



## Sponsorship portfolio as a brand-image creation strategy

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### ABSTRACT

The meanings held by events are sometimes transferable to a brand through sponsorship. The perceived sponsor–property fit affects brand evaluations. This research hypothesizes that in the case of a sponsorship portfolio, the source of image transfer can be composite, and brand image association may depend on the perceived fit between sponsorships. Building on theories of social cognition and categorization, this research proposes two dimensions of fit: sponsorship category relatedness and event personality fit. Two experiments show that categorical relatedness between sponsorships not only leads to the creation of a unified brand personality for the sponsor, but also enhances brand meaning consistency and clarity. Central category-related traits cue a category membership framework that integrates sponsorships in the portfolio. Under conditions of category ambiguity, the impact of event personality fit emerges. Interestingly, the findings suggest that sponsored properties having a “spiky” brand personality (having both high and low performance on dimensions) may communicate most clearly in a portfolio.

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### 1. Introduction

Corporate sponsorship frequently generates a favorable image for the sponsor, both at the corporate and brand levels (Gwinner and Eaton, 1999). In much the same way that a product may share the image of an endorsing celebrity, meanings held by events are transferable to a brand through sponsorship (Cornwell and Coote, 2005; Gwinner, 1997). Given the success of sponsorship as a brand building tool, the use of a single sponsorship strategy is becoming increasingly rare, whereas complex portfolios with multiple sponsorship properties are becoming ubiquitous. The purpose of this research is to understand the impact of a brand's sponsorship portfolio on its brand image.

A sponsorship portfolio is the collection of brand and/or company sponsorships comprising sequential and/or simultaneous involvement with events, activities and individuals (usually in sport, art and charity) utilized to communicate with various audiences. In most cases, a brand's sponsorship portfolio includes properties that are distinctive in image, sometimes even seemingly incompatible. Samsung, for example, has numerous sponsorship properties, ranging from the Olympics to dog show Crufts to the Paralympics. While sports events may portray a masculine, vigorous, even aggressive image, theatres and arts festivals tend to give an exclusive and conservative impression (Gwinner, 1997).

Increasingly, sponsors seek to ensure that consumers are aware of their broad community engagement through sponsorship in a variety of channels. For instance, as an official sponsor of the 2004 Athens

Olympic Games, Swatch exposed event spectators to its sponsorship of UNICEF through its “Kaleidoscope” project. The project involved the auctioning of art works created by Olympians, artists and celebrities to raise funds for UNICEF (Masterman, 2007). A sponsorship portfolio is a heterogeneous phenomenon and the addition of a new sponsorship property to an existing portfolio may affect the consumer's knowledge network (Cornwell, 2008). In particular, the fit among a brand's sponsorship properties is likely to influence consumers' processing of the sponsorship portfolio and their evaluations of the sponsor's brand image. Thus, investigation of sponsorship portfolios examines the interaction between sponsorship properties of a brand.

As an analogy, consumer evaluations of brand extension depend on the degree of relatedness between different brand entities within a portfolio (Lei et al., 2008; Mao and Krishnan, 2006). While researchers show interest in multiple brand assessment (e.g., Dacin and Smith, 1994) and collective communication effects (e.g., Keller, 2001), empirical evidence concerning how consumers respond to a sponsorship portfolio remains scant. If the introduction of a brand extension can create a feedback effect to the parent brand and existing products (Lei et al., 2008; Mao and Krishnan, 2006), similar effects may occur in case of sponsorship introductions at different points of time. Consistent with current marketing thought (e.g., Keller, 1993), brand communications through a sponsorship portfolio should convey a coherent message.

The study here focuses on brand meaning (an overall assessment of what a brand represents in the mind of a consumer; Becker-Olsen and Hill, 2006) and brand personality (the set of human characteristics associated with a brand; Aaker, 1997) as indicators of brand image. These are important measures because (1) brand personality allows for differentiation and competitive positioning (Aaker, 1997);

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(2) consumers select brands with meanings congruent with an aspect of self-concept, and self-image congruity has a positive influence on brand loyalty (Sirgy et al., 2008); and (3) consistency and clarity in communication allow people to know what to expect from a brand (Keller, 1993). Although researchers examine sponsorship effects on perceived brand image, prior studies primarily investigate sponsorship effects in the context of single sponsor–property pairing.

## 2. Consumer processing of a sponsorship portfolio

Applying associative network memory theory to the context of sponsorship portfolio, a sponsor brand's network of nodes may consist of various concepts associated with each sponsorship property. The “thematic organization packets” in memory allow connections between episodes whenever these episodes share common structures, even though their contexts are unrelated (Seifert et al., 1986). Firstly, sponsored properties in a portfolio share the brand. Furthermore, a strategy may successfully relate one property (e.g., Euro Cup Soccer) to another (e.g., the Olympic Games) in memory via features common to both sponsorships (e.g., sportsmanship, camaraderie), despite the differences in their respective program content.

When added to a brand's sponsorship portfolio, a new property is likely to activate corresponding concepts in memory that tie to the sponsor. The associative network memory theory maintains that the extent of spreading activation depends on the relatedness of brand nodes (Keller, 1993). Given the low-involvement nature of sponsorship processing, previously encoded and stored messages in memory may color present information processing and influence cognition and liking (Cornwell, 2008). Implicit measurements such as brand image tests may demonstrate this outcome. Such image evaluations form on the basis of a selective sampling of information from a cognitive representation of the brand that the individual has in memory (Feldman and Lynch, 1988). The implicit influence of a prior sponsorship represents one key difference between processing a single sponsorship and processing a sponsorship portfolio.

### 2.1. Perception of fit in a sponsorship portfolio

Whereas the literature advances dimensions used to assess sponsor–property fit, the sources involved in fit perceptions in a portfolio context remain unexamined. Perceived sponsor–property fit may arise from the similarity between images (e.g., Gwinner and Eaton, 1999), matching on personalities (e.g., Lee and Cho, 2008), and common associations in general sense (e.g., Pracejus and Olsen, 2004). Classic definitions of perceived fit, however, ignore the knowledge that can tie seemingly disparate entities together (Fleck and Quester, 2007). This issue becomes even more complicated for a sponsorship portfolio. As a brand adds a new property to its portfolio, the sponsorship introduces yet another set of attributes or beliefs which may/may not be consistent with the image the existing sponsorship properties already project. Thus, the present research conceptualizes perceived fit between sponsored properties as multi-dimensional.

Although assessment of perceived fit between sponsorship properties may be manifold, some dimensions are more likely than others. This research follows categorization theory and research in brand extensions to suggest that consumers process sponsorship properties affiliated with a brand on the basis of two distinct types of characteristics – category and attributes. Sponsorship categories typically refer to sport events, social causes and the arts (Gwinner, 1997). An attribute, on the other hand, is an independent property or trait of an object (Yamauchi and Markman, 2000), such as its personality. In line with this thought, the present research proposes two ways that consumers might calibrate perceived fit: (1) sponsorship category relatedness (SCR) where properties in the portfolio are from the same category, and (2) event personality fit (EFP) where

properties in the portfolio have high perceived similarity on personality dimensions.

### 2.2. Sponsorship category relatedness (SCR)

SCR refers to the degree of domain similarity between individual sponsorships in a portfolio. The structure of these superordinate categories (i.e., sponsorship domains) permits inference making about characteristics of subordinate categories (i.e., individual properties) (Yamauchi and Markman, 2000). For example, the Rugby World Cup and Soccer World Cup share common properties because both are sports events. Members of a category have a structure resembling a social unit (Brewer et al., 1995), which derives from a generalized image, or prototype, that represents the most common features of category members (Malt, 1989). Once developed, superordinate imagery exists at the category level, and the information about individual instances resides under this category impression (Mao and Krishnan, 2006). This superordinate structure denotes a particular group of exemplars and is instrumental in guiding attention (Yamauchi and Markman, 2000). Prototype serves as a decision heuristic, and prototype fit facilitates information processing by generating an intuitive explanation of why objects belong to the same group (Mao and Krishnan, 2006). Empirical evidence finds prototype match important in brand extensions. Specifically, a brand can extend more easily when the new category is similar to the original category (e.g., Lei et al., 2008), because consistent information meets people's expectations and hence is conceptually more fluent (Lee and Aaker, 2004).

An initial sponsorship creates a prototype on the basis of category against which consumers interpret additional sponsorships in a portfolio. Thus, categorically related sponsorships should “hang together” to augment fit perception, providing a basis for evaluating a sponsorship portfolio. People would have an “it feels right” perception, which in turn, translates to a consistent and clear brand meaning for the sponsor (Becker-Olsen and Hill, 2006). Information about category prototype, in turn, should frame the way people infer characteristics of a sponsor brand, such as its brand personality.

**H1a.** A portfolio with categorically related sponsorships leads to higher brand meaning consistency for the sponsor, in comparison to a portfolio with categorically unrelated sponsorships.

**H1b.** A portfolio with categorically related sponsorships leads to higher brand meaning clarity for the sponsor, in comparison to a portfolio with categorically unrelated sponsorships.

**H1c.** A portfolio with categorically related sponsorships leads to a more unified brand personality for the sponsor, in comparison to a portfolio with categorically unrelated sponsorships.

### 2.3. Event personality fit (EPF)

Cognitive psychologists report that seemingly disparate objects are classifiable as members of the same category and tied together on the basis of a single relational match (e.g., Murphy and Medin, 1985). While sponsored properties may possess many different features, not all features are defining. Features that have high diagnosticity (Feldman and Lynch, 1988) and are relevant to how people typically interact with instances of a concept (Murphy and Medin, 1985) are more likely to provoke greater activation during information processing. Consumers often perceive sponsorship properties in terms of event personalities; for example, consumers may describe the X Games as having an exciting and uninhibited personality (Lee and Cho, 2008).

This exemplar view of categorization suggests that impression of each portfolio member develops in an individuating manner (Malt, 1989). Unlike the prototype capturing generalized imagery of the category, exemplars register individual sponsorship's unique concepts (Brewer et al., 1995). The present research operationally defines

individual property concepts as the property specific personality traits that typically originate from the status, activities, and participants of an event. Thus, EPF occurs when sponsored properties share personality traits despite belonging to distinctive categories. To illustrate, opera and tennis belong to different categories but may share in an image of sophistication. EPF may provide readily identifiable thematic linkages between two sponsorships and enhance the fit perception.

**H2a.** A portfolio with high EPF leads to higher brand meaning consistency for the sponsor, in comparison to a portfolio with low EPF.

**H2b.** A portfolio with high EPF leads to higher brand meaning clarity for the sponsor, in comparison to a portfolio with low EPF.

**H2c.** A portfolio with high EPF leads to a more unified brand personality for the sponsor, in comparison to a portfolio with low EPF.

In sum, theory suggests that prototype fit drives SCR and portfolio processing anchors on category-level information. Conversely, exemplar fit drives EPF because consumers evaluate a portfolio in a piecemeal mode. Some researchers, however, suggest that judgment may hinge on summary information about a typical category as well as on specific features that are manifest in category members (e.g., Mao and Krishnan, 2006). Thus, although not formally hypothesized due to lack of clear direction from theory, logically a portfolio high in SCR and EPF would yield better evaluation of the sponsor's brand meaning and personality. Although the present research did not measure *per se* what piece of information consumers retrieve from memory, following some categorization research in psychology (e.g., Ross and Murphy, 1996; Yamauchi and Markman, 2000), inference making about the sponsor's brand image represents a reliable pointer to the content of information retrieved from memory and thus suggest category- or piecemeal-based processing. This is similar to the "accessibility-as-information" hypothesis, in that evaluations of a target object reflect the content of information retrieved (Menon and Raghbir, 2003).

### 3. Method

The study includes two experiments to test the hypotheses. Several pretests were undertaken to choose the sponsor brands and sponsored properties. All participants were undergraduate students from two state universities in an Australian metropolitan city. Properties from two sponsorship categories (sports events and social causes) were included in the study, on the basis of their differing domains. These categories are popular among sponsors and consumers and attract increased researcher attention (Cornwell, 2008). Fictitious brand names were used in the experiments to ensure that participants did not evaluate sponsorships on the basis of prior brand associations. Pretest 1 helped in the selection of the fictitious brand names. Participants ( $N=20$ ) rated the likeability of 12 fictitious brand names on a 7-point scale (1 = negative/unfavorable/bad; 7 = positive/favorable/good) and indicated these brands' associations with any existing brand names, sports, or charities. Allegra (apparel) and Hudson (watch) were chosen because both brand names were liked ( $M=5.07$  vs.  $M=5.27$ ,  $t<1$ ,  $p=.59$ ), indicated little association with existing brand names ( $M=3.75$  vs.  $M=3.85$ ,  $t<1$ ,  $p=.84$ ), and showed no association with sports ( $M=3.05$  vs.  $M=3.40$ ,  $t<1$ ,  $p=.40$ ) or charities ( $M=3.05$  vs.  $M=2.90$ ,  $t<1$ ,  $p=.76$ ). Allegra (Hudson) was used in the first (second) experiment.

Pretest 2 identified sports events that were familiar and had salient personalities. Participants ( $N=150$ ) rated familiarity of 48 international events on a 7-point scale adopted from Simmons and Becker-Olsen (2006) (1 = very unfamiliar/do not recognize/have not heard of; 7 = very familiar/highly recognize/have heard of). Sports events with the highest familiarity scores were selected: Rugby World Cup ( $M=6.42$ ), PGA Golf Championship ( $M=5.98$ ), Melbourne Cup

( $M=6.69$ ), Soccer World Cup ( $M=6.40$ ), Wimbledon Tennis Championships ( $M=6.18$ ), and NBA All-Star Game ( $M=5.94$ ). A one-way ANOVA revealed that familiarity did not differ across events,  $F=.79$ ,  $p=.56$ . Participants then evaluated personality of these sports events on a 15-item brand personality scale (Aaker, 1997) (scale items are available upon request). Individual items representing each personality dimension were averaged to form a score for that dimension. The most salient personality dimension for each event was determined in three ways: (1) the dimension received the highest score, (2) the score of the highest dimension was significantly higher than the scale mid-point, and (3) the score of the dimension was significantly different from scores of other dimensions. Analyses showed that the Rugby World Cup and Soccer World Cup displayed a ruggedness personality ( $M_{Rugby}=4.66$  vs.  $M_{Soccer}=4.08$ ), PGA, Melbourne Cup and Wimbledon demonstrated a sophistication personality ( $M_{PGA}=3.94$  vs.  $M_{Melbourne}=3.92$  vs.  $M_{Wimbledon}=3.88$ ), and NBA had an excitement personality ( $M=3.82$ ).

Pretest 3 identified social causes that were familiar and had salient personalities. Participants ( $N=39$ ) rated familiarity of eight social causes. Results led to selection of four causes: Breast Cancer Foundation ( $M=6.08$ ), Greenpeace ( $M=6.18$ ), Red Cross ( $M=6.56$ ), and Guide Dogs ( $M=6.06$ ). A one-way ANOVA revealed that familiarity did not differ across causes,  $F=.98$ ,  $p=.43$ . Participants then assessed the personality of these social causes. While the Breast Cancer Foundation ( $M=3.99$ ) showed a competence personality, RSPCA ( $M=3.71$ ) and Red Cross ( $M=3.92$ ) displayed a sincerity personality. Interestingly, Guide Dogs was rated high on sophistication ( $M=3.80$ ) and Greenpeace scored high on ruggedness ( $M=4.23$ ).

### 3.1. Stimuli

In developing the portfolio stimuli, the study included two sponsorship announcements for each sponsor into a fictitious newsletter. The news piece was akin to communications actual sponsors adopt, thus maintaining realism of the experimental task. Individuals were asked to take part in a study regarding perceptions of news clippings. SCR was manipulated as a portfolio with the sponsorships of two sports events (related categories) and of a sports event and a social cause (unrelated categories).

To manipulate EPF, properties were selected on the basis of their distinctive brand personality dimensions, as determined in the pretests. For a full depiction of the designs, see Table 1. PGA Golf Championship and Rugby World Cup were chosen as lead sponsorships. Importantly, properties with high EPF showed similar patterns on each personality dimension even when they were categorically unrelated; whereas properties with low EPF differed on two or more personality dimensions. For instance, PGA and NBA differed significantly on excitement and sophistication dimensions (see Fig. 1a for a depiction of brand personality). In other words, lines on the brand personality charts moved in mostly similar or opposite directions depending on the EPF condition.

The newsletter started with a paragraph of general brand information for the focal fictitious brand, followed by the details of the first sponsorship in the second paragraph. A description of the sport event/social cause was provided in the third paragraph. The second sponsorship announcement had the same structure and appeared on the second page of the newsletter. Three fillers were used in each newsletter to minimize rehearsal and obscure the purpose of the experiment.

## 4. Experiment 1

### 4.1. Design and procedure

Experiment 1 consisted of a 2 SCR (related categories vs. unrelated categories)  $\times$  2 EPF (low fit vs. high fit) between-subjects factorial

**Table 1**  
Sponsorship Portfolio Stimuli Used.

1a: Experiment 1			
SCR	Brand: Allegra (apparel)	EPF	High fit
Related	PGA Golf Championship and Wimbledon		PGA Golf Championship and NBA All-Star Game
Unrelated	PGA Golf Championship and Guide Dogs		PGA Golf Championship and Breast Cancer Foundation
1b: Experiment 2			
SCR	Brand: Hudson (watch)	EPF	Low fit
Related	Rugby World Cup and Soccer World Cup		Rugby World Cup and Melbourne Cup
Unrelated	Rugby World Cup and Greenpeace		Rugby World Cup and Red Cross

Note: SCR – sponsorship category relatedness.

EPF – event personality fit.

design. Participants ( $N = 120$ ; 60% female; average age = 21 years) were volunteer undergraduate students recruited from marketing classes. This sample yielded 29 to 32 observations per condition. Randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions (see Table 1a), participants first read the newsletter as described and then were given a series of filler questions used to mask the true purpose of

the study. Participants then evaluated the dependent variables and covariates.

#### 4.2. Dependent variables and covariates

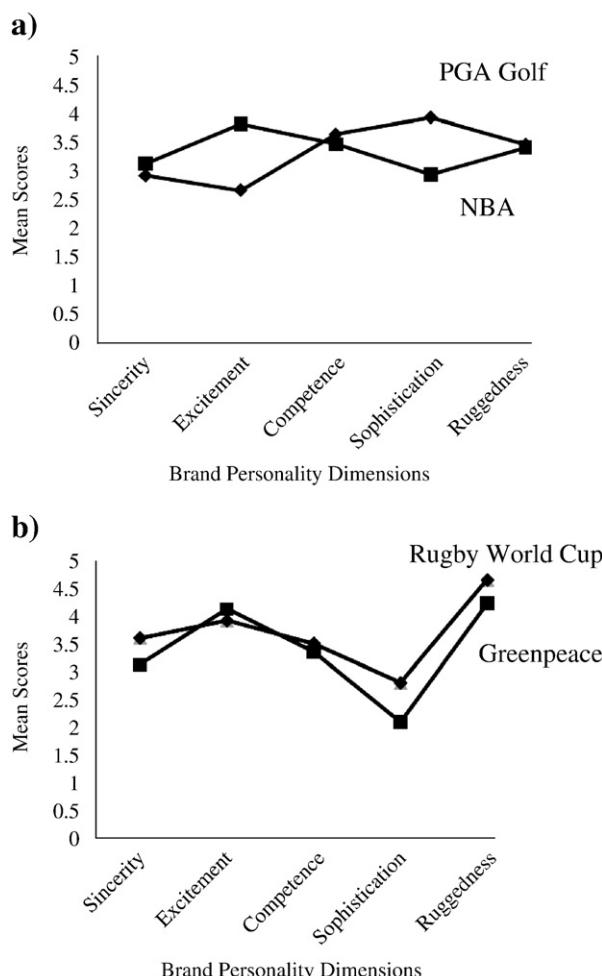
Unlike Gwinner and Eaton (1999) who developed a set of adjectives that were idiosyncratic to the contexts, brand personality was measured in the present study using Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale. Two other measures assessed the underlying meaning that consumers ascribe to the sponsor brand (Becker-Olsen and Hill, 2006). Brand meaning consistency was measured on a two-item scale (i.e., *conveys the same image in all its activities* and *has conveyed an inconsistent image over time* [reverse coded]; 1 = strongly disagree/7 = strongly agree; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .86$ ), and meaning clarity was measured on a three-item scale (i.e., *clearly communicates what it stands for*; *has an image that is difficult to understand* [reverse coded]; and *conveys a clear image in all its actions*; 1 = strongly disagree/7 = strongly agree; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .81$ ).

The study includes prior event knowledge and prior event attitude as proxies for individuals' involvement with the event/social cause that potentially could affect their evaluations of the sponsors (Sirgy et al., 2008). Following from similar work (e.g., Dacin and Smith, 1994), prior event knowledge was measured using a 5-point scale (1 = little or no knowledge/5 = a great deal of knowledge; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .80$ ). Prior event attitude was measured using a 7-point scale (1 = negative/unfavorable/bad and 7 = positive/favorable/good; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .94$ ; Ruth and Simonin, 2006).

#### 4.3. Results

**Manipulation check and covariates.** Participants assessed the perceived sponsor–property fit (1 = poorly matched/7 = well matched). A paired-sample  $t$ -test indicated that perceived sponsor–property fit did not differ significantly,  $t(119) = 1.82$ ,  $p = .07$ , suggesting that any observed effects could not be attributed to perceived sponsor–property fit. This also indicated successful selection of the fictitious sponsor brand as no pre-existing predisposition towards the brand existed. The prior event knowledge covariate had no impact ( $p = .36$ ) and was dropped from subsequent analysis. Prior event attitude was found to significantly influence brand associations ( $p = .001$ ) and was retained as a covariate.

**Brand meaning.** As postulated, a two-way MANCOVA, using the averaged brand meaning consistency and meaning clarity scores as dependent variables, found a multivariate effect of SCR at  $p < .10$  (Wilks'  $\lambda = .96$ ,  $F_{2,114} = 2.60$ ,  $p = .08$ ) (see Table 2). Despite this weaker than expected result, the analysis proceeded with univariate tests given this



**Fig. 1.** Example graphical comparison between sponsorship properties. a) A high SCR/low EPF portfolio in Experiment 1. b) A low SCR/high EPF portfolio in Experiment 2.

**Table 2**

Means and standard deviations of dependent variables – Experiment 1.

Brand: Allegra				
Dependent variables	Categorically related sponsorships		Categorically unrelated sponsorships	
	High EPF (n = 29)	Low EPF (n = 30)	High EPF (n = 31)	Low EPF (n = 30)
<i>Brand meaning</i>				
Meaning consistency	4.34 (.05)	4.15 (.15)	3.82 (.08)	3.82 (.05)
Meaning clarity	4.52 (.24)	4.24 (.18)	4.08 (.06)	4.00 (.83)
<i>Brand personality</i>				
Sincerity	3.24 (.46)	3.03 (.66)	3.35 (.58)	3.20 (.59)
Excitement	3.52 (.81)	3.70 (.63)	3.12 (.88)	3.28 (.60)
Competence	3.68 (.66)	3.53 (.58)	3.59 (.71)	3.63 (.61)
Sophistication	3.62 (.64)	3.42 (.78)	3.26 (.86)	3.38 (.95)
Ruggedness	3.81 (.81)	3.35 (1.10)	3.26 (.92)	3.32 (.95)

Note: EPF – event personality fit.

is one of the first studies investigating sponsorship portfolio effects. Univariate tests revealed a significant main effect of SCR on both brand meaning consistency and meaning clarity. Categorically related sponsorships yielded higher brand meaning consistency in comparison to categorically unrelated sponsorships ( $M = 4.25$  vs.  $M = 3.82$ ,  $F_{1,115} = 5.01$ ,  $p = .03$ ). The effect on brand meaning clarity was also only significant at  $p < .10$ , with categorically related sponsorships leading to higher brand meaning clarity ( $M = 4.36$  vs.  $M = 4.04$ ,  $F_{1,115} = 3.36$ ,  $p = .07$ ). Neither a significant main effect of EPF (Wilks'  $\lambda = .99$ ,  $F_{2,114} = .42$ ,  $p = .66$ ) nor a SCR  $\times$  EPF interaction was evident (Wilks'  $\lambda = .99$ ,  $F_{2,114} = .03$ ,  $p = .97$ ).

*Brand personality.* A two-way MANCOVA on the five brand personality measures revealed a significant main effect for SCR (Wilks'  $\lambda = .89$ ,  $F_{5,111} = 2.88$ ,  $p = .02$ ). Univariate tests indicated that SCR exerted a significant effect on the excitement dimension of brand personality, with categorically related sponsorship portfolios being perceived as more exciting ( $M = 3.61$  vs.  $M = 3.20$ ,  $F_{1,115} = 10.63$ ,  $p = .001$ ). The effect on the ruggedness dimension was marginally significant, with categorically related sponsorships being associated with a more rugged personality ( $M = 3.58$  vs.  $M = 3.29$ ,  $F_{1,115} = 3.48$ ,  $p = .07$ ). However, the personality dimension associated with the lead sponsorship, sophistication, was not significant ( $M = 3.58$  vs.  $M = 3.29$ ,  $F_{1,115} = 2.15$ ,  $p = .15$ ). Neither a significant main effect of EPF (Wilks'  $\lambda = .94$ ,  $F_{5,111} = 1.54$ ,  $p = .18$ ) nor a SCR  $\times$  EPF interaction (Wilks'  $\lambda = .97$ ,  $F_{5,111} = 0.75$ ,  $p = .59$ ) was observed.

## 5. Discussion

The main effects in Experiment 1 pointed to SCR as important in evaluating perceived fit between sponsorships in a portfolio. After controlling for prior event attitude, the initial exposure to the first sponsorship gave respondents an applicable schema, which appeared to have facilitated the processing of conceptually congruent information. Consistent with Simmons and Becker-Olsen (2006), findings of Experiment 1 suggests that the efficiency of category prototype may simplify information processing and facilitate response generation; as such, categorical relatedness between sponsorships might serve as a cognitive reference point during comparisons to reduce processing efforts (Yamauchi and Markman, 2000). To the extent that information about the sponsorship categories is accessible, perception of consistency should be likely to occur.

In Experiment 1, participants perceived the sponsor brand (Allegra) to be more exciting and rugged when the brand's portfolio contained two categorically related sponsorships (i.e., two sports events) than when categorically unrelated sponsorships (i.e., sports event and social cause) constituted the brand's portfolio. Category relatedness helped generate a unified personality for the sponsor,

whereas low SCR seemed to dilute personality. Interestingly, the sports events sponsored (i.e., PGA, Wimbledon, and NBA) did not per se display strong excitement or ruggedness personality individually in pretests. However, when grouped together in a sponsorship portfolio, these traits inherent in sports resonated with respondents. Sponsorships in a portfolio might have jointly developed a prototype that "represents a kind of average or central tendency of the category members" (Mao and Krishnan, 2006, p. 42). Since the original event personalities were either not processed or subsumed under the reconfigured prototype, the effects of EPF were absent. The results argued for the dual influence of SCR on evaluations of the sponsor brand, through its effect on the creation of category membership and development of an overall portfolio prototype.

Because sponsorship properties come with inherent personality traits and thus may result in idiosyncratic combining, learning if these findings hold in other contexts is important. The second experiment served as a replication for two reasons. First, the experiment tests the robustness of the effects by using an alternative set of stimuli that would allow the identification and establishment of different brand associations. Second, by using a different sponsor product, this research increases generalizability.

## 6. Experiment 2

### 6.1. Design and procedure

Original hypotheses were again tested in a 2 SCR (related categories vs. unrelated categories)  $\times$  2 EPF (low fit vs. high fit) between-subjects factorial design. The portfolio effects were measured in this experiment on the same dependent variables, controlling for prior event knowledge and prior event attitude. Four sponsorship portfolios were constructed for the fictitious watch brand Hudson based on the results of pretests. Each portfolio's ruggedness dimension was emphasized by using the Rugby World Cup as the lead sponsorship. That is, the Rugby World Cup was paired with either a rugged sports event (i.e., Soccer World Cup)/cause (i.e., Greenpeace) (see Fig. 1b for an example) or a non-rugged sports event (i.e., Melbourne Cup)/cause (i.e., Red Cross) (see Table 1b for the composition of portfolios). The structure of the newsletter and procedures were identical to those used in Experiment 1. Participants were 122 undergraduate students (66% female; average age = 22 years).

### 6.2. Results

*Manipulation check and covariates.* A paired-samples *t*-test showed that perceived sponsor–property fit did not differ significantly between sponsorship episodes,  $t(121) = 1.37$ ,  $p = .17$ . Both prior event knowledge ( $p = .004$ ) and prior event attitude ( $p < .001$ ) were found to be significant covariates and hence were retained in the model.

*Brand meaning.* The results of a MANCOVA showed a significant multivariate effect for SCR on brand meaning consistency and clarity (Wilks'  $\lambda = .90$ ,  $F_{2,115} = 6.16$ ,  $p = .003$ ). This was qualified by a significant SCR  $\times$  EPF interaction (Wilks'  $\lambda = .95$ ,  $F_{2,115} = 2.92$ ,  $p = .06$ ). The main effect of EPF was not significant (Wilks'  $\lambda = .97$ ,  $F_{2,115} = 1.61$ ,  $p = .20$ ) (see Table 3).

Univariate tests indicated that categorically related sponsorships produced higher brand meaning consistency ( $M = 4.34$  vs.  $M = 3.87$ ,  $F_{1,116} = 10.36$ ,  $p = .002$ ) and higher brand meaning clarity ( $M = 4.26$  vs.  $M = 3.78$ ,  $F_{1,116} = 5.80$ ,  $p = .02$ ) than categorically unrelated sponsorships. Further analyses showed that the SCR  $\times$  EPF interaction was significant for brand meaning clarity ( $F_{1,116} = 5.46$ ,  $p = .02$ ) (see Fig. 2a). To explore the interaction effect, the simple effects of SCR were analyzed at each level of EPF. The results showed that when properties have low EPF, categorically related sponsorships ( $M = 4.51$ ) led to greater brand meaning clarity than categorically unrelated sponsorships ( $M = 3.65$ ) ( $F_{1,118} = 10.39$ ,  $p = .002$ ). No significant impact of SCR was evident when

**Table 3**  
Means and standard deviations of dependent variables – Experiment 2.

Brand: Hudson		Categorically related sponsorships		Categorically unrelated sponsorships	
Dependent variables	High EPF (n = 29)	Low EPF (n = 32)	High EPF (n = 29)	Low EPF (n = 32)	
<i>Brand meaning</i>					
Meaning consistency	4.19 (.74)	4.48 (.84)	3.74 (.80)	3.98 (.87)	
Meaning clarity	3.98 (1.18)	4.51 (1.08)	3.93 (.89)	3.65 (1.11)	
<i>Brand personality</i>					
Sincerity	3.00 (.64)	3.03 (.70)	2.91 (.60)	3.16 (.71)	
Excitement	3.39 (.69)	3.57 (.58)	3.48 (.80)	3.41 (.74)	
Competence	3.60 (.73)	3.98 (.62)	3.66 (.78)	3.77 (.81)	
Sophistication	3.17 (.79)	3.56 (.62)	3.24 (.84)	3.13 (.89)	
Ruggedness	3.17 (.82)	3.42 (.96)	3.34 (.94)	2.83 (1.19)	

Note: EPF – event personality fit.

properties sponsored had high EPF ( $M=3.98$  vs.  $M=3.93$ ,  $F_{1,118}=.03$ ,  $p=.87$ ).

*Brand personality.* A MANCOVA was conducted on the brand personality measures. Contrary to Experiment 1, no significant multivariate effect was found for SCR (Wilks'  $\lambda=.98$ ,  $F_{5,112}=.55$ ,  $p=.74$ ). The main effect for EPF was not significant either (Wilks'  $\lambda=.95$ ,  $F_{5,112}=1.20$ ,  $p=.32$ ). Of theoretical interest is that, although not hypothesized, a significant SCR x EPF interaction effect emerged at  $p<.10$  (Wilks'  $\lambda=.92$ ,  $F_{5,112}=1.92$ ,  $p=.096$ ). Univariate tests indicated that the interaction was significant for the ruggedness personality dimension ( $F_{1,116}=4.52$ ,  $p=.04$ ) (see Fig. 2b). Follow-up analyses by EPF showed a significant simple effect of EPF on the ruggedness dimension when sponsorships were categorically unrelated ( $F_{1,118}=4.32$ ,  $p=.04$ ), with the sponsor

brand being perceived to be more rugged when properties had high fit ( $M=3.34$ ) than when properties had low fit ( $M=2.83$ ). The effect of EPF was not significant when sponsorships were categorically related ( $M=3.17$  vs.  $M=3.42$ ,  $F_{1,118}=1.05$ ,  $p=.32$ ).

### 6.3. Discussion

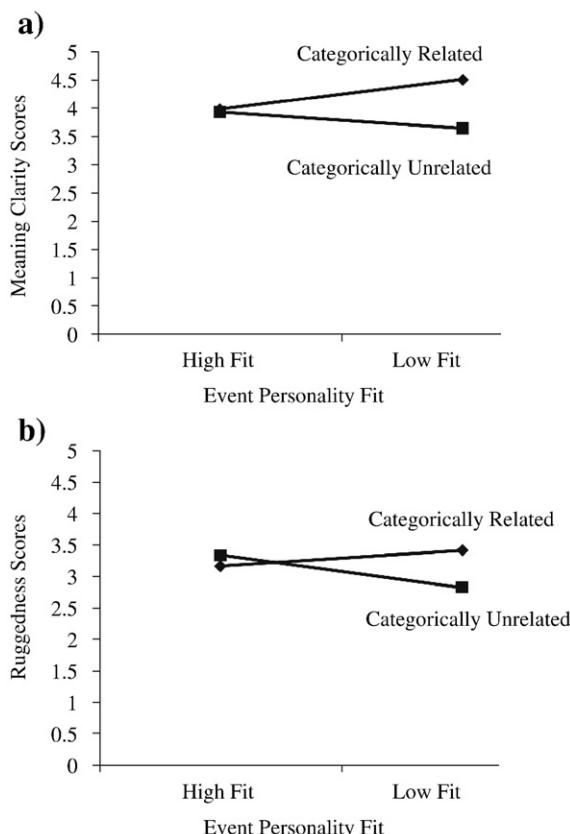
Although the specific results of Experiments 1 and 2 differed, categorical commonalities between sponsorships were able to generate category membership that pulled sponsorships together, despite differences on event personalities. SCR appeared to serve as anchor for fit calibration when EPF was low. As a result, information conveyed by sponsorships in the portfolio strengthened, thus promoting a coherent brand image (Keller, 2001). Contrary to Experiment 1, the main effect of SCR was not present here, and the effects of EPF emerged in a two-way interaction. One possible explanation is that piecemeal-mode processing might have replaced category-based processing when categories were different. The influence of personality was largely mute when sponsorships were categorically related, possibly because a superordinate categorical imagery overshadowed the individual event concepts; whereas absence of category match evoked elemental processing that might have led participants to generate more thoughts about individual property's personality. Consequently, ruggedness of the Rugby World Cup might have emerged and accentuated when evaluating the personality of Greenpeace and use of elements such as Rainbow Warriors. This evaluation might have created "relational links" (Cornwell et al., 2006) to connect the seemingly disparate sponsorships and allow ruggedness to stand out.

The particular personalities associating with the sponsored properties could be another reason why SCR did not have had an effect on sponsor brand personality. For example, in the low SCR-high EPF portfolio, the Rugby World Cup and Greenpeace not only fitted well on the personality dimensions of ruggedness, excitement and competence, but also fitted in terms of being low on sincerity and sophistication (as opposed to the same portfolio in Experiment 1, where the PGA and Guide Dogs moved in opposite directions on the sincerity and ruggedness dimensions although they were similar on the others) (see Fig. 1). Because of differences/similarities on these multiple dimensions, EPF may trump SCR as a point of fit assessment.

### 7. General discussion

Analyses across the two experiments provide mixed support for the conceptualization of sponsorship portfolio fit. The findings support H<sub>1a</sub> and H<sub>1b</sub>, suggesting that categorically related sponsorships lead to a perception of higher brand meaning consistency and clarity than categorically unrelated sponsorships. In line with person perception research (Macrae et al., 1994) and prototype-based model of categorization (Malt, 1989), people can more readily process information that is consistent versus inconsistent with the category prototype, because of the expectation for consistent information and creation of an "it feels right" perception (Lee and Aaker, 2004). The mechanism underlying this finding appears to be one that derives from enhanced processing fluency when category prototype facilitates the assimilation of incoming information and response generation (Lee and Aaker, 2004).

The effect of SCR on brand personality supports category-based processing. H<sub>1c</sub> states that SCR leads to more unified brand personality and the results lend partial support to the hypothesis. While an image transfer effect from a high SCR portfolio is evident, portfolio membership appears to highlight aspects of the properties' personalities. A prototypical imagery that represents the most common features of sports events emerges. Such processing and organization of information resembles the process of stereotyping in person perception (Macrae et al., 1994). This central category-related trait, in effect, cues a category



**Fig. 2.** SCR x EFP interaction effect on dependent variables. a) Effect on brand meaning clarity. b) Effect on the ruggedness dimension of brand personality.

membership that provides relational links (Cornwell et al., 2006) to pull sponsorships together.

Although the main effect of EPF was not significant in both experiments (failing to support H<sub>2a</sub>, H<sub>2b</sub>, and H<sub>2c</sub>), this does not imply that the variable has no influence on portfolio evaluation. Rather, the findings suggest that the impact of SCR as a processing heuristic diminishes when category prototype becomes ambiguous and personality is multi-dimensional. The SCR x EPF interaction implies that the perceiver is able to discern various personality dimensions of each individual property and decipher and integrate these dimensions. This finding opens interesting questions for brand personality research. If a brand seeks a distinctive personality across brand building elements such as sponsorship, to have a deficit on a presumably positive brand personality dimension (e.g., sincerity) may actually be desirable, especially if other desired dimensions are high. For brand building purposes, a “well-rounded” brand personality may not be as communicable as a “spiky” brand personality – one having both high and low performance on dimensions.

The present research examines sponsorship portfolio influence on brand image, whereas most previous research concentrates on the relationship between a sponsor and a property. This research contributes to the literature by demonstrating that sponsorships in a portfolio exert influence on each other to create an overarching effect on the evaluations of brand meaning and personality associated with the sponsor. The two experiments measure consumer inference making about the dimensions of brand image to suggest whether category- or piecemeal-based processing was accessible from memory. The findings are consistent with those in brand extension research: perceived fit of a new extension in relation to an existing parent brand can be a function of category similarity and concept consistency (Dacin and Smith, 1994; Mao and Krishnan, 2006).

### 7.1. Implications for sponsors

Through a sponsorship portfolio, brand managers can leverage what consumers know about a sponsorship property to develop associations for the sponsor brand. Although a brand may have reasons to develop a diverse portfolio of sponsorships to capitalize on positive associations, pursuing this objective may expose the brand to risks that ultimately may weaken brand image. Thus, brand managers should select sponsorships that possess logical connections on salient property characteristics such as event type or concept. If varied sponsorships address varied target audience, some consideration of overlapping exposure is justifiable.

Although loosely related sponsorships may dilute the desired brand concept, closely related sponsorships may also create a brand personality that is unexpected. In dealing with this paradox, brand managers should understand the personality dimensions of each individual sponsorship property, from a consumer's perspective, before making a sponsorship decision. Evaluation may include how the new sponsorship fits with the brand's existing portfolio prototype and whether these sponsorships have conflicting traits. Furthermore, the findings suggest that category serves as an important anchor of comparison when processing a sponsorship portfolio. As such, collateral marketing that communicates a brand's sponsorship portfolio could articulate (Cornwell et al., 2006) the traits associated with the sponsorship category to facilitate the formation of brand image. When a portfolio comprises categorically unrelated sponsorships, brand managers may want to emphasize shared personality traits of properties in order to facilitate information processing and focus image.

Understanding how consumers process a sponsorship portfolio may also help with event organizers' sponsor recruitment. They may ask: What sponsorship properties already exist in the sponsor's portfolio and how does our event match with these properties? Answer to this question can help position a special event on the image

criterion that is important to sponsors. To enhance viability as a sponsorship property, the event needs to cultivate a distinctive and unique event personality.

### 7.2. Limitations and future research directions

Use of hypothetical sponsor brands strengthens internal validity of the experimental design but threatens external validity. Future research should consider portfolios involving real brands along with real events to see if differences occur. Also, the discrepancy of results between the two experiments might relate to the fact that the sponsors differ in product category. Future research may examine the potential moderating effect of this variable. In addition, because the present research used real events in the experiments, sponsorships could not match completely on event personality dimensions. While the use of real events improved external validity, the perception of EPF and the process of image transfer were difficult to control. Whether consumers assessed EPF on the basis of the properties' common personality dimensions or lack of a personality trait remains unexplained.

Consumers' perceptions of the property's personality may change with deeper interaction with the property and this relationship may differ when reinforced over time. Future studies should consider manipulations to evoke event related imagery. Follow-up studies should consider alternative conceptualizations of sponsorship fit. Other dimensions of sponsorship may operate to calibrate the perceived fit which may influence the processing fluency. A content analysis of consumer associations for events could provide empirical evidence for or against the fit conceptualization in this research. Finally, the present research only examined the portfolio effects by examining fit between two sponsorships. Clearly, many sponsorship portfolios contain varied activities and thus examination of broad-based portfolios should also be necessary. This research represents a first step to use theory to address common practice in terms of capturing the effects of complex sponsorship portfolio strategies.

The potential importance of personality “spikes” or “troughs” presents an interesting direction for future research in all types of brand and strategic alliances. When two or more entities combine via contract or agreement, the resulting personality of the combination is seemingly dependent on both high and low personality traits. Combining entities with countervailing traits may wash out desired image creation. Given the importance of marketing alliances in sponsorship, brand placement and co-branding, the investigation of personality spikes and troughs is important.

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