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State of Art and Science in Sponsorship-Linked Marketing

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ABSTRACT: This is a stock-taking paper in the area of sponsorship-linked marketing. First offered is a summary of the development of sponsorship as a mainstay of marketing communications. Arguments for the entrenchment of sponsorship in a new evolving indirect marketing mix are made. Progress in understanding the art of management and the science of communications measurement are then examined. Finally, a brief research agenda is described.

Sponsorship of sports, arts, and charitable events is a mainstream marketing activity no longer in need of extensive introduction or justification. There is, however, a need to account for the progress made to date in integration of sponsorship-linked marketing into management, theory, and research. Moreover, there is a need to open a discussion of realignment in our thinking regarding the role that sponsorship and other indirect marketing communications play and will play in the future. Up to this point, we have tended to consider sponsorship, product placement, advergaming, and other new approaches as uniquely interesting areas at the intersection of advertising and entertainment. It is time to consider these trends holistically as a move toward a new era in communications, one that could be called "indirect marketing." There are many perspectives that can be taken on sponsorship. In this paper, the perspective of the firm or organization that might use sponsorship in a marketing and communications program is considered.

HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH

Over the past two decades, sponsorship-linked marketing growth has outstripped advertising growth by several percentage points (see Figure 1), with the 2007 figure for sponsorship topping $37 billion worldwide (IEG 2007). Moreover, this figure only represents the packaged sponsorship fee and does not include the leverage or activation that accompanies most sponsorship at a debated dollar for dollar ratio. Despite rapid growth, the area still suffers from lack of a strong understanding of how sponsorship works in the mind of the consumer and how it might be made more effective. Sponsorship and other indirect marketing communications (such as product placement) have also suffered from being free-standing areas of inquiry, sometimes thought of as sales promotion techniques or communication gimmicks, sometimes as consumer promotions, and very often as "other" in the communications budget.

Sponsorship's Hand in the "Death of Advertising"

Rust and Oliver predicted the death of traditional advertising fourteen years ago.

> Mass media advertising as we know it today is on its deathbed, and its prognosis is poor. . . . direct marketing is stealing business from traditional advertising; and the growth of sales promotion and integrated marketing communications both come at the expense of traditional advertising. The reason for advertising's impending demise is the advent of new technologies that have resulted in the fragmentation of media and markets, and the empowerment of consumers. . . . the era of producer–consumer interaction will dominate by 2010. (1994, p. 71)

Clearly, the future is here. It has been over a decade since Rust and Oliver (1994) predicted the death of advertising at the hand of new technologies. It has also been over a decade since Fox and Geissler (1994) countered that advertising was not dying. It was simply having a crisis—a crisis that was decidedly driven by the changing business environment that focused on the bottom line. It seems that not much has changed. A recent feature in *Fortune* magazine, "Nightmare on Madison Avenue" (Burke and Leonard 2004), again suggests that the old rules of marketing must be abandoned due to technological advancements and harsh control of spending. Admittedly, the rules have changed, but it is not only technology and economics driving the change; it is the intersection of these drivers with changed lifestyles and values of individuals and communities that is making this trend irreversible.

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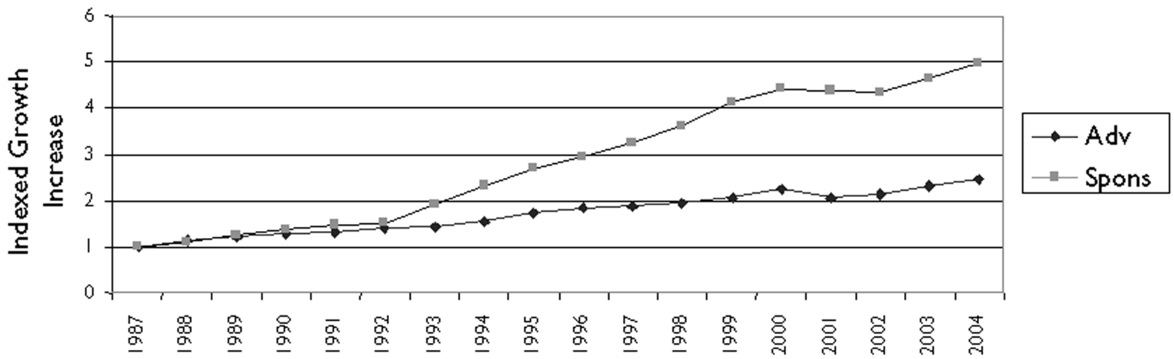
FIGURE 1
Advertising Expenditure Versus Sponsorship Expenditure



Source: Sisily (2005).

Around the world, countries wealthy enough to have discretionary income show increasing levels of out-of-home activities. In the United States, trends show increased spending on performing arts, and spectator sports in particular (Figure 2). While increased spending may partially reflect an increase in prices for these activities, participation in out-of-home activities figures more and more into the typical budget. The magnitude of these changes is significant. In the United States, expenditure on performing arts events increased by almost 50% between 1989 and 2000, adjusted for inflation, and admissions to major sporting events have almost doubled since the 1960s (Woudhuysen 2001). In England and Wales, participation in sports has increased since the 1980s among adolescents and adults (Green, Smith, and Roberts 2005). Likewise, among Swedish adolescents, sports participation has increased between 1974 and 1995 (Weserståhl et al. 2003). This trend toward out-of-home activities holds multifaceted implications: People have growing emotional connections to events of their choosing; individuals are away from in-home television, and their engagement with communication technologies is typically self-selected. With cell phones argued to outnumber both television sets and personal computers as of 2005 (Townsend 2000), "wirelessness" supports the trend to be away and yet connected.

Furthermore, the expansion of corporate involvement in readily sponsored out-of-home activities is evident in several areas. For example, the advent of "extreme sports" has been an image field day for marketers wanting to distinguish themselves from competitors (Puchan 2004). Likewise, expansion of music tours (Waddell 2005), sport tourism (Kurtzman and Zauhar 2003), local festivals (Felsenstein and Fleischer 2003), and mega events such as the Olympics and World Cup Soccer correlate neatly with the expansion of sponsorship.

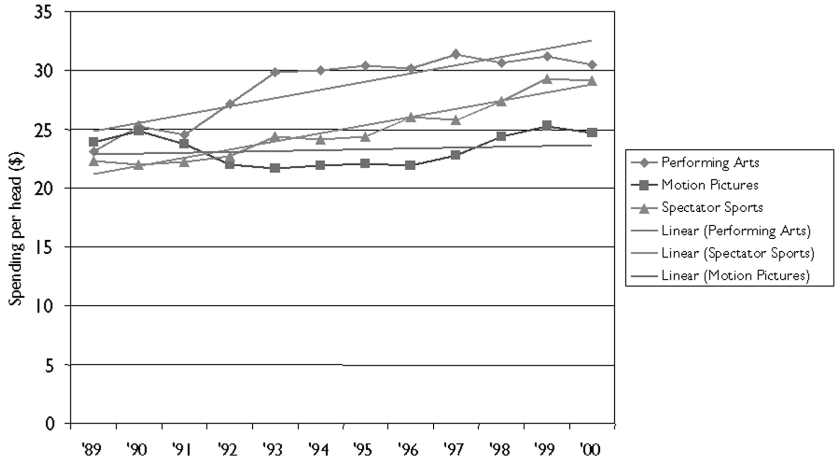
In addition to the expansion of potentially to-be-sponsored activities, the support for these and traditional activities figures into the long-term nature of this trend. Much sponsored activity is fueled, or at the minimum endorsed, by communities, governments, and nations as vital to economic prosperity (Felsenstein and Fleischer 2003; Matheson and Baade 2004). Large-scale and community event initiatives bind community and sponsors together and the glue is rather hard to undo. For example, it is almost unimaginable that community development or refurbishment of a major sports arena would be accomplished without corporate sponsorship. Taxpayers have learned that they can avoid at least part of the bill by selling the communications potential of the venue (Sillars 1995; Vadum 2004).

The State of the Industry

Yet another perspective on the irreversible trend toward sponsoring would come from the firms themselves and the developing infrastructure surrounding sponsorship activities. While early on, firms in many industries, especially those even tangentially related to sport, sought out sponsorship opportunities, many other firms were drawn into sponsorship by the "properties," that is, athletes, teams, events, and organizations that sought them out for sponsorship support. In response, many firms have some kind of sponsorship policy regarding, at the minimum, what investments they will and will not make and the type of information they need for this decision. A recent study of Fortune 500 firms found that one-third of these firms has made their sponsorship policy available on the Internet (Cunningham, Cornwell, and Coote 2009). Firms have invested in people and processes to deal with sponsorship and other indirect marketing initiatives. They have also begun to outsource these activities.

As sponsorship-linked marketing began to take off in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the response from the advertising industry was mixed. It ranged from embracing excitement to

FIGURE 2
Spending on Performing Arts, Motion Pictures, and Spectator Sports



Source: National Endowment for the Arts (2002).
Note: Figures at constant 1996 dollars.

disdaining detachment, with some agencies feeling forced to deal with the often thematically incompatible (and seemingly financially incomprehensible) investments of their clients. As sponsorship investments have grown, so has the supporting infrastructure. With some advertising agencies slow to reinvent themselves to accommodate the rapid growth in sponsorship, the door for start-up service providers was left open and inviting. Early entrants, such as Joyce Julius (see Table 1 for a summary of this intermediary and others mentioned in this section), provided some much-needed measurement of the quantity of sponsorship exposures. Although measuring sponsorship investments in seconds of exposure time and comparing this to the cost of advertising in a similar time slot continues to be problematic because these exposures are not equivalent in quality to an advertising message (see Cornwell 1995), it is clear that this measurement does provide some comfort to practitioners wanting to put a value on their investment. The next identified need in sponsorship support was for some sort of matching service where sponsors and sponsees could locate each other readily. Several matching services have begun and many have faltered. Two that appear to be flourishing are found in the United Kingdom: Sponsorshiponline, which provides a database of sponsors and sponsorship seekers, and the government-funded Sportsmatch.

The most recent addition to the sponsorship infrastructure has been proposal manager services. No matter their size, firms experience regular and sometimes overwhelming numbers of requests to sponsor sports, events, charities, the arts, and individuals. The task of managing requests has become a full-time job for many, since these groups and individuals see some relationship to the firm, and to rebuff or ignore them is tantamount to telling them never to buy your product again. Proposal management services are an intermediary employed by the firm. They accept applications from properties seeking sponsorship either in a standard template or using a customized proposal submission form. They may either forward all applications for sponsorship as received or they may screen and develop received proposals under some guidelines. For example, Sponsorwise helps shape on-line sponsorship proposal submissions to meet corporate decision-making needs.

Another evolution is the development of sports marketers such as Velocity Sports and Entertainment based in the United States, and Sportfive in Europe. Velocity tends to emphasize strategy and planning for sponsorship and event marketing, while Sportfive focuses more on an intermediary role between football clubs and leagues and potential sponsors. While these firms have broadened their offerings over time in recognition of the need for communications integration, they are decidedly centered on sport properties and property rights, an area where their expertise differs from that of the traditional advertising agency.

This is not to say that traditional advertising agencies have not risen to the occasion. Most large agencies have a division that deals with sponsorship. At Starcom Mediavest Group's Relay, they manage the development of sport sponsorship and event-marketing projects for clients. Moreover, on the client side, firms are seeking to find agencies with specialized services for event planning and sponsoring (Maddox 2005). Thus, new entrants, such as Omincom's Element 79 Sports in 2006 (Baar 2006), are appearing on a regular basis. It should therefore be emphasized that Table 1 is only illustrative of the developing infrastructure. Trends in the industry taken together show a

TABLE 1
Examples of Sponsorship Intermediaries

Name, URL, and year founded	Type	Description of example product offering
IEG www.sponsorship.com 1984	"Information house" with multiple products	IEG has numerous products, including their biweekly *Sponsorship Report* and the Return on Sponsorship (ROS) service, which quantifies the link between expenditures and investment returns. They model the factors that tie back to client objectives and calculate returns in each area.
Joyce Julius www.joycejulius.com 1985	Research supplier	Joyce Julius and Associates, Inc., provides independent sports, special event, and entertainment program evaluation. Key products include the Sponsors Report®, which provides documentation of in-broadcast brand exposure during sports, special event, and entertainment television programming, and the National Television Impression Value (NTIV®) Analysis, which provides impression measurement of sponsorship programs. Joyce Julius and Associates' Survey Analyses provide quantitative and qualitative research feedback to gauge a sponsorship's success.
Omnicom Group's Element 79 Sports www.element79.com 2006	Sports-marketing consulting and analysis	"Element 79 Sports will use a proprietary process called SportsSynch, which attempts to find the intersection of sports, target, and brand. The process is intended to differentiate the shop's work from other sports marketing companies" (Baar 2006).
Sponsor Direct www.sponsordirect.com 2000	Proposal management intermediary	Sponsor Direct is focused on developing Web-based applications for the sponsorship industry. SponsorPort is their sponsorship proposal and portfolio management software, which helps corporate sponsors and agencies manage new sponsorship proposals as well as current sponsorship portfolios.
Sponsorshiponline www.sponsorshiponline.co.uk 2000	Matching service	Sponsorshiponline provides a database of sponsors and sponsor seekers to help match sponsors and sponsorship seekers.

Sponsorwise www.sponsorwise.com 2002	Proposal management intermediary	Sponsorwise is an on-line service that helps corporations and agencies manage sponsorship proposals and requests.
SPORTSMATCH www.sportsmatch.co.uk 1992	Government matching program	Sportsmatch is a government-funded program that supports the development of grassroots and community sports in England by matching commercial sponsorship money invested in community sport with Sportsmatch funding.
(*The*) *Sponsorship Report* www.sponsorship.ca 1988	Newsletter and conference organizer	The Sponsorship Report is a Canadian publication focused on corporate sponsorship of the arts and entertainment, sports, charitable causes, festivals, and events. The aim of the newsletter is to foster partnerships between Canadian corporations and potential sponsees.
SPORTFIVE sportfive.com 2001	Sports rights marketing company	SPORTFIVE specializes in sports rights marketing, with headquarters in Hamburg and Paris, and offices throughout Europe and worldwide. SPORTFIVE also offers consulting services and publishes market-media studies, feasibility studies, and market research reports.
Starcom Mediavest Group's Relay www.relayworldwide.com 2000	Agency	Relay is a sports and event-marketing company focusing on sports, sponsorship, lifestyle, and event marketing. Services offered by Relay's sponsorship consulting division include strategy development, sponsorship evaluation, activation plan development and implementation, negotiation, sponsorship management, licensing, and consumer promotions. Relay SponsorVision is a digital monitoring system that uses image recognition technology to compute sponsorship exposure value.
Velocity www.teamvelocity.com 1999	Sport and entertainment agency	Velocity is a sponsorship- and lifestyle-marketing agency with services including consulting, brand promotions, retail marketing, event management, customer entertainment, meeting planning, municipal marketing, property alliances, and research and evaluation.

Note: Unless otherwise noted, information and descriptions were drawn from the URLs provided in the table, and in some instances, from personal communications with representatives from the firms listed.

worldwide network of sponsors, sponsees, and intermediaries forging a long-term business communications platform.

The Art of Management

As philanthropy gave way to strategic investing in sports, arts, and charities, the guardians of wealth were questioned for their intentions. Was it the CEO's love of tennis that moved Volvo into sponsorship or was it a match between the drivers of their cars and the tennis demographic? A paper that was perhaps a watershed in this regard was titled "Sponsorship: From Management Ego Trip to Marketing Success." Written by industry practitioners James Crimmins and Marty Horn (1996) at DDB Needham, it endorsed overtly the possibility that sponsorships could be a reasoned business investment and need not be an emotional action of a sports enthusiast CEO.

While commentators in the business press continue to suggest that management egos or agency effects overly influence sponsorship decision making, empirical evidence is mixed. Agency effects are said to exist when nonowner managers put their own interests above those of the shareholders in decisions involving corporate assets of the firm. That is to say, managers, with no cost to themselves, would invest corporate funds in activities such as sponsorship of sport or the arts that yield, for example, season box seats for their own use.

Cash flow within a firm is often considered a proxy for potential agency expropriations by managers within sponsoring firms. The thinking is that in firms with abundant cash, there is less monitoring of activities such as sponsorship investing. So-called agency costs (Jensen and Meckling 1976) are incurred when sponsorships benefiting the CEO are placed above sponsorships that are of benefit to the firm and its shareholders. Since manager motives for sponsorship investment are difficult to study, cash flow has become a proxy variable for this potential. A study of the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) showed a significant negative influence of the cash flow proxy variable (Pruitt, Cornwell, and Clark 2004), suggesting that managers take advantage of the benefits of sponsorship at no cost to themselves. In an event study of major league "official" sponsorships, no influence of the cash flow proxy variable was found, suggesting no agency effects (Cornwell, Pruitt, and Clark 2005). Using a slightly different approach to discovery of any agency effects, Farrell and Frame (1997), in a study of the 1996 Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta, found a positive relationship between ownership by large investors and securing abnormal returns. The researchers explain this result to be consistent with a monitoring hypothesis where shareholders are powerful enough to discipline managers. Conversely, they did not find negative abnormal returns for "entrenched" managers, that is, those operating without significant shareholder pressure to maximize firm value (p. 179). One interpretation of these various but limited event-study findings is that sponsorships with more public fee negotiations may be less subject to agency effects than those with clandestine decision making. NASCAR is known for very quiet negotiations. Alternatively, perhaps some contexts lend themselves more to agency effects than others—adequate evidence is not yet available.

Another perspective on management decision making could be that some ostensible agency conflicts may be misconstrued. Take, for example, an industrial firm in Belgium that had a sponsorship portfolio of typical large-scale sports properties and one curiously small sponsorship of a church choir. When queried about this latter sponsorship while visiting the manufacturing plant, on exiting the building, the manager simply pointed to the church across the street and said, "That is why we sponsor the choir." While it popped to mind that local civic responsibility would indeed be a reason for sponsorship, he explained that the reason for the sponsorship was far more pragmatic: The churchgoers did not need their parking spaces Monday through Friday and his firm did. Thus, while the managerial motives for sponsorship investments are important in understanding practice, it seems that we may need to borrow frameworks from management and marketing to better understand their complexity. Sponsorship decision making is thick with negotiation, barter, and deal making, and research is yet to unravel these complexities.

Researching Managerial Decision Making

If advertising, as an area of study, embraces sponsorship as part of the domain of advertising, which it has, then sponsorship decision making must be embraced as part of the domain of advertising management, but this has not yet happened. The old set of advertising relationships focused largely on the relationship between the agency and the client (see, e.g., Gould, Grein, and Lerman 1999), and were focused on the transactional perspective of buying advertising exposure. For many clients, advertising agencies were the gateway to media. In contrast, sponsorship-linked marketing may take many forms and include many intermediaries, such as those noted in Table 1, but may also include direct alliances between the firm and the property (Farrelly and Quester 2005); sponsoring is almost always relational in orientation. Intermediaries may play a pivotal role in sponsoring, but sponsorship is characterized by "go/no go" managerial decisions involving the property and activation of the relationship to it. Thus, sponsorship decision making must come to the fore of the advertising management research agenda.

In studying managerial decision making in sponsorship, it seems that choice-modeling approaches would be most useful. With choice modeling we could better understand how managers make trade-offs when considering sponsorship opportunities with differing characteristics. Similar methods such as choice-based conjoint (Pracejus and Olsen 2004) and conjoint analysis (Bloom et al. 2006; Dean 2004) have been utilized to understand how consumers make choices when sponsorship or cause-related elements are involved. A developing gold standard in this methodological vein is best/worst scaling (see Finn and Louviere 1992 for an example and Marley and Louviere 2005 for the underlying theory). With this approach, managers would evaluate choice sets (sponsorship alternatives, perhaps three or four at a time, with various characteristics) and indicate for each set the "best choice" and the "worst choice." This approach has several advantages over traditional discrete choice tasks (Marley and Louviere 2005, p. 464). First, it yields a good deal of information (with information about rankings derivable from the task). Second, the approach takes advantage of a person's propensity to respond more consistently to extreme options. Last, and perhaps most attractive of all, best/worst tasks are easy for people to do. Of course, a major challenge would be finding adequate samples of managers willing to participate in such studies.

HOW SPONSORSHIP WORKS: THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS

Underlying many marketing communications theories is more basic psychological theory on information processing. Key to an understanding of what happens in the mind is the idea of associative networks (Anderson and Bower 1973) and spreading activation (Collins and Loftus 1975). Briefly summarizing from this literature, knowledge is stored in memory in the form of linked nodes of information; activation of a node through some stimulation spreads, and in doing so, supports retrieval of stored information. Researchers in advertising and marketing have utilized this conceptualization extensively. For example, Keller (1993, 2003) shows sponsorship activities as resulting in brand knowledge, which is linked to the brand node in memory in an associative network. It is generally accepted that experience with the brand, and thus a large set of linkages, results in greater associative strength, which is a good thing in the main. Even so, Keller notes (2003, p. 597) that a deeper understanding of how knowledge for a brand and other linked entities interact is paramount. Understanding interactions with other linked entities and other linked information generally is important to sponsorship because sponsorship embeds the brand in a vast field of possible information nodes (e.g., player jerseys, time clocks, scoreboards), often with little direction on how to meaningfully link them to the brand.

Henderson, Iacobucci, and Calder (1998) have noted that while research on associative networks has progressed in psychology, these developments have not been adequately leveraged in advertising and marketing. While some research in consumer behavior, such as work on interference (Jewell and Unnava 2003; Kumar and Krishnan 2004), is making use of recent advances in psychology, there is still room for improvement. The need to consider theory is particularly important in sponsorship since little is known about how sponsorship-linked communications are remembered. Unlike traditional advertising, where a rich depiction of the brand may be (but is not always) made, sponsorship is an impoverished media, with media being broadly construed as the context through which messages pass. Sponsorship without leverage is a logo or brand name briefly displayed—a title sponsor mentioned by an announcer, but not a complete message. Although sponsorship may increase brand awareness and transfer event image elements to a brand or company, it accomplishes these things and others in an entirely different way. The question is then: What theories might be useful in consideration of sponsorship? Two of the more thought-provoking areas are now discussed.

Theory on How Sponsorship Might Not Be Working as We Expect

How sponsorship information is encoded and later retrieved depends not only on the nature of the exposure, but also on the nature of the receiver. Previous research suggests that the knowledge a person holds about a sport influences his or her perception of the congruence of a sponsor–event pairing (Roy and Cornwell 2004). This research only captured event knowledge—what is the role of other information held in memory? What influence does it have on a new sponsorship relationship?

The pairing of a brand or corporate name with an event or activity is similar to the paired-associate learning task found in numerous studies in psychology. In the paired associate paradigm, two words are presented at study and then individuals are asked to recall one given the other. In the memory literature, Nelson and his colleagues (Nelson, McEvoy, and Pointer 2003; Nelson et al. 1998; Nelson, Schreiber, and McEvoy 1992) have provided the most comprehensive account of how preexisting memories might contribute to recall. Their work accepts the associative networks of Anderson and Bower (1973), and then focuses on understanding one word's relationship to another and the way in which these relationships influence memory. They now have convincing evidence that when recall is cued with an associate of a to-be-remembered word, the network of associations emanating from both the cue and the target are involved in the recall process (Nelson, Bennett, and Leibert 1997; Nelson and McEvoy 2002). For example, if you ask individuals, "Is the brand TELUS a sponsor of amateur hockey?" the associates of TELUS as well as the associates of amateur hockey are activated in memory. This activation of associates might allow an implicit mediator such as "Canadian" to naturally arise and influence memory since TELUS is a Canadian company and hockey is a popular sport in Canada. This leads us to the following testable proposition:

Proposition 1: Natural mediators arise and influence memory for sponsorship-linked communications.

The results of Nelson, Bennett, and Leibert (1997) suggest that the provision of a mediator concept (or word) would be most important when the associative pathway involves an intermediate link between the cue and the target, as would often be the case in sponsorship. That is to say that in practice, communication managers could supply a concept to support the link between the sponsor and activity instead of relying on individuals' preexisting memory networks. Consider the example mentioned previously, "TELUS sponsors amateur hockey" (a hypothetical associative network is shown in Figure 3). In most past research, this pairing would not be considered to be highly congruent since telecommunications equipment is not typically featured or demonstrated during amateur hockey play, nor is there an obviously strong strategic relationship between the target market for telecommunications and the audience for amateur hockey (Cornwell 1995). For Canadian citizens, the hypothetical associative network shown might be cryptic, with their actual networks being much richer because TELUS is a Canadian firm and hockey is a national pastime for many. On the other hand, this hypothetical network might hold more information than the typical non-Canadian has in memory. With regard to supplied mediation (supplied by the communications manager of the firm), a plausible chain linking TELUS and amateur hockey could involve the intermediate links of "young people" and "cold." By emphasizing young people as the link between TELUS and hockey, one might activate a pathway that would otherwise not be activated. It should also be noted that associations are not limited to words and concepts, but might include visual images (e.g., the Telus lizard made popular in advertising and available as a free download from www.telusmobility.com), or referents to places (like Canada) or people. This suggests a second testable proposition:

Proposition 2: Plausible (yet distinctive) supplied mediating associations can help individuals form better memories for sponsor–event linkages and may also influence formation of positive attitudes.

An extended network perspective—one that considers natural mediators and secondary associations—would account for the superior memory results typically found for congruent sponsor–event pairs. An athletic shoe manufacturer would have numerous weak and strong links with a running event and would, in general, benefit from them. Without articulation or reasons to form an explicit memory for the sponsor–event relationship (Cornwell et al. 2006), however, implicit or unintentional memory for both the sponsor and event may make many connections available. These connections might be parallel and may activate resonant connections from the sponsor to the event and back, or they may traverse to other similar associations such as competitors, especially ones that have sponsored this or a similar event. This also suggests that a direct competitor might be picked up in the activation of weak intermediate links, even if it is not a sponsor of the particular event under consideration. Thus, the following proposition is offered:

Proposition 3: Providing a link of information relating to the sponsor and event may help establish memory for the sponsor as contrasted to any direct competitors.

The idea of providing additional information to support memory for a relationship between two entities is straightforward enough; however, the question of what type of information to provide in a given situation is still an open empirical question.

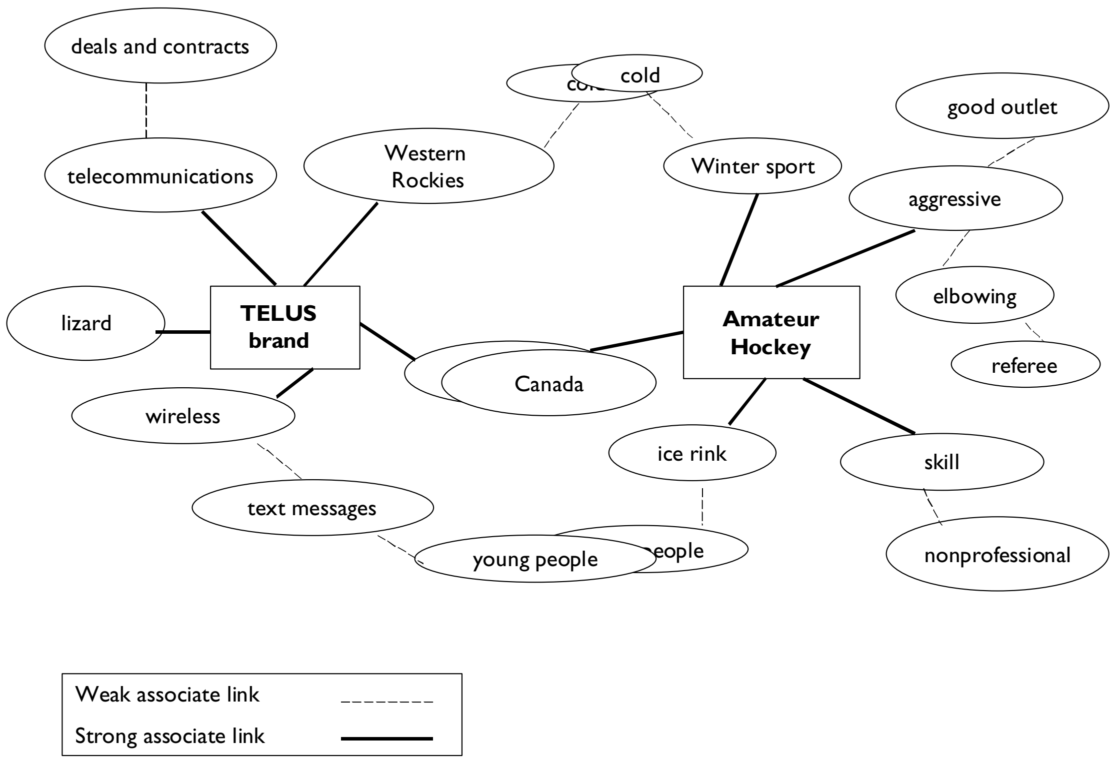
Why Use Item or Relational Information?

In a competitive marketplace where many brands are sponsors and many in the same category are sponsoring similar events, linking associations or relational information might not be enough. Weeks, Cornwell, and Humphreys (2006a) suggest that consideration of both item information and relational information might be instructive. This thinking, summarized here, combines the work of organizational memory theorists and levels-of-processing theorists. Organizational memory theorists (e.g., Bower 1970; Mandler 1967; Puff 1979) argue that good memory performance requires that an episode be encoded in an organized manner. They argue that similar features across various items produce overlap in memory, and overlap results in the various related items within an episode being encoded as a single, organized representation. Alternatively, levels-of-processing theorists argue that good memory is based on the encoding of differences (Craik and Lockhart 1972; Craik and Tulving 1975). Items are stored as unique representations in memory, identifiable through a lack of overlapping features or lack of integration across representations. It is this lack of overlap that assists retrieval, with the distinctiveness of a particular item allowing discrimination.

Einstein and Hunt (1980; Hunt and Einstein 1981) bring these two ideas together. They argue that distinctiveness encoding, as suggested by levels-of-processing theorists, applies to the processing of item information, whereas similarity encoding, as suggested by organizational theorists, applies to the processing of relational information. Relational information serves primarily a generative function, by activating the general class or category to which a specific stimulus belongs. Item information may then be used to search within this limited group of representations. In this way, Einstein and Hunt propose that relational and item information each contribute to memory retrieval processes, but in different ways.

To put this in the context of sponsorship, if someone is asked the question "Which brand is the major sponsor of

FIGURE 3
Hypothetical Associative Network



World Cup Soccer?" both relational and item processing may be used to provide an answer. Relational processing is required to activate memories related to the category "World Cup Soccer." This information alone may not be enough to provide a precise response, however, and so the use of item processing is also needed. Item processing would be used to discriminate among all those activated representations in the "World Cup Soccer" category, to identify the one with the distinctive feature of "major sponsor." Thus, if a congruent sponsor for an event might be confused with other congruent sponsors, it may be more important to emphasize the distinctiveness of the sponsor (provide item information) than to further develop the sponsor's relationship to the event. (For preliminary results in support of this proposition, see Weeks, Cornwell, and Humphreys 2006b.) This theorizing leads to the following two propositions:

> *Proposition 4: A brand with a diffuse image (and many varied associations) might be congruent with and fit with more sponsorship opportunities, but memory for sponsorship relationships would be expected to be poor.*

> *Proposition 5: A brand with a very distinctive image might have to work to develop fit with a sponsorship opportunity, but would then be expected to have a stronger relationship in memory due to the distinctiveness of the association.*

Sponsorship Theory and Generalizability

The above-mentioned arguments for the growth and entrenchment of sponsorship also apply to other nontraditional or "indirect" forms of marketing communication. Advances in technology and changing lifestyles are also related to the growth of activities such as product placement, viral marketing, buzz, ambient marketing, and even guerrilla marketing. All these approaches stem from the need to be where consumers are and the need to be embedded in experience, thus circumventing technologically enabled avoidance on the part of the consumer. These approaches then result in a similar pattern of communication and loose memory networks. Brand names flit by in a video game or come in the form of an audio or visual mention in a sitcom, but they do not form rich advertising messages. We need to know more about the knowledge networks developed by indirect marketing and the ways that they contribute to consumer understanding and behavior.

The other major player in indirect marketing is brand placement, and one of the lifestyle changes it follows is growth in cinema attendance. For example, in the United Kingdom during the years 1984 to 2001, cinema viewing increased rather dramatically (www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE/ssdataset.asp?vink=6484/). For individuals age 7 to 14, those reporting monthly viewing increased from 10 to 38%, and for those in the 15–24 age group it increased from 16 to 50% (along with lesser but significant increases across other age groups). Karrh (1998, p. 33) defined brand placement as the "paid inclusion of branded products or brand identifiers, through audio and/or visual means, within mass media programming." While the payment might be some kind of value exchange (barter is big in both brand placement and sponsorship), the idea is to connect with consumers by being embedded in media.

Here, several points of integration are worth noting. In a recent review of the theory explanations for sponsorship effects (Cornwell, Weeks, and Roy 2005), the following mechanisms were found in the literature: mere exposure effects, low-level processing, reactivation, matching/congruence, articulation, balance or meaning transfer, social identification, classical conditioning, prominence heuristics, and attribution theory. Following are examples that demonstrate the overlapping theory and research implications that suggest the need for bridging among indirect marketing communication areas.

As mentioned, one explanation for sponsorship effects is that the mere exposure of a brand name or logo during an event has the potential to influence affect, as suggested by Zajonc (1968, 1980). This has been explored in several papers on sponsorship (e.g., Bennett 1999; Olson and Thjømøe 2003). Similar theorizing was used by Auty and Lewis (2004) to explore children's choice of a soft drink following exposure to a movie clip with the soft drink brand name embedded in it. The contribution of Auty and Lewis's work with application to sponsorship research is the role of previous exposure in producing a reminder effect for the brand. Although the best starting point for future research on mere exposure might be to view it as processing fluency (Reber, Schwarz, and Winkielman 2004), where aesthetic pleasure is thought to be a function of the individual's processing dynamics, it is clear that in most instances the substantive differences in information processing are few across sponsorship and brand placement.

Again, focusing on brand placement, we find that several of the theory explanations for sponsorship are similar to those found in brand placement. Russell and Stern (2006) use balance theory to explain how consumers align their attitudes toward brands with those of the story characters. Likewise, congruence between brand and plot influence memory (Russell 2002), as is the case in sponsorship where congruence between brand and event influence memory (Cornwell et al. 2006).

Blogging, brand pushing, and word-of-mouth communication also operate in a loose web of associations that might be studied in the same ways as sponsorship and brand placement. Thus, it would be beneficial to take a more integrative approach to the various forms of indirect marketing. As Gilbert says with regard to buzz and related custom communication approaches, "While advertising remains a vital tool, it is increasingly becoming one element among equals in the marketing mix" (2005, p. 294). It is useful theoretically and practically to group techniques using experience-embedded exposure together as indirect marketing and to learn to what extent they differ from traditional advertising. Thus, a starting point would be to examine the following proposition empirically.

Proposition 6: Indirect marketing communications result in context-dependent associations that are more variable and idiosyncratic than associations developed via traditional advertising messages.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

If we were to conduct a similar analysis of industry activities for each of these indirect approaches to marketing as was done for sponsorship in Table 1, we would find fledgling firms reminiscent of where sponsorship was only a decade ago. Already, the established firms are capitalizing on core capabilities established in sponsorship analysis, namely, capabilities in choosing the best opportunity for a brand or organization and of measuring effects. Consider the expansion of Joyce Julius, known for sponsorship exposure analysis, to include products such as "Television Product Placement Analysis," "Motion Picture Product Placement-Rental/Sales Analysis," "Opportunity Assessment-Projection Analysis," and "On-Site Theater Surveys." Likewise, the major agencies are on top of these trends. For example, in addition to a Sport and Event Marketing division, Starcom Mediavest Group has one devoted to Entertainment Marketing for entertainment tie-ins and Gaming Communications to reach video-game players.

While sponsorship should have an elevated status in advertising and marketing, it must reckon with traditional views of the promotions mix. Given the above discussion regarding the similarities between sponsorship and other indirect marketing approaches, and given the need for a term that is flexible for use into the future, the new element should be described with a term such as "indirect marketing." At this time, spending on sponsorship dominates indirect marketing budgets, but other areas, particularly brand placements, are expanding rapidly. This suggests that definitional work is needed to set indirect marketing apart from advertising, public relations, personal selling, and sales promotion.

FUTURE RESEARCH

In writing this review of the state of the art and science in sponsorship-linked marketing, a number of areas in need of research were brought to the fore. Several have already been addressed, but others seem noteworthy. Therefore, a research agenda seems a fitting note on which to conclude.

Sponsorship and Reconstructive Memory

Advertising has been shown to influence consumer memory for past product experiences (Braun 1999). Braun's finding that "consumer recall of past experience is subject to distortion and can be guided by marketing communications" (p. 332) could certainly be applied to sponsorship. A simple extension would examine the potential of sponsorship to elevate recall of past brand experience, but other extensions could be even more interesting. While Braun focused on postexperience communication, attendees during sponsored events might also be influenced by contemporaneous product experience (e.g., through sampling and pouring rights at events) and exposure to signage, as well as postexperience advertising. This multifaceted potential to refashion brand experience has not been explored.

Leveraging and Activation of Sponsorship

One of the most needed areas of research concerns spending that occurs in addition to the sponsorship contract. This spending typically results from efforts to build awareness of the link between the brand and event through advertising and promotion. Recently, Weeks, Cornwell, and Drennan (2008) distinguished *leveraging* as all marketing communications collateral to the sponsorship, whereas *activation* relates to those communications that encourage interaction with the sponsor. The term "sponsorship-linked marketing" as the orchestration and implementation of marketing activities for the purpose of building and communicating an association (link) to a sponsorship was coined to reflect the required coordination of interacting employees, audiences, volunteers, events, activities, sales promotions, merchandise, cosponsors, and media (Cornwell 1995, pp. 15–16). Very few papers have attempted to address the integrative effects of sponsorship in combination with leveraging (consider Becker-Olsen and Simmons 2002; McCarville, Flood, and Froats 1998). Researchers know little about how each possible element in the sponsorship arsenal communicates, and we know next to nothing about how they communicate in combination. Practitioners also face challenges in managing them. For example, are logos able to communicate in a meaningful way on football jerseys, rotational signage, on a field, or when superimposed on broadcast scoring? Based on the findings of Janiszewski and Meyvis (2001), we know that logo meaning, familiarity, and presentation schedule are important for processing fluency, and in turn, for consumer decision making. Moreover, in focused experiments, it seems that processing fluency is not a monotonically increasing function of the number of exposures (Janiszewski and Meyvis 2001). Thus, with logos, more is not necessarily better. In fact, targeted logo presentations might be balanced with efforts to provide other meanings that would improve processing fluency and, arguably, memory.

Sponsorship Portfolios

In addition to the management and measurement required in activating a sponsorship, one must also consider the firm's portfolio of sponsorships. Managing a large sponsorship portfolio might be considered simply another integrated marketing communications challenge. On the other hand, there are at least two aspects of sponsoring that deserve additional research. First, there is a practical and strategic need to understand the value of integrating sport and charity sponsoring to gain reach (with sport) while at the same time avoiding perceptions of commercialization (via charity). This portfolio strategy seems commonplace in practice but is underresearched. Theoretically, it is important to understand how the addition of a new sponsorship to an existing portfolio changes the knowledge network of consumers. Keller (2001) argues that for any communications element, it is important to consider the trade-off between commonality and complementarity, in other words, the extent to which the same associations are reinforced or the extent to which new associations are added by any new communications element. Clearly, the theory presented in the previous section could be applied to the development of sponsorship portfolios.

Sponsorship's Role in Market Entry

The ever-increasing internationalization of sport (Amis and Cornwell 2005) is making sponsorship a truly international communications vehicle, rivaled only by the Internet. Global and local objectives can be united in sport sponsorship, and a consistent brand image can be presented across multiple global markets (Rines 2002). In fact, large-scale sponsorships "amortized" across markets makes the most cost-effective use of sponsoring sport ("Sports Marketing" 2004). What, then, is sponsorship's role when brands seek to enter new markets? Because sponsorship is only able to carry a rather cryptic message, it seems that it would be most useful where new markets can already make the link between the product category and the brand name. This would suggest that sponsorship would be helpful in brand line extensions, but would not be as useful as advertising for an entirely new entry for the brand in a category. Nonetheless, it seems that sponsorship may have an expanding role to play if it can be effectively combined with traditional advertising in market entry because it builds awareness for the brand (Schulz, Cornwell, and Weisenfeld 2005).

Social Considerations

Controversial sponsorships, such as those for tobacco brands, have been receiving academic attention for some time (Cornwell 1997; Dewhirst and Hunter 2002; Dewhirst and Sparks 2003), but only recently have the issues surrounding obesity forced fast food vendors into a similar unwelcome limelight (Barrand 2004). The main policy issue involves the combining of unhealthy consumption choices with seemingly healthful sport images. Does pairing sport and fast food implicitly communicate that one can eat these foods and still look like an athlete? In this regard, gambling, food, and alcohol may all deserve more researcher attention. Other more subtle social issues also merit investigation. It seems that in keeping with the commercialization of sport, holding celebrities in check may actually kill the goose that lays the golden egg. In NASCAR experience, for example, sponsorship is forcing drivers into the same corporate mold, thus reducing their "wild" appeal (Macur 1999). Also noted is a preference for decidedly attractive athletes for sponsorship. This is one point in the broader set of issues regarding people and sports included and excluded from sponsorship opportunities.

Sponsorship Policy as a Company Instrument

Sponsorship policies are a curious element as a corporate instrument. A sponsorship policy is the document a company crafts that typically explains what a company will (and will not) sponsor, which audiences should be targeted, the quantity of sponsorships that should be undertaken over a given period, and the level of sponsorship devoted to each. Unlike policies on marketing, advertising, and public relations, sponsorship policies are the most likely to be made public. Because sponsorship engagement has historically hinged on some rather unsophisticated, nearly random matching of sponsor and sponsee, policies have been made public to support this process. It seems that some publicly available policies show a missed opportunity to communicate positively and effectively with important audiences. Many sponsorship policies on the Web are deeply embedded in a tangle of links (Cunningham, Cornwell, and Coote 2009). Thus, the state of the art could be described as a bit Jackson Pollock-esque.

Sponsorship Termination

We have failed to give adequate attention to the end of the sponsorship relationship. A starting point is a paper by Olkkonen and Tuominen (2006) on relationship fading: "The concept of relationship fading refers to the phase in which a relationship seems to be permanently or temporally weakening and declining. Relationship fading can precede an enduring relationship ending, but it can also represent a temporal weakening of the relationship without leading to ending" (p. 67). One obvious challenge is to begin to understand carryover effects in sponsorship. When a sponsorship is taken over by a firm, in particular a competitive firm in the same industry, how significant are the carryover recollections of the previous sponsor? This suggests the need for additional research on sponsorships as relationships or strategic alliances (Farrelly and Quester 2005) rather than tactical decisions.

Ambushing

No paper on sponsorship-linked marketing would be complete without some mention of ambushing. Ambushing is typically thought of 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 (Sandler and Shani 1989). Past thinking on policies and strategies regarding ambushing needs to be reconsidered. Since legal protections for true sponsors have expanded, ambushers tend to come close to stepping over the legal line, but do so less often. Strategy research needs to consider how to incorporate would-be ambushers and form alliances, thus avoiding bothersome legal fees as well as painful and expensive surveillance. Communication research needs to consider the positive and negative outcomes for all parties involved. Perhaps an outrageous ambushing actually helps establish memory for the sponsorship in general, and moreover, for the true sponsor as contrasted with the ambusher.

Sponsorship-linked marketing is a decidedly interesting and multifaceted area of research. While worthy of examination in its own right, it is also a leader in the sweeping trend toward greater investment in indirect marketing activities. There is a need to better understand the differing communication capabilities of sponsorship, product placement, ambient marketing, and other indirect forms of promotion. There is also a corresponding need to identify areas of overlap and synergy.

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