed at increasing brand awareness are implemented using a multitude of promotional media and are designed to have the sponsoring brand exposed to as many potential consumers as possible. Past research has examined the effectiveness of these awareness building strategies through a variety of methods (e.g., total event attendance, exit polls, sales following the event, and number of media mentions). Regrettably, far less research attention has focused on brand image issues. Indeed, researchers have suggested that little is understood about what makes sponsorship "work," particularly with regard to image association (Javalgi et al. 1994; Lee, Sandler and Shani 1997).

The purpose of this paper is to gain insight into the brand image aspects of sponsorship. Specifically, based on theoretical perspectives from the celebrity endorsement, schema, and advertising literatures, we propose and test several relationships involving the influence of sporting event sponsorship on the sponsoring brand's image.

## *Image Transfer in Sporting Event Sponsorships*

Brand image has been defined as "perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in memory" (Keller 1993, p. 3). This definition takes an associate memory network view, in that brand image is based upon linkages a consumer holds in his/her memory structure regarding the brand. These linkages, or in Keller's terminology, "brand associations," are developed from a variety of sources including brand and product category experiences, product attributes, price information, positioning in promotional communications, packaging, user imagery (e.g., typical brand users), and usage occasion (Keller 1993). From a theoretical position, Keller (1993) suggests that brand associations can be influenced when a brand becomes linked with a celebrity through an endorsement or linked with a sporting event through sponsorship activities. In these cases, the pre-existing asso-

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ciations held in consumers' memories regarding a celebrity or sporting event become linked in memory with the endorsed or sponsoring brand. In essence, the celebrity or event image is transferred to the brand.

This transfer of associations is consistent with McCracken's (1989) view of the celebrity endorsement process. McCracken eschews the "credibility" and "attractiveness" models of endorsement used to explain the persuasive nature of endorsers. Instead he offers a theory of meaning transfer, where "meaning" refers to an overall assessment of what a celebrity "represents" to the consumer. This meaning is built upon an individual's interpretation of the celebrity's public image as demonstrated in "television, movies, military, athletics, and other careers" (McCracken 1989, p. 315). According to this theory, the meaning attributed to celebrities moves from the celebrity endorser to the product when the two are paired in an advertisement (McCracken 1989). The transfer process is completed when a consumer acquires/consumes the product, thus transferring the meaning to the user.

With regard to implications for brand image, sporting events and celebrity endorsers are similar on two levels. First, consumers can associate both sporting events and celebrities with particular meanings. While celebrities derive their meanings from consumer perceptions of their various public activities (e.g., movies, athletics, politics, etc.), the meanings associated with sporting events are derived from the type of event, the event's characteristics (e.g., professional status, venue, size, etc.), and individual consumer factors such as one's past experiences with the event (Gwinner 1997). Second, events may act in a manner analogous to celebrity endorsers in the transfer of image to sponsoring brands. That is, just as consumers associate a celebrity's "meanings" with the brand they endorse, consumers may also associate a sporting event's "meanings" with a sponsoring brand. Obviously, if this image transfer process is occurring, then brand managers considering sponsorship arrangements should not only consider exposure issues (i.e., brand awareness) but should also take into account the congruence between a sporting event's image and the image/positioning goals for their brands. While it is possible that the directionality of the image transfer may move from brand to event rather than event to brand, this is less likely to occur when the event has a strong established image relative to the sponsoring brand. Further, since the primary focus of the spectator is typically on the activities of the sporting event rather than on the sponsors, the event's image is likely to be more salient in their mind, suggesting the image transfer process would move from event to brand. This discussion leads to the first hypothesis:

H1: A sporting event's image will transfer to a sponsoring brand's image when they are linked through sponsorship.

### *The Impact of Event and Brand Match-up on Image Transfer*

Many scholars have examined or commented on the importance of matching the characteristics of spokespersons with the characteristics of the products they endorse (see Lynch and Schuler [1994] for an excellent review of this literature). Generally, these types of studies have found that a match between endorser and brand leads to a variety of positive outcomes for firms including enhanced spokesperson expertise/credibility, a more positive attitude toward the ad, a more positive attitude toward the brand and higher brand recall.

Kahle and Homer (1985) were among the first to empirically examine and propose a "match-up" hypothesis in the context of celebrity endorsement. These authors argued and found support for the notion that advertising effectiveness is increased when the image of the celebrity converges with the image of the endorsed product. Specifically, they found physically attractive celebrity endorsers of a beauty enhancing product (i.e., endorser-brand match) to have a positive influence on consumer's brand attitudes, purchase intentions, brand recall, and recall of advertisement arguments. Building on Kahle and Homer, many spokesperson-brand congruence studies have been conducted by manipulating some physical attribute of the spokesperson to be in-congruence or out-of-congruence with a given product. For example, in one experiment, Lynch and Schuler (1994) manipulated muscularity of the spokesperson to be in or out of congruence with products that either helped to produce muscularity (e.g., exercise equipment) or products perceived to be masculine in nature (e.g., car batteries). In another study, Kamins (1990) manipulated spokesperson attractiveness to be in or out of congruence with an attractiveness related product. The Kamins study found that when product and spokesperson physical characteristics were congruent, then spokesperson believability/knowledge was increased, while Lynch and Schuler (1994) found that congruency led to high perceived spokesperson knowledge. One notable exception to the manipulation of spokesperson physical characteristics is Misra and Beatty (1990) who examined image congruence in a holistic manner akin to McCracken's notion of meaning. In their study, Misra and Beatty matched spokesperson characteristics with product characteristics.

For example, in their pretest of celebrities, Clint Eastwood was associated with the characteristics of "tough" and "rugged." In the congruent condition this celebrity was paired with a fictitious brand of jeans (Unitough jeans), while in the incongruent condition he was paired with a fictitious board game called Funnybone. Results of this study indicated that the congruence condition resulted in higher recall and more favorable brand attitudes than incongruent or neutral congruency pairings. Kamins and Gupta (1994) also manipulated spokesperson-product congruence in terms of image. They found increased congruence resulted in perceptions of higher believability and attractiveness of the spokesperson and a more favorable product attitude.

So why does this match-up hypothesis seem to be in effect? One of the more compelling arguments proposed is based on schema theory (Lynch and Schuler 1994; Misra and Beatty 1990). A schema is a cognitive structure that represents knowledge about a type of stimulus, for example, a person, event, or object (Bartlett 1932; Lord and Foti 1986). Schema theory is based on research which found that memory is not a verbatim account of past experiences, but rather a blend of both specific memories as well as general abstractions about types of people, activities, and objects (Bartlett 1932; Rumelhart and Ortony 1977). Schema represents a mechanism to allow individuals to function in a complex environment. That is, instead of having to recall from memory what behaviors are appropriate in a *specific* situation (e.g., boarding a United Airlines flight) or what evaluations have been made of some *specific* person (e.g., Dr. Bernhard) or *specific* object (Campbell's soup), one is able to simply recall knowledge related to the *general type* of situation (airline boarding), person (heart surgeon), or object (soup).

With regard to the use of schema theory in support of the match-up hypothesis, Misra and Beatty (1990) found evidence of a "filtering model," which suggested spokesperson characteristics that are incongruent with brand schema characteristics will be "filtered out" and not encoded as well as congruent information. They argued that the better recall demonstrated by subjects in their congruent condition is a result of better or more effective encoding of information. Further, they proposed, but did not test, that this encoded information associated with a congruent celebrity spokesperson schema would become integrated with the product's schema. If this were to hold true, then one would expect the schemas of celebrities and the schemas of the products they endorse to become more similar, assuming congruence of some salient characteristics.

In an event sponsorship context, McDaniel (1999) has explored an aspect of the match-up hypothesis by matching event and brand in terms of involvement. He found that subjects rated attitude toward the ad significantly more positively when a highly involving product (e.g., an automobile) was paired with a highly involving sporting event (e.g., the Olympics) than when the product was paired with a low involvement sporting event (e.g., PBA Bowling). In his study, event-product involvement match was not found to have an effect on attitude toward the brand or purchase intention. While providing insight into one match up dimension, McDaniel's study did not attempt to match the sporting event and the sponsoring brand on attributes related to their respective "meanings" in the manner that McCracken (1989) discussed or that Misra and Beatty (1990) explored.

This begs the question, "on what basis might we judge a sporting event to be similar or dissimilar to a product?" McDonald (1991) discusses the importance of product relevance to the sponsored event, suggesting that it might occur directly or indirectly. The direct method occurs when the sponsoring firm's products are (or could be) used in the event. Indirectly, relevance can be achieved if some aspect of the sponsor's image corresponds with the event. Gwinner (1997) has used the terms "functional based" and "image based similarity" to refer to the potential congruence between events and the brands/companies that act as sponsors. Consistent with McDonald (1991), Gwinner (1997) has suggested that functional based similarity can occur when the sponsored brand "is actually used by the participants during the event..." (p.152). Examples of this type of similarity would include Seiko being an official timer at the U.S. Open Tennis Championships or Gatorade sponsoring the Ironman Triathlon. In both cases, functional similarity is present because of the use of the sponsoring brand in the event. Image based similarity has been described as occurring when the "image of the event is related to the image of the brand..." (Gwinner 1997, p.152). For example, the Master's Golf Tournament and Cadillac Automobiles may be similar in terms of a prestige image. Drawing on the earlier schema theory discussion, it can be argued that congruent event-brand information in the form of either functional or image based similarity will lead to enhanced image transfer. Thus, extending the notion of the match-up hypothesis found in the celebrity endorser context, we offer the following two-part hypothesis:

- H2a: Similarity between brand and event will influence the image transfer such that the image transfer will be stronger for



brands having functional-based similarity with the event they are sponsoring than when brands have no similarity with the event.

H2b: Similarity between brand and event will influence the image transfer such that the image transfer will be stronger for brands having image-based similarity with the event they are sponsoring than when brands have no similarity with the event.

## Method

### Overview

To test the hypotheses an experiment was conducted using one between groups factor (sponsorship: [yes sponsorship and no sponsorship]) and one repeated measures factor (level of event-brand similarity: [image based, functional based, and no similarity]). While there may be many ways to examine image transfer, our examination uses brand and event personality. Brand personality can be regarded as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand..." (Aaker 1997, p. 347). Brand personality has been described as an important aspect of brand image that is impacted by one's expectations of the type of person who would use a particular product – user imagery – and in which situations a product might be used – usage imagery (Aaker 1997; Keller 1993; Plummer 1985). Both user and usage imagery can be communicated in an event sponsorship context. The brand personality concept is important because it serves as a mechanism upon which producers can differentiate their goods and services. This becomes especially critical when other potentially differentiating features are perceived by consumers as equal across competing brands (Plummer 1985).

### Pretests

The first pretest sought to find appropriate pairings of sporting events and sponsoring products to represent each of the three types of similarity (functional based, image based, and no similarity) for use in the main experiment. As illustrated in Table 1, each potential sporting event was paired with three different brands. Gwinner (1997) suggests that certain event characteristics (e.g., size, history, venue, etc.) will influence an event's image. Using this as a guide, we selected seven sporting events based on their national visibility and rich, long histories. This

was done because subjects in the main study needed to have some prior image of the event in order to increase our confidence in the image transfer measure. That is, they needed to *have* an image of the event in order to have it transfer to the brand.

We developed scale items to measure functional and image based similarity based on the definition provided by Gwinner (1997). Functional based similarity was measured using three items assessed on seven-point strongly disagree/strongly agree scales. The three items were: (1) "It is likely that (participants) in the (event name) use (brand name) during the (event name)," (2) "When I watch the (event name), I often see (brand name) being (used)," and (3) "(Brand name) is not a product that (participants) in the (event name) would consider (using)." The third item was reverse coded. The parenthetical "participants" label in these questions was replaced by the appropriate participant title, depending upon the specific event (e.g., player, rider, driver, etc.). Cronbach's alpha for this scale is .89, thus demonstrating good reliability.

Image based similarity was also assessed with seven-point strongly disagree/strongly agree anchored scales using the following three measures: (1) "The (event name) and (brand name) have a similar image," (2) "The ideas I associate with (brand name) are related to the ideas I associate with the (event name)," and (3) "My image of the (event name) is very different from the image I have of (brand name)." The third image based similarity measure was reverse coded in the analysis. Cronbach's alpha for this scale is .90. The best "No Similarity" pairing was operationalized as the event-product score receiving the *lowest* score on a summed scale consisting of all six items listed above.

One hundred and thirty-five undergraduate students enrolled in a marketing management course responded to the similarity pretest survey. In order to reduce respondent fatigue, each subject was randomly assigned to respond to questions regarding three of the seven events. This resulted in a useable sample of between 41 and 50 subjects per event.

As indicated in Table 1, for the image similarity condition, the pairing of the U.S. Open Golf Championship and Acura Automobiles was found to be the best pairing. For functional similarity, the pretest showed that the Indianapolis 500 Auto Race and Goodyear Tires was the best pairing. Finally, the best illustration of the no similarity condition was World Cup Soccer and Camel Cigarettes. These pairings were assessed after removing those subjects who scored below the scale mid-point on a brand familiarity question in order to increase validity.

**Table 1**  
**Pretest 1 Pairings of Sporting Events and Sponsoring Products**

<i>Similarity Type</i>	<i>Event Alternatives</i>	<i>Product Pairing Alternatives</i>	<i>Mean Similarity (std dev)</i>	
Image Based	Professional Beach Volleyball	Cuervo Gold tequila	9.9	(5.8)
		Dorito's tortilla chips	9.7	(4.7)
		Nintendo video games	9.0	(5.3)
	Kentucky Derby	American Express	10.3	(5.0)
		Oldsmobile automobiles	9.2	(5.1)
		John Hancock insurance	8.8	(4.0)
	<b>U.S. Open Golf Championship</b>	<b>Acura automobiles</b>	<b>12.1</b>	<b>(5.5)</b>
		Sony camcorders	10.5	(5.1)
		Michelob beer	9.4	(5.2)
Functional based	<b>Indianapolis 500 Auto Race</b>	<b>Goodyear tires</b>	<b>19.2</b>	<b>(2.6)</b>
		Pennzoil motor oil	17.0	(3.6)
		Shell gasoline	14.1	(4.8)
	NCAA basketball tournament	Champion brand uniforms	16.9	(3.1)
		Reebok shoes	16.0	(4.4)
		Powerade sports drink	15.5	(4.3)
No similarity	<b>World Cup Soccer</b>	Dell computers	6.9	(4.8)
		Clorox bleach	6.4	(4.5)
		<b>Camel cigarettes</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>(2.0)</b>
	Rose Bowl	Irish Spring soap	5.3	(3.7)
		Renuzit air fresheners	4.7	(2.5)
		Levi's jeans	4.1	(2.3)

Note: Bold faced event-product combinations were rated as the best representatives of their respective similarity type category (based on high mean value for image and functional similarity pairings and low mean value for no similarity pairing) and were subsequently used in the main study.

A second pretest was conducted to create a set of personality-oriented adjectives that could be used to describe image dimensions of each of the three events selected from the first pretest. Twenty adjectives were generated by the authors for each of the three sporting events. In order to increase the saliency of the task, only adjectives that could potentially describe the particular event were included (Graeff 1996). Eighty-one undergraduate students enrolled in a marketing course used a seven-point scale to rate the 60 adjectives on their usefulness in describing each of the three events (20 adjectives per event). The ten adjectives rated as most useful in describing the event were selected for use in the experiment and are listed in Table 2.

### **Experimental Procedure**

Three hundred and sixty undergraduate business students participated in the experiment for extra

credit. Because of the use of sporting events with long, rich histories, we believe a student sample will be familiar with the events and, therefore, the results will be generalizable to a larger population. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of the two sponsorship treatments. Randomization assures that the impact of individuals' prior product schemas will not bias the results in any given treatment. In each condition, subjects assessed event-brand combinations representing all three similarity conditions (i.e., image based, functional, no similarity). Cell sizes were evenly distributed, resulting in a uniform 180 subjects per cell assignment.

### **Independent Variables**

*Sponsorship condition.* This condition consisted of two levels, one in which the event and brand were paired in a sponsor relationship ("yes sponsorship")

**Table 2**  
**Adjectives Used in Measurement of Image Transfer from Event to Brand**

<i>U.S. Open Golf Championship (Image Based Similarity)</i>	<i>Indianapolis 500 Auto Race (Functional Based Similarity)</i>	<i>World Cup Soccer (No Similarity)</i>
Calm	Fast	Active
Mature	Dangerous	Multi-cultural
Leisurely	Exciting	Energetic
Clean	Aggressive	Exciting
Formal	Masculine	Foreign
Civilized	Wild	Thrilling
Accurate	Historic	Youthful
Pressure	Tactical	Tactical
Orderly	Strategic	Tough
Slow	Monotonous	Brazen

and one in which they were not ("no sponsorship"). In the "yes sponsorship" level subjects viewed three black and white photographs, each depicting one of the sporting events. Each picture was designed to resemble a magazine advertisement for the event and the actual logo of the sponsoring brand was superimposed on the photograph. In addition, ad copy typical of a sponsorship arrangement was included on the photo (e.g., "Camel cigarettes is proud to sponsor World Cup Soccer '98").

The cover page also added to the sponsorship manipulation through the survey title, "Product Sponsorship of Sporting Events Survey" and through the survey instructions which referred to the sponsorship ties in the photographs ("Yes Sponsorship" instructions: "We are conducting this study to better understand how students feel about corporate sponsorship of sporting events"). For the "no sponsorship" level no photos were included; the survey was titled simply, "Image Survey," and mention of the sponsorship was not included in the instructions ("No Sponsorship" instructions: "We are conducting this study to better understand the images students have regarding different events and products").

*Similarity condition.* As described in pretest 1, the similarity condition was manipulated by pairing sporting events and sponsoring brands to create three similarity levels: image similarity (the U.S. Open Golf Championship and Acura Automobile), functional similarity (the Indianapolis 500 Auto Race and Goodyear Tires), and no similarity (World Cup Soccer and Camel Cigarettes).

### **Dependent Measures**

*Adjective based image transfer measure.* As stated above, this study examines brand/event personality

as a specific aspect of image. Recall that in pretest two, three groups of ten adjectives were selected as being useful in describing each of the three events. In the experiment each of the 10 adjectives were rated as to how well it described the particular event (1=very well; 7=not at all) and then, separately, subjects responded as to how well the same 10 adjectives described the brand. If an image transfer is occurring, one would expect the image of the event and the image of the brand to be more similar in the "yes sponsorship" condition, as the event's image would be "transferring" to the brand. Accordingly, we calculated a measure of congruence/similarity by taking the sum of the absolute differences between the corresponding adjectives in the event and the brand ratings. For example, if a subject rated the adjective "mature" as a "2" for the event and a "5" for the brand, then the absolute difference for those corresponding adjectives would be "3." We summed the ten absolute difference scores for each event-brand pair to create a congruence index. Smaller numbers in the index indicate greater congruence (i.e., less difference between event and brand). Hypothesis one would predict that this measure will be significantly smaller for those subjects in the "yes sponsorship" level than in the "no sponsorship" level—indicating more similarity.

*Holistic image transfer measure.* Although the difference score method discussed above has been used by most studies examining self-image congruence, Sirgy et al. (1997) have argued for a more parsimonious measure of congruence. These authors suggest that a method which directly measures congruency using the respondent's own image dimensions and employing a holistic evaluation is more appropriate for examining image congruence between a brand

and one's own image. We extended this advice by adapting the Sirgy et al. (1997) measure to study event-brand congruence. Specifically, we offered the following instructions (adapted from Sirgy et al. 1997) and asked subjects to rate the consistency between the event image and the brand image:

"Take a moment to think about the (sporting event name). Think about the various images and experiences one would encounter when they attended or watched this event. Imagine this event in your mind and then describe the event using several adjectives such as: exciting, traditional, young, conservative, sexy, or whatever adjectives you think describe the image of this sporting event."

Subsequent to this mental imagery task, consistency was scored on a seven point scale (1=Strongly Agree, 7=Strongly Disagree) keyed to the following question: "My image of the (sporting event name) is consistent with my image of (brand name)."

## Results

Hypothesis One was analyzed using a one-way MANOVA, between groups design. With sponsorship treatment (yes, no) as the between groups factor and the three image congruence scores (based on summed absolute differences) as the criterion, a significant multivariate effect was found for sponsorship treatment (Wilk's lambda=.89,  $F [3,324]=12.33$ ;  $p < .0001$ ). The sample means are displayed in Table 3. Tukey's HSD test reveals that subjects who were exposed to the sponsorship arrangement had significantly lower difference scores (i.e., higher image congruence) than those subjects not exposed to the sponsorship tie for both the functional similarity (Indianapolis 500 and Goodyear tires) and image similarity (U.S. Open Golf Championship and Acura automobiles) event-brand combinations. There was not a significant difference between subjects in the "yes sponsorship" level and the "no sponsorship" level with regard to the no similarity event-brand combination (World Cup soccer and Camel cigarettes). Therefore, two of the three "absolute difference" congruence measures support Hypothesis One.

Hypothesis One was also tested using the holistic image congruence measures adopted from Sirgy et al. (1997). Again, using a one-way MANOVA, between groups design, we found a significant multivariate effect (Wilk's lambda=.92,  $F [3,353]=10.48$ ;  $p < .0001$ ) for sponsorship treatment. As with the adjective based congruence measure, the Tukey HSD test showed significantly higher congruence in the "yes sponsorship" treatment level than in the "no sponsorship" treatment level for both the functional similarity and

image similarity event-brand combinations. Although a significant difference does exist for the no similarity event-brand pairing, the means are the opposite of the hypothesized direction. That is, there is greater congruence between World Cup Soccer and Camel cigarettes in the "no sponsorship" condition. Thus, Hypothesis One is supported by two of the three holistic congruence measures. This unexpected pattern of results in the no similarity pairing is considered in more detail in the discussion section.

Hypotheses 2a and 2b state that image transfer will be stronger in sponsor relationships when there is either functional (H2a) or image (H2b) based similarity than when there is no similarity. Accordingly, these hypotheses were tested using only data from those subjects exposed to the sponsorship relationship (data in the top row of Table 3). Since each subject responded to all three event-brand sponsorships these hypotheses were analyzed using a one-way analysis of variance, repeated measures design. The test reveals a significant effect for sponsorship similarity using the summed absolute difference scores as the dependent congruence measures,  $F (2,328)=231.85$ ;  $p < .0001$ . Contrasts show that congruence of event and brand image is significantly less in the no similarity event-brand combination than in the functional similarity,  $F(1,164)=192.91$ ;  $p < .0001$  (H2a) and image based similarity,  $F(1,164)=362.11$ ;  $p < .0001$  (H2b) combinations. Further, although not hypothesized, congruence is stronger in the image based similarity pairing than in the functional based combination,  $F(1,164)=60.41$ ;  $p < .0001$ . Results using the holistic congruence measures adapted from Sirgy et al. (1997) provide consistent results. Under the holistic congruence measure, both image and functional event brand pairings are more congruent than the no similarity event-brand pairing. However, counter to the absolute difference measure, the holistic measure indicates transfer is higher in the functional similarity condition than in the image similarity condition. As such, hypotheses 2a and 2b are supported.

## Discussion

*The image transfer process.* The test of Hypothesis One indicates a transfer of image as evidenced by the majority of the personality congruence scores. Implications related to the image transfer findings fall on both sides of the sponsorship arrangement. First, on the product side, brand managers should be cognizant of the event's image when deciding upon the allocation of sponsorship dollars. Our results suggest



**Table 3**  
**Summary of Image Congruence Means and Image Transfer Strength**

	Adjective Measure <sup>1</sup>			Holistic Measure <sup>2</sup>		
	Image Similarity	Functional Similarity	No Similarity	Image Similarity	Functional Similarity	No Similarity
"Yes" Sponsorship <sup>3</sup>	14.2	20.3	34.3	3.3	2.7	6.4
"No" Sponsorship <sup>3</sup>	18.6	22.5	31.9	4.2	3.3	5.9

<sup>1</sup>Sum of the absolute differences between the ten corresponding adjectives in each event-brand pairing, lower numbers indicate greater congruence/image transfer.

<sup>2</sup>Single item measure of congruence based on respondent's own adjectives, lower numbers indicate greater congruence/image transfer.

<sup>3</sup>Means are significantly different between sponsorship treatment levels ( $p < .05$ ), except for the "no similarity" adjective based measure.

that brand positioning goals may be partially accomplished through event sponsorship. However, the potential to transfer an image inconsistent with positioning goals also exists. This implies that before entering into sponsorship arrangements firms would be advised to take a proactive role in measuring their target consumers' event image perceptions in order to confirm that the event's image is consistent with the firm's brand positioning goals. On the event side of the sponsorship arrangement, the image transfer findings suggest that an opportunity exists for event managers to differentiate their events based on the image they convey. As such, an event management team looking to attract new product sponsors or enhance the value for existing sponsors might provide empirical evidence showing the various dimensions of their event's image that could be used to enhance or maintain the image of the potential sponsor. Indeed, cultivating a particular image may allow the event to demand an added premium from sponsoring firms.

Of particular interest are the results found in conjunction with the no similarity event-brand pairing in both the adjective based and holistic measures. Although only significantly different in the holistic measure, the means in both cases were the reverse of the hypothesized direction for this condition. That is, there is a higher congruence mean in the "no sponsorship" treatment than in the "yes sponsorship" treatment for the advertisement depicting Camel cigarettes sponsoring the World Cup Soccer Championship.

We speculate that this is an artifact of the type of product used to operationalize the no similarity condition. Our manipulation may have inadvertently represented dis-similarity (i.e., the healthy image of sport contrasted with the unhealthy image of cigarettes) rather than simply a neutral/no similarity condition. There is evidence to suggest that consumers with strong product schemas (i.e., elaborate amounts of interconnected product knowledge) will be less

impacted by discrepant information than those with weak product schemas (Peracchio and Tybout 1996). That is, for those with strong product schemas, new information that is incongruent with existing knowledge is distorted and discounted so as not to upset the existing schema (Crocker, Fiske and Taylor 1984). Perhaps a similar phenomenon is at work in our pairing of Camel cigarettes and the World Cup Soccer Championship. In their work examining the effect of new information on attitude change, Sherif and Hovland (1961) found that in the case of extremely discrepant information, attitude changes often occurred in the opposite direction as that advocated by the discrepant communication (e.g., someone with a positive attitude toward a product is exposed to extremely negative information about the product and their product attitude becomes even more positive). In these cases the extremely discrepant product information may be viewed as highly biased, and thus individuals are apt to overcompensate with regard to their attitude toward that product. While the research in this area examines attitude change as opposed to image transfer, their findings are similar to the pattern displayed by our holistic congruence measure. That is, with respect to the no similarity condition (perhaps more appropriately named dis-similarity), not only is event-brand congruence not higher in the sponsorship condition, it is actually significantly lower. Perhaps those exposed to the cigarette-soccer pairing in the sponsorship condition found the notion so incongruent that they pushed the images apart in their minds.

*Event and brand match-up.* Our results extend the match-up hypothesis popularized in the celebrity endorsement literature to an event sponsorship context. The support of hypotheses 2a and 2b suggests that firms can leverage their sponsorship dollars, in terms of image transfer, by selecting events based on image or functional similarity. While there may be times when other promotional objectives (e.g., brand

awareness) are the overriding goal, recent research has begun to document the importance of image related objectives to corporate sponsors (Abratt, Clayton and Pitt 1987; Hoek, Gendall and Sanders 1993; Irwin and Sutton 1994). Indeed, in their framework for evaluating the attractiveness of sponsorship opportunities, Irwin and Asimakopoulos (1992) describe image association as one of the six primary sport sponsorship objectives. The point is that if image transfer is of concern, then event selection should be made with degree of similarity in mind. To enhance the strength of image transfer in cases of event sponsorship, it seems plausible that the marketing manager may wish to alter the communication regarding the product prior to the event, to be more congruent (on either a functional or image basis) with the image of the event. For example, a flurry of advertising linking the attributes of the event with the advertised product. Our findings indicate that if the match between the event and product can be made stronger, then the resulting image transfer will be more pronounced.

### Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The results of this study should be considered in light of several constraints. First, due to concerns over our subjects' available time, we conducted this experiment using one event-brand pairing per similarity type and a single exposure to the sponsorship stimuli. Other studies may wish to develop research designs allowing for a more robust treatment of the similarity condition utilizing multiple sponsorship ties. Although some experimental control may be lost, a field experiment at an actual sporting event would provide a context in which multiple brands coupled with the dynamic environment of a realistic event could be studied. Further, a field study would be able to incorporate other elements that are difficult to create in a "lab" setting (e.g., the influence of other spectators and the "secondary" nature of the sponsorship association versus the "primary" concern of the event itself). Second, our use of a student sample should be expanded to include non-student respondents. For example, future studies might explore how different "types" of fans experience the image transfer process. Given the increasing amount of research on sports-fan team identification (e.g., Fisher and Wakefield 1998; Mael and Ashforth 1992; Wann and Branscombe 1995; Wann and Dolan 1994), it would be interesting to test for differences on sponsorship issues (e.g., image transfer, sponsor recall, sponsor patronage, etc.) between high identified and low iden-

tified sports fans. A third issue is our use of different sets of instructions in the "yes" and "no" sponsorship conditions, as well as the use of photos only in the "yes" sponsorship condition. Given our research design, we are unable to assess the influence, if any, that these differences between conditions may have had on the dependent variables above and beyond establishing the event-brand linkage. Finally, we examined image congruence after the exposure to sponsorship stimuli. Thus, we assumed—rather than tested—the direction of the image transfer. Accordingly, it is possible that the image transfer occurs from the brand to the event rather than from the event to the brand. Examining the direction of the image flow and under what conditions it might be switched represents a fruitful future research direction. The use of known versus unknown brands might be instrumental in understanding these effects (Tripp, Jensen and Carlson 1994).

Another interesting issue surrounding image transfer and related to degree of similarity is that of conflicting images among multiple sponsorships. It is not uncommon for firms to engage in multiple sponsorship relationships over the course of any given year (Farrelly, Quester and Burton 1997). It may be insightful to consider the effect to a consumer's brand schema when a brand sponsors multiple events with conflicting images. Would the image transfer cancel out? Would the most recent image have the larger impact? Here schema theory may prove useful for providing insight. As discussed, discrepant information is less likely to lead to schema change because it is often discounted by the individual. However, a brand associated with multiple events, each having a different and discrepant meaning, might lend credence to the discrepant information, or at least call into question the existing schema. Alternatively, social adaptation theory would suggest that discrepant event associations would, presumably, not be effective sources of information and, therefore, would not facilitate adaptation to environmental conditions (Kahle and Homer 1985). In contrast, it may be possible for a firm to positively leverage the image transfer by sponsoring multiple events with consistent images. Of course, the sponsorship of two (or more) events with conflicting images only becomes an issue when a given targeted consumer group is aware of both sponsorship ties. Still, within a single event it may be possible to have conflicting similarity types (i.e., functional and image based). For example, an interesting future research question could address how image transfer might be affected when an event-product pairing is high in functional similarity, but low in image similarity (and

vice versa). Additionally, will image transfer be enhanced when both types of similarity are present (and consistent) in the sponsorship arrangement?

A related issue is the impact of multiple sponsors of a given event. Gwinner (1997) suggests that the transfer of an event's image to a sponsoring brand will be moderated by the exclusiveness of the sponsorship arrangement as measured by the number of other sponsors and the level of the sponsorship. He suggests transfer will be less in instances of multiple sponsors and lower sponsorship levels (e.g., title sponsor versus perimeter fence signage). This is consistent with recent research in the celebrity endorser literature which has found that the number of products endorsed by a celebrity is negatively related to endorser credibility, likability and attitude toward the ad (Tripp, Jensen and Carlson 1994). As such, studies might explore how image transfer and brand attitudes are impacted by the number of sponsors and the level of sponsorship. Further, although our results are supportive of the image transfer hypothesis, they do not provide insight into the enduring nature of this phenomenon. Additional studies are needed to assess the long term influence of event sponsorship as it relates to image transfer.

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