

Event-related advertising and the special case of sponsorship-linked advertising

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Corporate sponsorship is a valuable brand-building platform, typically leveraged by advertising and promotion. While advertising often ‘uses news’ to connect to meaningful events, sponsorship contracts create a special category of advertisers that have official rights to event affiliation. In fact, sponsorship-linked marketing creates two special categories of advertiser: those officially linked to the event and those that seek association with the event but have no legitimate link (i.e. ‘ambushers’). We examine the prevalence and nature of sponsorship-linked advertising (SLA) as a leveraging strategy employed by both sponsors and ambushers. SLA includes advertising that communicates a sponsorship link or tie, as well as advertising that demonstrates a theme that links to sponsorship. Two content analytic studies find extensive use of SLA by ambushers and true sponsors. We propose a diagnostic method to identify ambushing attempts. Practical implications for sponsoring brands, potential ambushing brands and policy makers are discussed.

Introduction

This research proposes that sponsorship-linked advertising (SLA) is valuable in understanding how brand and corporate advertising links to sponsorship and event marketing. Sponsorship is concerned with two activities. First, an exchange between sponsor and event property occurs whereby the event property receives compensation and the sponsor obtains the right to associate itself with the event. Second, the sponsor leverages the association by developing marketing activities to communicate the sponsorship (Cornwell 1995; Cornwell *et al.* 2006; Simmons & Becker-Olsen 2006). Sponsorship-linked marketing is therefore a subset of event-related marketing and is distinguished by the presence of a sponsorship contract that authorises some entities to link with the event in an

official way. This is an important distinction, as event-related advertising implies a wider ambit of communications that may include advertising linkage to non-sponsored events, such as political campaigns, disasters, fundraisers and even celebrity weddings and births.

Importantly, sponsorship of events creates an out-group of advertisers that seek to associate with the event. These advertisers may be categorised as potential ambushers. Ambush marketing, defined as the formation of an association with an event without securing official sponsorship rights (Sandler & Shani 1989), is possible via advertising executions. Ambush marketing has evolved since its emergence 25 years ago and now represents a threat to sponsors (in terms of creating confusion among consumers), sports property valuation and the integrity of major events (Burton & Chadwick 2009; Pitt *et al.* 2010). The ambush marketer may actively seek the misattribution of 'official sponsor' by consumers and viewers, or may simply seek awareness via association with a sponsored event to capitalise on goodwill and value generated by the event or property (Burton & Chadwick 2009). While the importance of ambushing during events has been discussed in a number of papers (Sandler & Shani 1989; Stotlar 1993; McDaniel & Kinney 1994), the importance of ambushing at a distance via advertising has not been extensively researched (for an exception see Kinney & McDaniel 1996). Most academic attention has been directed towards the legal and ethical debate surrounding ambushing practice at the event (e.g. Hoek *et al.* 1997; O'Sullivan & Murphy 1998; Townley *et al.* 1998) and the activities with which it is associated (e.g. Hoek *et al.* 1997; Meenaghan 1998; McKelvey & Grady 2008; Chase & Kurnit 2010). This has resulted in an event-orientated examination of ambushing.

The importance of examining SLA is emphasised by Cornwell *et al.* (2005), who support extension of research on leveraging sponsorship to logically include 'thematically tied advertising' and call for theoretically grounded research into sponsorship processing mechanics. Crimmins and Horn (1996) have noted that stronger memory traces would be expected of collateral advertising, not only stating the sponsorship relationship but also strengthening the link creatively. Success of sponsorship, in terms of brand distinction and firm value, has been directly associated with the extent of advertising undertaken to leverage the sponsorship (Cornwell *et al.* 2001). Advertising in conjunction with sponsorship is thought to increase recall and awareness for the sponsor–event relationship (Herrmann *et al.* 2011). Moreover, it is often argued as necessary in order to keep competitors from encroaching on the popularity of a sponsored event. More broadly, adoption of distinctive communications strategies such as sponsorship, sponsorship-linked advertising, and product placement reflect a growing trend for advertisers to adopt new, 'indirect' strategies to circumvent clutter in mainstream media (Cornwell 2008; Reijmersdal *et al.* 2010; Chu & Kim 2011).

While higher levels of leveraging in the form of advertising have been endorsed, the nature of this advertising and associated ambushing advertising has not been critically examined. Extant sponsorship research has only briefly examined leverage in terms of its combined effects with sponsorship (McCarville *et al.* 1998; Derbaix & Lardinoit 2001; Simmons & Becker-Olsen 2006). We therefore explore SLA as an important communications subset of event-related advertising, and argue that the central characteristic of

having a contractual right sets up new categories of communication such as ambushing. We recognise that the ambusher is not a sponsor, so their activity might be better called ‘sponsored-event linked advertising’, nonetheless they are attempting to connect to a sponsored event. If the event had no official sponsor, there would be no issue and this would simply be another example of event-related advertising. In the following sections, we utilise the shorthand SLA to indicate advertising that connects to some sponsored event for both sponsors and ambushers.

The studies presented seek to gauge the extent of SLA adopted by true sponsors and would-be ambushers. To accomplish this, an objective test of ambushing activity is developed. The proposed test is consistent with the legal requirement in most jurisdictions of establishing the intent of a defendant. The practical difficulty of proving malicious intent is reflected in the lack of successful cases against ambushing (Coulson 2004; Davis 2008; McKelvey & Grady 2008). The proposed test addresses this problem of proof in a legal context, by offering criteria that are useful in assessing advertiser intent. The test also offers practical assistance to rights holders seeking to protect their investments through more proactive counter-ambushing strategies aimed at anticipating and deterring such campaigns. Hence, identification of ambusher intent is relevant for both reactive and proactive strategies available to official rights holders (e.g. Burton & Chadwick 2009; Chase & Kurnit 2010).

Study 1: content analysis and the three-point test of ambushing

Although SLA is relevant as a leveraging strategy across all types of sponsorships, this research focuses on SLA use specifically in the context of sport. This context is justified due to the global significance and size of sport sponsorship relative to other sponsorships. Moreover, there have been recent academic calls for investigation into advertising as a means of effectively leveraging sports sponsorship (Crimmins & Horn 1996; Walliser 2003; Cornwell 2008).

SLA may include explicit communication of a sponsorship link (here termed ‘Explicit SLA’) and/or implicit sponsorship connections (here termed ‘Implicit SLA’). Explicit SLA may be conveyed by embedding a sponsorship statement or event logo (or both) within an ad (Cornwell & Roy 2004; Smolianov & Shilbury 2005). Implicit SLA, however, is exemplified by abstract, creative, or indirect execution that suggests (without any explicit statement or event logo) an overall theme associated with the sponsored event. For example, visuals depicting a soccer stadium, a football, swimmers lined up on blocks, or copy subtly suggesting sports relatedness (e.g. ‘Great Shot, Sony’ combined with a visual of a soccer player kicking a goal) would demonstrate Implicit SLA. When occurring in isolation, theme is arguably characteristic of all creative ads, irrespective of whether or not the ad is linked to sponsorship. What distinguishes Implicit SLA from the realm of creative advertising – and from other forms of event-related advertising – is advertiser intent to associate with a sponsored event. In addition to thematically orientated creative executions, a true sponsor would be expected to use event logos and/or explicit statements

of association (referred to as 'Combined Explicit and Implicit SLA'). Ambushers, on the other hand, are precluded from using event logos due to the absence of formal sponsorship rights. Hence, ambushers are limited to using only Implicit SLA to form an association with the event.

SLA differs from marketing 'alliance' communication strategies such as celebrity endorsement and co-branding due to the complexity of the association between event and brand being compounded by the presence of multiple stakeholders including event organisers, official sponsors, the advertising brand, attendees, participants, fans, policy makers and, of course, potential ambushers. SLA strategies – both by the true sponsor and by potential ambushers – may be used in a variety of media contexts including print, television, internet and broadcast radio. Increasingly, more creative media vehicles are being adopted (Dahlen 2005). For example, sports stadiums, product packaging, sports merchandise, mobile phones, blimps and spectators are potential vehicles for SLA communications.

Theoretically, the two manifestations of linking to a sponsored event (Explicit ties and Implicit ties) do different communication jobs for the sponsor-event relationship. Traditionally, memory research has distinguished between item and relational information types (Humphreys 1976, 1978; Hunt & Einstein 1981). Item information is defined as information utilised when recalling a specific object or event (Hunt & Einstein 1981). In contrast, relational information is that information used to recall the relationship between objects or events (Hunt & Einstein 1981). Item and relational information types have been distinguished on the basis that they involve differential recall and recognition, as well as how they are differently encoded and retrieved (e.g. Hunt & Einstein 1981). Weeks *et al.* (2006) propose a model where sponsorship success depends upon how audiences encode information at the time of exposure. If combined item and relational processing are induced, then retrieval of information is facilitated. Applying their conceptual framework to sponsorship leveraging implies a need to promote the processing of item information in relation to sponsoring brand and/or sponsored event components, and relational information linking component item information such as brand and event, through strategic execution.

One would expect that legitimate sponsors would want to leverage assets such as rights to logos and marks to their advantage in advertising. Presenting sponsorship identification as item information about the event within the context of a sponsoring brand ad, even if not thematically tied, creates a potential relationship. Likewise, embedding a sponsor's brand advertising in event programming, even if not thematically tied, could support the development of relational information since the brand and event are juxtaposed. Utilising an advertisement theme linked to the event would further develop the potential for articulating a relational link (Cornwell *et al.* 2006). Thus, it is expected that Combined Implicit and Explicit SLA would develop strong relational information through use of distinct visual and verbal cues that support articulation of the brand–event relationship. Moreover, only true sponsors have the right to tie to the event and therefore adopt Explicit SLA executions. It is not, however, the case that only Explicit SLA could develop item information. Depending upon execution style, the presence

of cues and visuals, and these in combination with the viewer's prior knowledge, could support development of useful item information.

Although sponsors have a contractual right to explicitly link to the event, they might adopt implicit advertising for at least two reasons. First, Implicit SLA might be used as part of a comprehensive and integrated campaign, including a mix of Explicit, Implicit, Combined SLA and product advertising, with the aim of maximising engagement with the campaign. Second, sponsors may choose to adopt Implicit SLA to limit adverse judgement of their commercial motives (Rifon *et al.* 2004). It is therefore anticipated that sponsorship leveraging practice by sponsors will yield more examples of Combined Implicit and Explicit ads than ads using either implicit or explicit executions in isolation. On the other hand, true sponsors, intentional ambushers, or any brands seeking to leverage a positive image through affiliation with the event, can conceivably adopt Implicit-only SLA. In the present research, brands that engage in Implicit-only Sponsorship-Linked Advertising, but that are neither official event sponsors nor judged to have ambushing intent, will be referred to as 'free riders'. Given that Implicit-only SLA may be used by official sponsors, ambushers or free riders, while explicit forms of SLA are restricted to use by sponsors only, it is expected that:

H1: the observed frequency of each form of SLA will differ from chance such that one form will be used more frequently. Specifically, when the observed frequencies of (a) Implicit-only SLA, (b) Explicit SLA, and (c) Combined Implicit and Explicit SLA executions are compared to expected frequencies, the observed frequency of Implicit-only SLA will be greater than expected by chance.

The second hypothesis also compares observed and expected frequencies of use of each of the three types of SLA, but here we are interested in use of each of the three forms by legitimate sponsors only. Hence, the hypothesis will be tested only on the subsample of SLA that was employed by true sponsors:

H2: the observed frequency of each form of SLA used by true sponsors will differ from chance such that one form will be used more frequently. Specifically, in the subsample of SLA ads used by true sponsors, a comparison of the observed frequency of (a) Implicit-only SLA, (b) Explicit SLA, and (c) Combined Implicit and Explicit SLA executions to expected frequencies will show that the observed frequency of Implicit-only SLA will be greater than that expected by chance.

Ambushing appears to be a pervasive practice at large sporting events (Burton & Chadwick 2009; Pitt *et al.* 2010). Given the purported pervasiveness of ambushing, it is expected that SLA in its implicit form will include a high proportion of ambushing ads. Thus Sponsorship-Linked Advertising, in its purely implicit form, becomes relevant in the global sponsorship arena, where ambushers, legitimate event sponsors and free riders may all engage in SLA as a competitive tool. Hence, we predict:

H3: the observed frequency of Implicit-only SLA by different parties will differ from chance such that one type of user will employ Implicit-only SLA more frequently than would be expected by chance. Specifically, in the subsample of Implicit-only SLA ads, a comparison of the observed frequency of (a) ambushers, (b) legitimate sponsors, and

(c) free riders to expected frequencies will show that the observed frequency of ambushers will be greater than that expected by chance.

Faced with the challenge of being legally restrained from adopting an Explicit SLA tactic, ambushers are likely to elevate the connection between brand and event by adopting additional tactics aimed at developing relational connections, such as placement of advertising at a time coincidental to the event and placement of the advertising in media targeting the event audience. These tactics will be considered subsequently when introducing coding for ambushing evidence.

Study 1: method

This study examines SLA in terms of the proposed dimensions of explicitness and implicitness through content analysis (Weber 1990). Since Kassarjian (1977) introduced content analysis as a method to study message content, it has been applied in a variety of advertising contexts. For example, studies have examined cross-cultural differences in advertising (e.g. Bang *et al.* 2005), celebrity endorsement (Choi *et al.* 2005; Grau *et al.* 2007), use of fine art in advertising (Hetsroni & Tukachinsky 2005), policy concerns in billboard advertising (Taylor & Taylor 1994) and use of nostalgia (Muehling & Sprott 2004).

Stimuli

To obtain a representative sample of ads, general interest, sports and news/business magazines were sampled from the United States (*Newsweek*, *GQ*, *National Geographic*), United Kingdom (*Four Four Two*, *Car*, *European Business*, *GQ*) and Australia (*Inside Sport*, *Time*, *Four Four Two*, *Alpha*, *The Bulletin/Newsweek*) during September 2006. These magazines were sampled for several reasons. They are widely circulated publications in their sporting, business and general interest categories. Average circulation rates are 3.2 million issues per year in the United States, 400,000 issues per year in the United Kingdom, and 105,000 issues per year in Australia (Magazine Publishers Association 2006; Periodical Publishers' Association 2006). These magazines have similar readership profiles, including readers who are well educated, of above average wealth and generally regarded as being aware of global events (Albers-Miller & Gelb 1996; Bang *et al.* 2005; Magazine Publishers Association 2006; Periodical Publishers' Association 2006), and are thus comparable. To reduce noise in the data, these magazines were sampled from countries that are culturally similar (Albers-Miller & Stafford 1999). Finally, these magazines were used because they were judged as being likely to contain ads linked to sponsorship of sporting events. We considered only half-page or full-page ads to control for ad size effects, and because of their dominant use in magazines (Harmon *et al.* 1983). Magazines were purchased from the respective countries for the study. From the total pool of 485 ads found in these magazines, every fifth ad was selected. This resulted in a total sample of 97 ads.

Procedure – coding for Implicit and Explicit SLA

Four judges independently evaluated all ads. Each judge had a background in marketing, and was extensively trained prior to coding. Judges coded for presence and absence of

implicit and explicit dimensions within ads. Each coder indicated presence or absence of implicit sports theme, defined as the dominant motif or central idea conveyed by the ads. Implicit SLA may be exhibited through verbal and/or visual cues embedded in the ad and may be overt or more abstract and creative. To illustrate, ads containing visuals featuring the FIFA World Cup stadium, soccer players, a celebrity endorser player, or just a soccer ball, for example, were coded as Implicit. Absence of an implicit connection to sport was coded as Non-Implicit. Presence of an explicit statement and/or event logo was coded as indicative of Explicit SLA, and coded Explicit. For example, copy stating 'Proud sponsors of the FIFA World Cup' or presence of the World Cup logo within an ad, were coded as Explicit. Absence of such Explicit sponsorship ties was coded as Non-Explicit.

Procedure – coding for evidence of ambushing

The definitions of sponsorship and ambushing (O'Sullivan & Murphy 1998; McKelvey & Grady 2008) previously outlined suggest several elements distinguishing legitimate sponsors from ambushers. First, sponsorship implies the existence of an event and a sponsorship contract, requiring payment relating to that event from the true sponsor. 'True' ambushing is then specifically designated here to include intent to link to a sponsored event through marketing communications by the ambusher. However, intent cannot be presumed because it is plausible that a brand may inadvertently link to an event with the same effect of ambushing a sponsoring brand. An example of this 'innocent' leveraging may include a non-competing brand that is simply aiming to enhance its brand image through affiliation with the goodwill and popularity of the event, without intending to dilute sponsoring brands' equity. Hence, labelling an instance of SLA as a purposeful ambushing attempt may be inaccurate if it is without further evidence of intent.

After establishing official sponsorship status of true sponsors, possible ambushing intent of the remaining advertisers is inferred from three criteria: timing of the ad placement, context of the placement, and press coverage of competitive intensity. The first criterion asks if timing of placement of the implicit ad coincides with sporting events central to the ad. Coinciding timing is defined as a placement occurring within six months preceding or following an event, since this timeframe reflects the practice of placement by sponsors. It is logical that ambushers would engage in thematic leveraging close to the event if their intent is to associate with the event. Timing of ambush advertising in close proximity to the event is likely to undermine legitimate sponsors' expected leveraging, which is one possible aim of ambushing (Meenaghan 1998; Burton & Chadwick 2009). It is also a criterion that can be objectively applied.

Regarding context, existence of true sponsors' SLA within the same publication is the criterion deemed to demonstrate competitive intensity in the placement. While ambushers are unlikely to have advance knowledge of sponsors' placement decisions, it is plausible that ambushers might mimic the placement pattern demonstrated either historically by sponsoring brands, or in the time between securing sponsorship and the event. Placement

in the same media vehicles as true sponsors is some indication of ambushing intent, as it also has the potential to confuse the brand–event association in consumers' minds. In sum, ambushers, being constrained in their ability to maximise explicit cues in their advertising, are likely to seek additional relational cues to elevate the saliency of the association, such as carefully timed placement and context.

The third aspect of intent considered here is existence of press pertaining to competitive intensity or ambushing within the relevant product category or industry. Media reporting of ambushing is one objective proxy for public identification of ambushing attempts, particularly those that attract reactions from legitimate sponsors or the public for their creative and subversive tactics. We therefore include such media attention as a criterion for distinguishing ambushing from sponsorship leveraging through SLA.

Based on this planned three-point test of intent, ads were first classified according to the sport or event around which they were themed, and whether the advertising brand was in fact an official sponsor. Official sponsorship status was identified by reference to each event's website and to the Hoovers (2007) database. Subsequently, timing coincidental to the event and presence of the legitimate sponsor's advertising in the same publication was coded. In order to consider the context of competitive intensity, product category or positioning (e.g. luxury) of both the ambushing brand and legitimate sponsors were also identified. While the most prominent 'warfare' has occurred between direct rivals (e.g. Nike vs Adidas, Coke vs Pepsi), it has become commonplace for corporations to compete against all other brands (Scherer *et al.* 2005). Although competitive status is not an element of existing ambushing definitions per se, competitive intensity is likely to suggest an inference of intent and may therefore be a relevant factor in identifying ambushing (Burton & Chadwick 2009). As mentioned, some simply sports-themed ads (i.e. Implicit SLA) might be identified as potential instances of ambushing given this approach. Advertisers not intentionally seeking misattribution as event sponsor but being mistaken as sponsors – termed 'incidental ambushers' by Quester (1997) – would, however, most likely be aware of their perceived position. They could have adapted their communications platform rather than face media scrutiny and potential lawsuits if they were not keen to gain the larger association that the event brings. While these marketers might be incidental ambushers, they are more likely free riders in their use of an important event to garner attention and elevate interest in their brand.

Media scrutiny is utilised as an indicator of public perceptions of ambushing relating to the instance as a gauge of inferred intent. Therefore, the press element of the test was operationalised by undertaking media searches of the Factiva database during the year preceding the study's timing. Media reports of those brand names, industries and sporting events featured in the relevant themed ads (those explicitly considering coverage of perceived ambushing) were collected and coded as a presence of press coverage. In summary, although intent may not be discernable from any of these elements in isolation, in combination they mount a cogent intent profile, which is less subjective than judgement or reporting of intent by involved parties.

Study 1 results

Explicit and Implicit SLA

The data were first analysed using traditional measures of inter-coder reliability. Cohen's coefficient Kappa for explicit and implicit attributes were 0.87 and 0.94 respectively for four judges and therefore within acceptable levels of reliability established by Kassarjian (1977) and Nunnally (1978). Differences were resolved via discussion.

Table 1 presents a cross tabulation of frequency of explicit and implicit dimensions found in the subsample of SLA ads. Seventeen ads (17.53%) were rated as Combined Explicit and Implicit SLA. Twenty-eight of the ads (28.87%) were rated as Implicit-only, and a further two (2.06%) were Explicit-only. Hence, there were 47 (48.45%) Sponsorship-linked ads found in the sample. In addition to these SLA ads, a further 50 ads (51.55%) were neither Implicit nor Explicit SLA. These non-SLA ads are not examined further.

A chi-square test for goodness-of-fit was conducted to test H1. This test used only the data pertaining to the three different forms of SLA ads, and did not consider non-SLA ads. The observed frequencies of usage of each of the three forms of SLA were not equal and thus differed from chance, $\chi^2 (df = 2, N = 47) = 21.74, p < 0.001$. The majority of SLA communications were Implicit-only SLA advertisements (59.57%). Observed frequencies of use of Explicit-only (4.26%) and of Combined Explicit and Implicit SLA forms (3.47%) were both below expected frequency. Hence, H1 was supported. A separate test was used to test for association between the proposed explicit and implicit attributes. Here, the phi-coefficient was calculated and found to be 0.43, $p < 0.001$, indicating that the two dimensions are weakly associated.

As detailed in the following section, 26 of the Implicit-only ads were, after further analysis, deemed to be either ambushing ($n = 18$) or 'free riding' ads ($n = 8$). Legitimate sponsors were identified via Hoovers 2007 (www.hoovers.com) and relevant event websites. The number of sponsorship-linked ads by legitimate sponsors included 17 Combined Explicit and Implicit ads, two Explicit-only, and two Implicit-only ads. H2 was tested using a chi-square goodness-of-fit test to examine legitimate sponsors' use of each of these three different forms of SLA. Considering only the 21 ads from legitimate sponsors, the observed frequencies of usage of each of the three forms of SLA were not equal and thus differed from chance, $\chi^2 (df = 2, N = 22) = 19.27, p < 0.001$. Legitimate

Table 1: Cross tabulation of implicit and explicit dimensions of SLA

	Implicit (ad demonstrates overall sports theme or motif)	Non-implicit	Total
Explicit (presence of sponsorship statement and/or event logo in ad)	17	2	19
Non-Explicit	28	—	28
Total	45	2	<i>N = 47</i>

sponsors primarily used the Combined SLA execution (80.95% of sponsors' SLA ads), hence H2 is supported.

Ambushing classification

Prior to testing H3, it was necessary to determine which of the 28 Implicit-only ads constituted an ambushing attempt, and which were examples of legitimate sponsorship leverage. The ambushing classification scheme was applied to the subsample of Implicit-only ads that all showed some thematic link to sponsored events. Results of the classification are detailed in Table 2. Ambushing intent was found to predominate the 28 Implicit-only ads: 14 of these were classified as 'ambushers' by all three criteria, and a further four ads were labelled 'potential ambushers' after meeting at least two of the criteria for ambushing. Thus, 18 (64.29%) of the 28 Implicit-only sponsorship-linked ads were classified as ambushers of some type. Two of the 28 (11%) held a legitimate sponsorship, and the remaining eight ads, or 29% of the Implicit-only subsample, were judged to be from neither legitimate sponsors, nor ambushers of any kind. These eight were labelled 'free riders'.

Table 2: Classification of advertiser intent in Implicit-only SLA ads

Product category	Sport type/event	Legitimate sponsor ^a	Timing coincidental to event			Perceived ambush
			Context ^b	Press ^c		
Car	Formula One	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Digital camera	Soccer/World Cup	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Entertainment	Soccer	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Golf balls	US Masters	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mobile phone	Soccer/World Cup	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ski equipment	Winter Olympics 2006	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Soft drink	Soccer	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sports clothing	Soccer/World Cup	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sports shoes	Soccer/World Cup	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sports shoes	Soccer	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sports shoes	Soccer/World Cup	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sports shoes	Soccer/World Cup	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
TV/home entertainment	Soccer/World Cup	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
TV/home entertainment	Rugby Union (International Test Series)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Product category	Sport type/event	Legitimate sponsor ^a	Timing coincidental to event			Perceived ambush
			Context ^b	Press ^c		
Sports shoes	Cricket (International)	No	Yes	Yes	No	Likely
TV/home entertainment	Soccer/World Cup	No	Yes	No	Yes	Likely
Sports equipment	Soccer	No	Yes	Yes	No	Likely
Watch	Formula One	No, but sponsor of competing team	Yes	Yes	No	Likely
Car	Winter Sports (Snowboarding)	No	No	No	No	No
Car equipment	Formula One	No	Yes	No	No	No
Charity	Soccer	No	Yes	No	No	No
Electrical/home entertainment	Soccer/World Cup	No	Yes	No	No	No
Hair styling products	Soccer	No	Yes	No	No	No
Investment banking	Boxing	No	No	No	No	No
Watch	LPGA/Golf	No, but official sponsor of women's official rankings	Yes	No	No	No
Vitamins	Swimming	No	No	No	No	No
Tyres	Soccer/World Cup	Yes	—	—	—	NA
Watch	The Goodwood Revival (Motorsport)	Yes	—	—	—	NA

Notes:

^a Legitimate sponsor status confirmed via Hoovers 2007 (www.hoovers.com) and relevant event websites^b Legitimate sponsors' ads in same publication^c Press release relating to competitive intensity in that industry/product category at the time of publication

Yes = Blatant ambush (50% of Implicit-only subsample); Likely = potential ambush, i.e. at least two criteria met (14.29% of Implicit-only subsample); No = Free rider (28.57% of Implicit-only subsample); NA = Legitimate sponsor (7.14% of Implicit-only subsample)

Ambushers (including blatant and potential) in total sample = 18%

To test H3, a chi-square test of goodness-of-fit analysis was conducted to test the frequency of use of Implicit-only SLA by ambushers, legitimate sponsors and free riders. Results of this test show that frequency of use of Implicit-only SLA by each of the three groups differed from chance, χ^2 ($df = 2, N = 28$) = 112.93, $p < 0.001$. With an observed frequency just over 64%, ambushers (including blatant and likely ambushers) were the most frequent users of Implicit-only SLA ads. Hence, H3 is supported.

Study 1 discussion and conclusion

Results support H1, with the majority of SLA in the sample using the Implicit-only style of execution. The large proportion of Implicit-only SLA also reflects the presence of ambushers and free riders, both of whom are legally prevented from Explicit SLA use, but nevertheless seek relational cues both within and around the advertising context. Relatively few true sponsors used Explicit-only or Implicit-only advertisements. H2 was also supported, with a test applied to determine the behaviour of legitimate sponsors revealing that sponsors in the sample tended to use a combined SLA strategy more frequently than expected by chance. This finding aligns strategically with item and relational theory that predicts stronger memory traces when relational cues are present. Thus it makes sense for a legitimate sponsor to maximise the relational links between event and brand by adopting combined explicit and implicit cues. While a finding that sponsors are likely to use Combined Explicit and Implicit SLA strategy to leverage their sponsorships appears intuitive, this study is the first to provide empirical evidence to document the practice. Moreover, this content analysis finds examples of the much less intuitive practice of sponsors engaging in use of Implicit-only SLA.

H3 was also supported. A large proportion of the Implicit-only subsample of sponsorship linked ads was identified as ambush attempts. Ambushing intent was inferred in the majority of the Implicit-only sample and extended to a range of strategies including the use of lower-level sponsorships secured at relatively low cost that were amplified in advertising. Interestingly, lower-end sponsors may avoid media attention by having a legal right to associate with the event thematically, even if they are not allowed to use event logos and marks. Results are consistent with recent arguments that this strategy is a common event-linked marketing practice (Burton & Chadwick 2009; Chase & Kurnit 2010). Thus, definitions of ambushing may need to be reconsidered. Should low-level sponsorships that are heavily advertised be considered ambushing or is this rather just clever investing?

While results from Study 1 are interesting, findings are limited by the relatively small ad sample analysed. Use of a cross-sectional sample means that ads for some seasonal products, as well as ads coinciding with major sporting events, are not represented by the sample. To seek further support of these findings, we conduct a second independent content analysis using a larger and more diverse sample of ads in a different time period.

Study 2: replication

The purpose of Study 2 was to build on initial insight gained from Study 1, by replicating findings relating to the SLA typology and ambushing classification, in a larger and more diverse sample of magazine ads. All three hypotheses from Study 1 were therefore retested in this new sample.

Study 2 method

Study 2 adopted a content analytic method identical to that used in Study 1, excepting

differences in sample size, time period, and selection of magazines. Again, we sampled a variety of general interest, sports and news/business magazines from the United States (*Newsweek*, *GQ*, *National Geographic*, *Forbes*, *Fortune*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Time*, *Hoop*), United Kingdom (*The Economist*, *GQ*, *Four Four Two*, *Rugby*, *European Business*) and Australia (*National Geographic*, *GQ*, *Men's Health*, *Rugby*, *Australian Tennis*, *Four Four Two*, *The Bulletin/Newsweek*, *Time*, *Inside Sport*). These magazines were sampled during December 2007. This period was selected because it did not coincide with any major global sporting event. Hence, it allowed us to determine whether SLA and ambushing are common leveraging strategies during the course of normal business. Annual circulation for the sampled magazines averages 2.5 million in the United States, 340,000 in the United Kingdom, and 110,000 in Australia (Magazine Publishers Association 2006; Periodical Publishers' Association 2006). These magazines were once again purchased from their respective countries, and the sample was drawn from full- and half-page ads only. Every fifth ad was selected from a total pool of 1005 ads, with no stopping point, to form the final sample of 201 ads for content analysis.

Study 2 results

Explicit and Implicit SLA

The data were first analysed using traditional measures of inter-coder reliability. Cohen's coefficient Kappa for explicit (0.85) and implicit dimensions (0.86) were within acceptable levels of reliability established by Kassarjian (1977) and Nunnally (1978). Again, differences were resolved by discussion.

Table 3 presents a cross-tabulation of frequency of explicit and implicit dimensions found in the sample, revealing a total of 81 sponsorship-linked ads (40.29% of all ads sampled). Twenty-five ads (12.44%) were rated as Combined Implicit and Explicit. Forty-nine of the ads (24.38%) were rated as Implicit-only. A further seven (3.48%) were Explicit-only. In addition to the data available in Table 3 that pertain specifically to SLA ads, a further 120 ads (59.70%) were neither Implicit nor Explicit. These non-SLA ads are not examined further.

Consistent with Study 1, we tested H1 using a chi-square goodness-of-fit test on the 81 SLA ads. This test showed that the observed frequency of usage of each SLA type differed significantly from the frequencies that would be expected by chance,

Table 3: Study 2 cross-tabulation of implicit and explicit dimensions of SLA

	Implicit (ad demonstrates overall sports theme or motif)	Non-implicit	Total
Explicit (presence of sponsorship statement and/or event logo in ad)	25	7	32
Non-Explicit	49	—	49
Total	74	7	<i>N</i> = 81

χ^2 ($df = 2, N = 81$) = 32.89, $p < 0.001$. H1 was supported, since Implicit-only SLA was more prevalent in the sample than either Explicit-only SLA or SLA in its combined form. In a separate test for association between explicit and implicit dimensions proposed, the phi-coefficient was calculated and found to be 0.37, $p < 0.001$. This indicates a weak association between the attributes.

As detailed in the following section, 41 of the Implicit-only ads were, after further analysis, deemed to be either ambushing ($n = 29$) or free riding ads ($n = 12$). The number of sponsorship-linked ads by legitimate sponsors included 25 Combined Explicit and Implicit ads, seven Explicit-only, and eight Implicit-only ads. H2 was tested using a chi-square goodness-of-fit test to examine legitimate sponsors' use of each of these three different forms of SLA. Considering only the 40 ads from legitimate sponsors, the observed frequencies of usage of each of the three forms of SLA were not equal and thus differed from chance, χ^2 ($df = 2, N = 40$) = 11.75, $p < 0.01$. Legitimate sponsors primarily used the Combined SLA execution (62.50% of sponsors' SLA ads), hence H2 is supported.

Ambushing classification

As in Study 1, the Implicit-only ads ($n = 49$) were further examined to determine whether they constituted ambushing attempts. Results of the classification are summarised in Table 4. Ambushing intent was found to predominate the 49 Implicit-only ads: 14 of these were classified as 'ambushers' by all three criteria, and a further 15 ads were labelled 'potential ambushers' after meeting either one or two of the criteria for ambushing. A majority of the subsample of Implicit sponsorship-linked ads (29 of 49, or 59.2%) were classified as ambushers of some type.

To test H3, a chi-square test of goodness-of-fit analysis was conducted to test the frequency of use of Implicit-only SLA by ambushers, legitimate sponsors and free riders. Results of this test show that frequency of use of Implicit-only SLA by each of the three groups differed from chance, χ^2 ($df = 2, N = 49$) = 12.93, $p < 0.001$. With an observed frequency just over 59%, ambushers (including blatant and likely ambushers) were the most frequent users of Implicit-only SLA ads. As in Study 1, H3 is supported.

A review of these ambushing advertisers found that six of 29 held some low-level sponsorship, including individual players or teams; thus again questioning if the event and title event sponsorship is being ambushed when lower-level sponsorships are advertised without explicit ties to the event but with implicit communications. The remaining SLA ads were legitimate sponsor ads (i.e. eight or 16.3% of the Implicit subsample), and ads from free riders (i.e. 12 or 24.5% of the Implicit subsample). Prevalence of ambushing across the entire sample of 201 ads in this study is a notable 29 ads, or 14.4%.

Study 2 discussion

Replication of Study 1 in Study 2 with an independent sample provides strong support for all three hypotheses. The pattern of findings was nearly identical. We now turn to a combined analysis.

Table 4: Study 2 classification of advertiser intent in Implicit-only sponsorship-linked ads

Product category	Sport type/event	Legitimate sponsor ^a	Timing coincidental to event		Context ^b	Press ^c	Perceived ambush ^d
			Contextual	Press			
Beer	Soccer – FIFA World Cup	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Car	Formula One	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Car	Rugby World Cup	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Digital camera	Rugby World Cup	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fashion clothing	Grid Iron Football – Super Bowl	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Food	NBL Basketball	No (but sponsor a league team)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sports equipment	Tennis – Australian Open		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sports radio	Cricket World Cup	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sports shoes	Soccer – FIFA World Cup	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sports shoes	Rugby World Cup	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sports shoes	Running – coinciding with Super Bowl	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sports shoes	NBL Basketball	No (but sponsor individual players)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Watch	Tennis – Australian Open		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Watch	Cricket World Cup	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Banking	NBL Basketball	No (but sponsor a team)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Likely
Banking	Running – New York Marathon		Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Likely
Business consulting	Golf – US Masters	No	Yes	Yes	No	Likely	
Fashion clothing	Rugby World Cup	No	Yes	Yes	No	Likely	
Laundry detergent	Tennis – Australian Open	No	Yes	Yes	No	Likely	
Laundry detergent	Tennis – Australian Open	No	Yes	Yes	No	Likely	
Sports equipment	Soccer – FIFA World Cup	No (but sponsor a team)	Yes	Yes	No	Likely	
Sports equipment	Tennis – Australian Open		Yes	Yes	No	Likely	
Watch	Cricket World Cup	No	Yes	Yes	No	Likely	
Watch	Tennis – Australian Open	No	Yes	Yes	No	Likely	

(continued)

Table 4 (continued)

Product category	Sport type/event	Legitimate sponsor^a	Timing coincidental to event	Context^b	Press^c	Perceived ambush^d
Watch	Golf – US Masters	No (sponsor individual player)	Yes	Yes	No	Likely
Watch	Golf	No (sponsor individual player)	US Masters	Yes	No	Likely
Tyres	Car Racing	No	Formula One	Yes	No	Likely
TV/home entertainment	Basketball	No	NBL	Yes	No	Likely
TV station	Car Racing	No	NASCAR	Yes	No	Likely
Banking	Soccer	No	World Cup	No	No	No
Fashion clothing	Cricket	No	World Cup	No	No	No
Fashion sports shoes	Running	No	No	No	No	No
Golf membership	Golf	No	No	No	No	No
Motorbike	Motor Racing	No	No	No	No	No
Sports clothing	Major Baseball League	No	Yes	No	No	No
Sports equipment	Extreme	No	No	No	No	No
Sports shoe	Running	No	No	No	No	No
Video game	Soccer – FIFA World Cup	No	Yes	No	No	No
Video game	Soccer – FIFA World Cup	No	Yes	No	No	No
Vitamins	Swimming	No	No	No	No	No
Watch	Air Racing	No	No	No	No	No
Fuel	Car Rallying	Yes	–	–	–	NA
Mobile phone	Soccer	Yes	–	–	–	NA
Motor cycle	Motor Racing	Yes	–	–	–	NA
Sports shoes	Soccer	Yes	–	–	–	NA
Sports shoes	Soccer	Yes	–	–	–	NA
TV/home entertainment	Cricket	Yes	–	–	–	NA
TV/home entertainment	Soccer	Yes	–	–	–	NA
Watch	Yacht Racing	Yes	–	–	–	NA

Notes:

^a Legitimate sponsor status confirmed via Hoovers 2007 (www.hoovers.com) and relevant event websites^b Legitimate sponsors' ads in same publication^c Press release relating to competitive intensity at time of publication (Factiva 2007)^d Yes = Blatant ambush (28.6% of Implicit-only subsample); Likely = potential ambush, i.e. at least two criteria met (30.6% of Implicit-only subsample); No = Free rider (24.5% of Implicit-only subsample); NA = Legitimate sponsor (16.3% of Implicit-only subsample)
Ambushers (including blatant and potential) in total sample = 14.4%

Given that Study 2 replicated the results of Study 1, we undertook an additional analysis of the combined data to verify the consistency of the findings across the entire sample. A chi-square goodness-of-fit analysis revealed significant differences in frequency of SLA in each of its Combined Implicit and Explicit, Implicit-only, Explicit-only forms, χ^2 ($df = 2, N = 128$) = 10.18, $p < 0.001$. H1 is therefore supported across the studies. To test for association between explicit and implicit dimensions proposed, the phi-coefficient was calculated and found to be 0.39, $p < 0.001$, suggesting a weak association. A chi-square test of goodness-of-fit analysis of the combined subsample of Implicit-only SLA ads from both studies showed a difference in observed versus expected frequencies of use of SLA by each of the three types of user, χ^2 ($df = 2, N = 77$) = 27.84, $p < 0.001$. Ambushing (including blatant and likely ambushing) represented a high proportion of this subsample (61.73%). Hence, ambushers constituted a larger proportion of the sample than legitimate sponsors, supporting H3 in the combined data.

Combined data were also analysed to determine whether there were any country-specific patterns in SLA usage. While this was not a focus of the research, an international comparison of the data might suggest country differences in sponsorship leveraging practice. The total SLA sample across the two data sets comprised 128 ads, including all forms of SLA, of which 42 (33%) were from UK publications, 48 (37.5%) from US publications and 38 (29.6%) from Australian publications. A chi-square goodness-of-fit test indicated that there was no statistical difference between observed and expected frequencies of SLA usage across the three countries, χ^2 ($df = 2, N = 128$) = 1.19, ns. Similarly, there was no difference in proportions of SLA between 2006 and 2007, the two years of the study, χ^2 ($df = 5, N = 128$) = 1.07, ns.

General discussion

The pattern of results reported across two content analytic studies provides support for our hypotheses, and insight into typical leveraging practice associated with events, pursued by brands, whether sponsors, ambushers or free riders. Together, the studies provide evidence of strong potential for ambushing. We found empirical evidence of Implicit SLA being the most likely form of leveraging in both print advertising samples. The two studies also revealed evidence in support of our hypotheses, consistent with an item and relational theoretical model, predicting that sponsors would seek to leverage their significant investments by maximising relational cues in their advertising through adoption of Combined Implicit and Explicit SLA. Likewise, ambushers seek elevation of the brand-event connection, but are legally limited to establish this link through Implicit-style SLA. Our findings provide empirical evidence supporting theoretical predictions that ambushers will look to relational cues both within and external to the advertising, including timing and context tactics. Moreover, a high level of leveraging, beyond the average leveraging expenditure undertaken by official sponsors, may extend ambushing definitions to (1) low-level sponsors engaging in disproportionate leveraging, and (2) free riders as potential ambushers. Overall, our results across the studies offer converging evidence that sponsorship leveraging practice is undertaken using considered and tactical decision

making, which may be explained by item and relational theory. That is, the two studies point to a pattern of SLA placement and execution by sponsors and ambushers that is different from chance occurrence.

Limitations and future research

Some limitations of this research may be addressed by future work. Since only one medium (magazines) was included, findings cannot necessarily be generalised to other media vehicles. Compared to other forms of media, magazine advertisements are notable for their enduring characteristics and their degree of standardisation, particularly in a cross-cultural context (Okigbo *et al.* 2005). Not surprisingly, most advertising research has been conducted on magazine ads (Abernathy & Franke 1996). Nonetheless, future research might consider broadcast advertising. While the pattern of results across the two studies – and that found in the combined sample of advertisements – suggests that results of the individual studies are not country-specific, this too only applies to magazine advertising and to the English-speaking countries included.

This research represents a conceptualisation of an important communications strategy and empirical examination of the competitive context in which it operates. Hence, further research is needed to validate these content analytic results to multiple media and samples. Empirical research on leveraging practice and its impact upon sponsor and ambusher brand equity would be a valuable future research direction. Specifically, examination of sponsor leveraging and ambushing practice should extend beyond paid advertising, to brand communications during events. It would be worthwhile measuring the prominence of such brand communications, in terms of screen time and screen space, and the location (e.g. athlete apparel, scoreboard, venue signage). Experimental research aimed at testing cognitive and affective consumer response to SLA and ambushing – perhaps through factorial design incorporating SLA, ambushing, and non-SLA – is warranted to gain insight into the impact of these important marketing strategies upon brand equity.

Future research in the area might build on these findings by investigating why sponsors occasionally elect to use an Implicit-only SLA leveraging strategy. Implicit-only sponsorship-linked ads effectively avoid overt display of the sponsor's legal sponsorship rights and this might downplay the commercial nature of the sponsorship relationship. It might also be the case that the extra cost of thematically tied advertising may not seem justified when product focused advertising is readily available. Clearly the simple addition of a logo to an existing campaign is a low-cost alternative. Consumer perceptions of SLA, including how SLA is likely to be processed in its various forms, and consumer attitudes towards this form of leveraging would be a logical future research direction.

Implications for practice, and conclusions

There are several important practical implications of this research. The prevalence of leveraging sponsorship has been empirically supported here, consistent with prior research advocating its positive impact upon sponsorship success (e.g. Crimmins & Horn 1996;

Cornwell & Roy 2004). Results also suggest that sponsors and event organisers should not underestimate the activity of ambush marketing. Ambushing appears to be a prevalent tactic outside event venues. These results suggest that sponsors and event organisers must consider appropriate proactive tactics to protect their sponsorship investments. These may include leveraging and careful placement of campaigns explicitly communicating their sponsorship ties with an event.

The objective test proposed to distinguish ambushing is equally relevant to legislators' intent on capturing such tactics. Anti-ambushing legislation has often been invoked in response to specific ambushing activities. There have, however, been problems enforcing such legislation due to the difficulty of identifying subtle tactics, and the challenge of showing direct evidence of actual harm caused by ambushing. Application of our three-point test has revealed that ambushing as sponsorship-linked advertising may extend to lower-level sponsorships that are heavily leveraged, thus requiring an enlargement of traditional definitions of the term (see Sandler & Shani 1989). While recent research in the field has suggested intensive lower-tiered sponsorship leveraging as a possible ambush strategy (Burton & Chadwick 2009; Chase & Kurnit 2010), we provide the first empirical proof of existence of this practice and cause for determining it as intended ambushing.

Findings here suggest another possible indicator of ambushing that was not addressed in this study but may be of practical value in legal decisions linked to ambush advertising. Extensive use of sponsorship-linked advertising when related to low-level sponsorships might result in a high contract to leveraging ratio. That is to say, when leveraging ratios drastically exceed the typical 1.9 average (IEG 2007), there is reason to question the intent of the advertiser. The identification of strong potential for ambushing across the two studies is particularly disconcerting for many sponsors adopting Implicit SLA to leverage sponsorships, with surprisingly many sponsors in the samples adopting this strategy. The questions to be addressed for future research in the area are: Are intentional ambushing and free riding communications potentially damaging? Do they confuse or mislead? If ambushing communications are present, as defined using the three-point test, does SLA by the true sponsor defend from this attack? Recent research on counter-ambushing communications suggests that actively addressing ambushing with new communications that mention the event and the ambusher brand actually cement the name of the ambusher in the mind of the consumer (Humphreys *et al.* 2010). While countering ambushing with communications that 'name and shame' might seem rightful for the true sponsor, memory effects may not be positive. With this in mind, any protecting potential of SLA communications to the true sponsor may make it even more valuable than previously estimated.

With advertising costs at prohibitive rates during large events, even when given 'first right of refusal', it is often not feasible for official sponsors to leverage all advertising opportunities. Moreover, the universal appeal and potential to support market entry makes global sporting events increasingly attractive to ambushers. Although legislation now extends to generic terms linked to the 2012 Olympics to be held in London, including 'gold', 'Olympics' and 'London 2012' (e.g. London Olympics Bill 2012), it is unlikely that this trend will ever cover broader event-related terms such as 'sport' or 'art'. Ultimately, more subtle types of ambushing may be impossible to control due to many

factors, including use of new media forms; the cost and difficulty of fully leveraging sponsorship opportunities; the competitive intensity surrounding global sporting events; and the inability of country-specific legislation to extend globally. Sponsorship-linked advertising by the legitimate sponsor is therefore a valuable tool in the sponsorship-leveraging toolbox.

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