BRAND SPILLOVER EFFECTS WITHIN A SPONSOR PORTFOLIO: THE INTERACTION OF IMAGE CONGRUENCE AND PORTFOLIO SIZE

JOE COBBS, *Northern Kentucky University*
MARK D. GROZA, *Northern Illinois University*
GREGG RICH, *The University of Georgia*

A sponsor portfolio exists where multiple brands sponsor a single activity or property, such as a sporting event, team, league, or a charity simultaneously. While sponsor portfolios are common in practice, little is known about how the brand perceptions of several concurrent sponsors spill over to influence each individual sponsor's brand. This paper summarizes two experiments that investigate sponsor portfolios to determine how spillover effects influence consumers' perceptions of a particular sponsor's brand within the portfolio. In Study 1, empirical evidence substantiates a brand spillover effect between multiple sponsors of a single sport property. In Study 2, the influences of image congruence and portfolio size on this spillover effect are empirically assessed. Results demonstrate an interaction effect whereby brands incongruent to the sponsored property enjoy a more favorable brand perception when included in either a small portfolio inclusive of another incongruent co-sponsor, or a larger portfolio of otherwise congruent sponsors.

INTRODUCTION

One of the fastest growing corporate marketing expenditures is the sponsorship of sports, events, and non-profit organizations, which has topped $57 billion globally and expanded by over four percent annually since 2012. Meanwhile, advertising and promotions expanded by less than three percent annually during that same period (IEG, 2015a). In North America, sports account for 70% of all sponsorship spending, followed by entertainment (10%), causes (9%), festivals and the arts (4% each) (IEG, 2015a). Sponsorship is commonly defined as the "provision of assistance either financial or in kind to an activity by a commercial organization for the purpose of achieving commercial objectives" (Meenaghan, 1983, p. 9). With the increasing financial investment by corporations into sponsorship and its utilization as a versatile marketing communication tool (Crowley, 1991), instances of multiple sponsor environments have become increasingly common (Smith, 2004). When a particular property (i.e., a sporting event, team, league, or a charity) possesses multiple sponsors, these brands represent the property's sponsor portfolio or network (Erickson & Kushner, 1999; Farrelly & Quester, 2003).

For example, the Williams Formula One (F1) racing team boasts a sponsor portfolio of eighteen official corporate partners, hailing from multiple countries and representing several product categories. The Williams F1 sponsor portfolio includes brands such as Italian winemaker Martini, Brazilian energy company Petrobras, Finish packaging and wholesale product company Wihuri, British menswear tailor Hackett, and Swiss watchmaker Oris, to name a few (WilliamsF1, 2015). Most of Williams' sponsors receive visual branding on the team's two race cars, which places their brand images in close proximity to each other. The impact of such visual representations of sponsorship portfolios remains unclear.

Rising corporate investment in sponsorship and shareholder scrutiny have increased pressure on marketing managers to more accurately measure sponsorship effects (Jensen & Cobbs, 2014). While return-on-objective (ROO) and return-on-investment (ROI) metrics draw significant focus from practitioners (Pearsall, 2010), the difficulty in isolating sponsorship effects from other marketing and advertising effects brings to question the reliability of those measures (Maestas, 2009). Subsequently,

substantiating this return often depends on demonstrating image enhancement or distinction through a brand association with a sponsored property, whereby the meanings consumers associate with a sports or entertainment property are transferred to the sponsoring brand (Gwinner, 1997; McCracken, 1989; Meenaghan & Shipley, 1999). High sponsor-property congruence or fit, where consumers perceive a match between sponsor and property, has frequently been identified as a key factor for increasing this association and enhancing sponsors' perceived brand equity (Roy & Cornwell, 2003; Weeks, Cornwell, & Drennan, 2008) and achievement of business outcomes (Cornwell, Humphreys, Maquire, Weeks, & Tellegen, 2006; Roy & Cornwell, 2004). For example, personal beauty brand L'Oreal sponsors the Emmy Awards as well as several other award shows. In such arrangements, consumers are likely to transfer meanings of glamor and beauty associated with the shows' celebrities to the L'Oreal brand (IEG, 2015b). Such an association is theoretically enhanced when consumers perceive congruence between L'Oreal and the sponsored awards show.

Sponsor portfolios create a situation with concurrent presentation of multiple brand images where a brand spillover effect is theoretically possible. In such scenarios, a spillover effect occurs when the impression of an individual brand in the portfolio is influenced by other brands that consumers simultaneously perceive (Lebar et al., 2005; Uggla, 2004). Additionally, in these situations the potential effects of congruence or fit between concurrent sponsoring brands and the sponsored property, as well as *among* the sponsoring brands, becomes exponentially complex.

For instance, sports apparel brand Nike, language software provider Rosetta Stone, and confectionary producer Hershey are all sponsors of USA Track & Field (USATF) (Schoettle, 2015). Brand image transfer between the sports property—USATF—and its individual sponsors is anticipated based on established research (e.g., Gwinner & Eaton, 1999). This research further suggests the perceived congruence between the USATF and each individual sponsor influences this transfer

of image. Yet, at USATF events and in USATF promotional materials, these sponsors and others from a range of product categories are not presented in isolation but simultaneously with the USATF brand. As a result, beyond the image transfer with USATF, a secondary brand spillover between concurrent sponsors may be occurring. Is Rosetta Stone's brand image influenced by Nike and Hershey in the context of their concurrent USATF sponsorship? While extant literature documents dyadic processes for image transference between a property (i.e., event, endorser, or other sponsored organization) and a single corporate sponsor (e.g., Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; McCracken, 1989; Speed & Thompson, 2000; Till & Busler, 1998), little research has been conducted to examine the possibility of sponsor portfolio effects on the sponsoring brand.

Thus far, sponsorship portfolio research has primarily focused either on multiple sponsors' spillover effect on the brand of the sponsored property (Groza, Cobbs, & Schaefers, 2012; Ruth & Simonin, 2003, 2006), or the effect of multiple sponsored properties on a single sponsoring brand (Chien, Cornwell, & Pappu, 2011). However, an important question for many brand managers is what effect—if any— *other* sponsors of the same property have on your sponsoring brand. Unfortunately for managers, examination of spillover effects among sponsors within a single property's sponsor portfolio has been mostly ignored. One existing study has started this work by looking at the image transfer between two concurrent sponsors (Carrillat, Harris, & Lafferty, 2010), but managers know a key question related to industry practice is what spillover effects arise between *several* concurrent sponsors of a shared sponsored property.

The purpose of this research is to empirically address this need by investigating sponsor portfolios to determine how spillover effects influence consumers' perceptions of a particular sponsor's brand within the portfolio. Two different experimental designs utilizing actual consumer brands are employed to achieve this objective and advance sponsorship research.

This paper makes several unique research contributions. First, in Study 1 empirical

evidence of brand spillover effects is presented between multiple sponsors within a single sport property's sponsor portfolio. Then in Study 2, the influence of portfolio congruence and size on this spillover effect is empirically assessed. Literature reviews precede each study to provide theoretical and contextual justifications for the hypotheses tested, which are followed by sections describing methods, results, and discussions of each study. Finally, the article concludes with a summary of limitations, managerial implications and recommendations for future research.

STUDY 1

Study 1 examines whether a spillover effect occurs between sponsors within a single property's sponsor portfolio, and if so, how such effects influence the purchase intention for sponsors' brands. The following review of literature on brand associations and equity in brand alliances provides theoretical justifications for hypotheses used in this study.

Brand Alliances

According to Aaker (1991, p. 15), brand equity is the "set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service." This research emphasizes five specific dimensions within brand equity: brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other proprietary brand assets. From the perspective of sponsors, creating brand associations with a sports team, league, or player has been identified as a primary purpose of marketing through sports (Meenaghan & Shipley, 1999). For example, telecommunications brand AT&T, relies heavily on sport sponsorships to create brand associations (Lefton, 2015). In the past twelve months, the AT&T brand was associated through sponsorship with such major American sporting events as the College Football Playoff, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Final Four, the Major League Baseball (MLB) World Series, and the National Basketball Association (NBA) Finals (Lefton, 2015). By building these brand associations, sponsors such as AT&T seek to raise brand equity and thereby increase brand strength (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Keller, 1993; Lebar

et al., 2005). Brand strength can serve as a distinctive advantage for sponsors, with consumers tending to support strong brands with attention, consideration, evaluation, and choice (Hoeffler & Keller, 2003).

Theoretically, brand associations are established in memory through schemas or informational nodes that link traits such as attributes, benefits, and attitudes to a brand; thereby, forming a schematic network of associations in the mind (Halford, Bain, Mayberry, & Andrews 1998; Hunt, Kernan, & Bonfield, 1992; Keller, 1993). The ability to establish and manipulate desired associations within a brand's schematic network through sport sponsorship offers sponsors a means of aligning itself to the attributes, benefits, and attitudes potential consumers associate with their favorite sport properties. While the research to date on brand associations in the context of sponsorship focuses on consumers' associations of a property with a sponsor (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Meenaghan, 1983; Meenaghan, 1991, 2001; Meenaghan & Shipley, 1999), this study introduces the possibility of brand associations between sponsors within a property's sponsor portfolio.

Both primary associations (brand name, logo, packaging, and actual product) and secondary associations (endorsers, sponsored events, and other affiliated brands) influence a consumer's perception of brand equity (Keller, 1993, 2003). Specifically, secondary associations with other brands are thought to be particularly relevant in establishing attributes and benefits of a brand (Keller, 2003). Lederer and Hill (2001) recognize the impact of such secondary associations and conceptualize their connection to a comprehensive brand image through the brand portfolio molecule, where a brand's portfolio is defined as the collection of brands that could factor into the purchase intentions of a particular brand. Each brand within the portfolio carries certain individual traits or characteristics that contribute to consumers' perceptions of the other brands in the portfolio (Lederer & Hill, 2001). Extending such a conceptualization to a sponsor portfolio situation raises the possibility that the equity of a particular sponsor's brand could be influenced by the other brands present within a multiple sponsorship environment.

Consider AT&T and the consumer electronics brand LG, both NCAA sponsors. AT&T has been the NCAA's longest-standing corporate champion (Smith, 2011). Results from a recent sponsor loyalty survey demonstrated that nearly 33% of avid NCAA fans correctly identified AT&T as the NCAA's official wireless service provider (Broughton, 2015). In the consumer electronics category however, more fans incorrectly identified LG's competitor Samsung as the NCAA sponsor despite LG's sponsorship since 2009 (Lefton, 2015). AT&T and LG have a product relationship in that LG makes wireless handsets that use AT&T wireless service. If consumers conceptualize brand images within a schematic network or portfolio—as the above theory indicates—both AT&T and LG may benefit from more overtly emphasizing their common sponsorship relationship with the NCAA.

Building on McCracken's image transfer model of endorsement (1989), Gwinner (1997) focused on the sponsored property and highlighted the potential impact of various meanings brought by multiple brands in a sponsorship environment. Events with multiple sponsor associations were proposed to be more difficult to identify with a consistent image. Instead, consumers were thought to rely on whatever association was salient at the moment. In his own version of the image transfer model, Smith (2004, p. 462) conceptualizes this multiple sponsorship effect on the sponsored brand as the "composition of a sponsorship" and postulates that a more complex composition involving more sponsoring brands is likely to reduce the intensity of an image transfer. Multiple sponsorship arrangements, however, are likely to become increasing prevalent as events, teams, leagues and popular endorsers continue their ongoing quest to maximize revenue by adding sponsors. For instance, in the past two years, USATF has increased the number of sponsors in its sponsor portfolio from seven sponsors to 19, with annual sponsorship revenue increasing by $11 million (Schoettle, 2015). Similarly, over the past four years, the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) has increased its sponsors—corresponding with its number of events—from 23 to 33, with its prize money financed by sponsors increasing nearly $20 million (Nichols, 2015).

Neither Gwinner (1997) nor Smith (2004), however, sought to empirically investigate the spillover effects on individual sponsors within a sponsor portfolio. Perhaps the closest examination of spillover effects in a multiple brand environment came when Ruth and Simonin (2003) found that two different sponsors, one with complementary products and another with controversial products (i.e., tobacco and alcohol), can affect a sponsored property's brand in divergent ways. While they stopped short of examining effects between sponsors, they did acknowledge the need for such research.

Although empirical research on the impact of a portfolio of brand images in a single sponsorship environment is lacking, early brand alliance research has shown the physical or symbolic combination of two or more individual brands can result in spillover effects (Fang & Mishra, 2002; Rao, Qu, & Ruekert, 1999). These effects occur when consumers' perceptions of a single brand are influenced by other brands in an alliance or joint branding situation (Lebar et al., 2005; Samu, Krishnan, & Smith, 1999; Simonin & Ruth, 1998). In a cooperative advertising context, Fang and Mishra (2002) found significantly different perceptions of a fictitious, unknown brand based on the perceived quality and homogeneity of the other brands in the alliance portfolio. This result suggests the composition of brands in a multi-branded promotional situation can affect the perceptions of the individual brands present. The studies presented herein extend these findings from a brand alliance context to a sponsorship situation, where an independent organization (the sponsored property) brings together multiple sponsors seeking promotion in a sports environment.

Drawing on the theory of brand associations, their contribution to brand equity, and the empirical support in brand alliance studies, the following two hypotheses are formulated:

H$_1$: In a sponsor portfolio consisting of multiple brands, a positive relationship exists between consumers' perceptions of the brand equity of a particular sponsor and the brand equity of the other brands within the portfolio.

H₂: In a sponsor portfolio consisting of multiple brands, a positive relationship exists between consumers' purchase intentions for a particular brand and the brand equity of the other brands within the portfolio.

Research Method

The hypotheses outlined above are tested through an experimental between-subjects design consisting of two sport sponsorship conditions (high brand equity versus low brand equity). Each condition consists of three different brands and one common focal brand within the sponsor portfolio. The brands used in this experiment were chosen from four distinct product categories frequently involved in the sponsorship of sport properties.

Pretest and manipulation check. To develop the two portfolio conditions, narrow product subcategories of (1) automobiles, (2) big-box retailers, and (3) credit cards were intentionally selected so as to include direct competitors in each category (i.e, the BMW luxury brand would most likely not be considered a legitimate competitor to an economical automobile brand such as Kia).

A group of 36 undergraduate students were used to conduct both a pretest and a focus group to gauge familiarity with a list of brands in various product categories, then test potential manipulations between low and high equity portfolio groups, and lastly confirm validation of the chosen questionnaire items. This pretest procedure led to minor rewording of a few questions for clarification purposes. Otherwise, the experiment's operation and directionality of pretest results confirmed an adequate manipulation of the sponsor portfolios. Manipulation checks in the main study statistically confirmed the respondents' perceived difference in brand equity between the low and high portfolio conditions for each product category included (auto: $p < .001$; retail: $p < .001$; credit: $p < .001$). Table 1 presents this manipulation that includes Dodge, Kmart, and Discover Card in the low brand equity condition, and Toyota, Target, and VISA in the high brand equity condition. Marriott hotels served as the common brand in both

sponsor portfolios as the focus group demonstrated brand recognition but relatively neutral brand equity within the hotel product category. This combination of category awareness but brand neutrality was deemed most useful for experimental manipulation with some generalizability of the experiment's results.

TABLE 1:
Study 1 experimental design featuring sponsor portfolio conditions of low (group 1) and high (group 2) brand equity.

Brands	Portfolio Compositions	
	LOW	HIGH
Marriott	Group 1	Group 2
Dodge	Group 1	
Kmart	Group 1	
Discover Card	Group 1	
Toyota		Group 2
Target		Group 2
VISA		Group 2

To further enhance the practical relevance of the design and address concerns for the potential impact of the sponsored property, the top-level National Hockey League (NHL) or the lower-level American Hockey League (AHL) were assigned as the sponsored property for each portfolio condition. This essentially created a 2 (low/high portfolio) x 2 (NHL/AHL) design that was collapsed for the primary analysis when no significant difference ($\alpha = .05$) in terms of Marriott's brand equity (BE) or consumers' purchase intentions (PI) was detected between these two league assignments in either portfolio condition (low condition: BE, $p = .744$; PI, $p = .989$; high condition: BE, $p = .652$; PI, $p = .213$).

Sample and Data Collection

The sample for this study consisted of 160 undergraduate students from two Northeastern universities. The use of undergraduate students has been widely accepted in image transfer, endorsement, and experimental sponsorship designs (e.g., Chein et al., 2011; Groza et al., 2012; Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Ruth & Simonin, 2006; Speed & Thompson, 2000).

The experiment was administered to respondents via a computer-aided system designed to give the appearance of a survey regarding various advertising layouts. At the outset, each respondent was randomly placed into one of the two sponsor portfolio conditions (high versus low brand equity). As a distractor task, subjects were first asked to assess the clarity and effectiveness of three different advertisements, which served as the stimulus for the experiment. All three ads viewed by the respondent featured a professional hockey league thanking the same four corporate sponsors for their support. The logos of each sponsor within the portfolio condition were included in all three ads. Each of the four sponsor logos were of comparable size in each advertisement and the layouts were identical between conditions except for the manipulation of sponsoring brands apart from Marriott. Following the distractor questions regarding the overall advertisements, subjects were presented with the primary questionnaire aimed at capturing their impressions of the sponsors' brand equity and their purchase intentions as related to the sponsors' products.

Measures. The primary questionnaire was composed of nine items (see Appendix A), each based on a seven-point scale. The first six items were selected from previously validated brand equity Likert scales to represent the loyalty, quality, and value association dimensions of brand equity ($\alpha = .891$) (Aaker, 1996; Yoo & Donthu, 2001; Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000). The final three items captured purchase intentions through the use of a common semantic differential scale ($\alpha = .941$) (MacKenzie, Lutz, & Belch 1986).

Results

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to statistically analyze the difference between experimental groups in this study. In order to support H_1, recall that consumers' perceptions of the brand equity of a particular sponsor (here the control sponsor Marriott) within a sponsorship portfolio composed of multiple brands must demonstrate a positive relationship to the brand equity of the other brands contained within the portfolio. Indeed, the brand equity impressions of Marriott were significantly higher when Marriott was presented within a sponsorship portfolio that contained higher equity brands (Marriott BE_{high} = 5.27 versus Marriott BE_{low} = 4. 92; F(1,159) = 5.87, $p < .05$). In regard to H_2, while the rating of Marriott purchase intention was greater for the high brand equity condition as compared to the low brand equity condition, this difference was not statistically significant (Marriott PI_{high} = 5.06 versus Marriott PI_{low} = 4. 79; F(1,159) = 2.04, $p > .05$), and therefore H_2 cannot be accepted based on the data analysis here. Table 2 presents a summary of the analysis of variance for both hypotheses.

Discussion

Study 1 reveals empirical evidence of a brand spillover effect between corporate sponsors of a sport property's sponsor portfolio. The results of this experiment suggest that consumers may

TABLE 2:
Cell means and ANOVA results for Study 1

	Perceptions of Control Brand Marriott	
	Brand Equity	**Purchase Intent**
High Brand Equity Portfolio Condition	5.27 (0.90)	5.06 (1.19)
Low Brand Equity Portfolio Condition	4.92 (1.05)	4.79 (1.29)
	F(1,159) = 5.87*	F(1,159)=2.04

Note: * p < .05, Standard deviation in parenthesis

attribute greater brand equity to a sponsor's brand that is part of a sponsor portfolio with other sponsors' brands that they perceive as high in brand equity. This finding extends the literature on corporate sponsorship, which has primarily been concerned with the dyadic relationship between a sponsored property and a single sponsor (e.g. Gwinner, 1997; Lebar et al., 2005; Meenaghan, 2001; Speed & Thompson, 2000).

This research also advances the brand alliance literature by extending the evidence of spillover effects to secondary associations (Keller 1993; Lederer and Hill 2001). While the sponsors' brands in this experiment did not directly align with each other to produce a co-branded product—such as the above example of AT&T (wireless service provider) and LG (wireless handset manufacturer)—or engage in an intentional co-marketing initiative (Bucklin & Sengupta, 1993), their connection to a common sponsored property, such as a sports league, led respondents to seemingly form associations between the brands and thereby influence assessments of brand equity. As a result, firms entering alliances to achieve promotional objectives should first map the secondary associations that accompany such an alliance. This mapping exercise might best be accomplished through network software (e.g. UCInet or Pajek) that also allows for analytical investigation.

The findings of Study 1 support the presence of brand equity spillover effects among sponsors within a shared property's sponsor portfolio. The purpose of Study 2 is to aid marketing managers in applying this knowledge of brand spillover effects by further investigating potential boundary conditions as related to the size and congruence of the property's sponsor portfolio.

STUDY 2

The results of Study 1 suggest that the brands within a sponsorship portfolio can in fact influence consumer perceptions of other concurrent sponsoring brands. As discussed, this finding directs managers of sponsoring brands to be cognizant of fellow sponsors. This finding also raises the potential for negative (or positive) aspects of a brand-property

sponsorship relationship to be exacerbated (or mitigated) by other brands within the sponsorship portfolio. Consider the fit or congruence between a sponsor and the property; researchers have found sponsorships involving incongruence between sponsor and property to be sub-optimal (Fleck & Quester, 2007). Since brands within a sponsor portfolio influence consumer perceptions of co-sponsors (i.e., the findings of Study 1) and considering the importance of congruence in sponsorship research and practice, in Study 2 we test the effect congruence has on concurrent sponsors within sponsor portfolios of different sizes. For instance in the case of the LPGA sponsor portfolio, is the brand image of condiment maker Smucker's influenced by more seemingly congruent sponsors such as golf equipment provider Titleist and Andrews Sports Medicine, or do sponsors with less obvious congruence such as car brand Kia and Northeastern University help counteract any potential downside to perceived incongruence for Smucker's?

Congruence / Fit

One of the most widely studied aspects of sponsorship is the importance of fit or congruence between sponsor and the sponsored property (Fleck & Quester, 2007). Low fit (versus high fit) sponsorships are generally less effective in terms of sponsor recall (Cornwell et al., 2006) and image transfer (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999). Importantly, Simmons & Becker-Olsen (2006) found that low fit sponsorships can adversely affect brand clarity, a core component of brand identity (Bhattacharya & Sen 2003). Thus, the fit between sponsor and property is a key factor marketing managers must consider when engaging in sponsorship activity.

A substantive issue faced by many sponsors and sponsored properties however, is the lack of natural fit between the two entities. Previous research suggests one avenue to assuage the adverse effects of a low-fit sponsorship is by articulating or creating a congruent attribute shared by both sponsor and property (e.g., Cornwell et al., 2006; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). For instance, USATF recently signed a sponsorship deal with Rosetta Stone, which produces software tools for learning

foreign languages--not an obvious fit with track & field (Schoettle, 2015). USATF CEO Max Siegel, however, suggests that with competing athletes traveling internationally, developing foreign language skills at a basic level is a valuable asset (Schoettle, 2015). Articulation theory indicates that explaining this relationships in promotional communication could enhance perceptions of sponsorship congruence.

Yet, characteristics of sponsorship beyond articulation that could help attenuate the negative effects of a naturally low-fit relationship have thus far been ignored. As indicated by Study 1, one such factor that may influence perceptions through a brand spillover effect is the co-sponsors within a property's sponsor portfolio. Categorization theory, which is an extension of schema theory as discussed in Study 1, provides insight to consider the role of incongruence in sponsor portfolios.

Categorization Theory

According to categorization theory, individuals cognitively implement a categorization process to organize information in a manner meaningful to them, which serves as a simplification heuristic (Loken, Barsalou, & Joiner 2008; Rosch & Mervis, 1975). These categories, or mental schemas, are created according to how similar or distinct an individual perceives the information (e.g. brands) being categorized. When considering brands as objects of information to be categorized into mental schemas, categorization theory suggests that individuals will place two or more brands perceived to have similar features within the same schema; alternatively, two or more brands that individuals perceive to possess distinct features from one another will be placed in separate schemas (Tversky, 1977). Schemas are created using features most salient to the perceiver, which suggests the possibility (and likelihood) of schema variability between individuals categorizing the same information.

To cognitively reinforce schema groupings, individuals exaggerate the similarities and differences of features relevant in the categorization decisions—an encoding bias that is explained by accentuation theory (Krueger & Clement, 1994; Tajfel, 1959). Following

accentuation theory, assimilation effects occur when individuals exaggerate similarities to reinforce schema grouping; whereas contrast effects occur when individuals exaggerate differences in features to reinforce grouping into different schemas.

By the nature of sponsorship, a sponsor desires to be associated with the sponsored property. Thus, in a sponsorship context, contrast effects between a sponsor and its sponsored property are undesirable. Rather, the sponsor is seeking an environment conducive to assimilation effects between itself and its sponsored property. In a dyadic situation where only one sponsor is featured, that sponsor—even if it possesses brand features incongruent to those of the property—may not necessarily be placed in a separate schema, depending on whether those features are salient during the encoding process. For example, many events feature a title sponsor and some also feature a presenting sponsor. In the motorsport IndyCar Series, the schedule includes several races with just a title sponsor, such as Angie's List Grand Prix of Indianapolis, Iowa Corn 300, and Toyota Grand Prix of Long Beach; meanwhile, certain events also feature a presenting sponsor in addition to the title sponsor, such as the Chevrolet Dual in Detroit presented by Quicken Loans. Where an incongruent sponsor coexists with the addition of another sponsor perceived to be more congruent with the property, contrast effects could be more salient to the perceiver, who then is more likely to place the incongruent sponsor into a separate schema. Conversely, if the two sponsors are both perceived to be congruent with the sponsored property, an individual is more likely to keep all entities (the co-sponsors and the property) in the same schema. Thus, Hypothesis 3 is proposed:

H₃: In a sponsorship portfolio, the presence of a single co-sponsor congruent (versus incongruent) to the sponsored organization will be detrimental to the brand image of an incongruent sponsor.

As categorization theory is enacted by individuals as a heuristic to simplify information complexity, the number of sponsors within a sponsor portfolio could theoretically influence the categorization process. Whereas, a lone incongruent sponsor

in a two-sponsor situation is expected to be the victim of detrimental contrast effects, the cognitive processing load required by an individual to categorize a large sponsor portfolio may attenuate such contrast effects. This theoretical attenuation of contrast effects has been documented in a prior study that investigated the effects of sponsor incongruence on the brand of the sponsored property (Groza et al., 2012). Thus, Hypothesis 4 is proposed:

H$_4$: The size of the sponsorship portfolio will moderate the negative contrast effect congruent co-sponsors have on the brand image of an incongruent sponsor such that co-sponsors will have a weaker effect in a portfolio of larger size.

Research Method

To test H$_3$ and H$_4$, a 2 (congruence of co-sponsor(s): congruent versus incongruent to property) x 2 (portfolio size: 1 versus 5 co-sponsors (in addition to the target incongruent sponsor)) between subjects factorial design was used. The same target incongruent sponsor was present in all four conditions. Similar to Study 1, actual brands were used in developing the incongruent and congruent sponsor portfolios. Both sponsor portfolios consisted of sponsors within one of five product categories (i.e. sunscreen, airlines, sportswear, beer, and wine) not used in Study 1.

Experimental Design

To develop the two sponsor portfolios, image-based congruence in the form of nationality was chosen as the common fit dimension, and a sponsored sport property—the United States Australian Football League (USAFL)—was selected for relevance to nationality congruence manipulation. Furthermore, the sponsoring brands selected for the study were not functionally similar to the sponsored property. These design choices were aimed at minimizing confounds by maintaining consistency in the fit dimension across brands from several different product categories (Poon & Prendergast, 2006). The target incongruent sponsor in each condition was Buca di Beppo restaurants, which was chosen because of its nationality incongruence to the sport property and

relatively neutral brand image results in a pretesting focus group. The congruent sponsor portfolio consisted of Australian brands (Australian Gold, Qantas Airlines, Greg Norman Collection, Fosters, and Yellow Tail), while the incongruent sponsor portfolio consisted of brands of differing national origin from one another (Banana Boat, Singapore Airlines, Cutter & Buck, Dos Equis, and Ernest & Julio Gallo). Manipulation checks utilizing the three-item congruence scale of Fleck and Quester (2007) confirmed that subjects' perceptions of congruence of the co-sponsor(s) were in fact consistent with the intended fit manipulations.

Sample and Data Collection

The convenience sample for the second study consisted of 106 participants recruited through contact lists developed by alumni and students of two Northeastern universities. There was no participant overlap between the samples in Study 1 and Study 2. Study participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions (cell sizes ranged from n = 24 to n = 29). Consistent with prior experimental research on sponsorship (e.g., Cornwell et al., 2006; Johar & Pham, 1999), press releases—presented in Appendix B— were used to announce the collection of fictitious sponsorships between the portfolio's sponsoring firms and the single property.

Measures

Similar to prior work addressing sponsorship fit (e.g., Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006; Chein et al., 2011), we measure two specific components of brand image as the study's dependent variables: brand meaning distinctiveness (α = .90) and brand meaning clarity (α = .71) for the target incongruent sponsor. Both dependent variables were measured using established scales shown in Appendix B (Curras-Perez, Bigne-Alcaniz, & Alvarado-Herrera 2009; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006).

Results

Two 2 x 2 ANOVAS were estimated using clarity of positioning and brand distinctiveness as the dependent variables. Neither ANOVA yielded significant main effects for congruence

of co-sponsor(s) or portfolio size. Yet, both analyses yielded a significant two-way interaction of the two factors, lending support to the study's hypotheses (distinctiveness: $F(1,100) = 4.264$, $p < 0.05$; clarity: $F(1,100) = 4.491$, $p < 0.05$). The statistical results can be found in Table 3.

In the presence of only one co-sponsor, brand distinctiveness and brand clarity of the focal incongruent sponsor were lower when paired with a congruent (versus incongruent) co-sponsor. This finding suggests a negative contrast effect is salient when the incongruent sponsor is paired in a portfolio with just one other sponsor and that co-sponsor is congruent to the property—as predicted by H_3. Conversely, in the presence of five co-sponsors, brand clarity and distinctiveness of the focal incongruent sponsor were each higher when the portfolio consisted of otherwise congruent (versus incongruent) co-sponsors. This result supports H_4 and implies that individuals use a simplification heuristic to categorize brands involved in larger, more complex sponsorship portfolios. Figure 1 and Figure 2 demonstrate this interaction effect for both dependent variables—brand distinctiveness and clarity, respectively.

Discussion

This second study contributes to the literature on corporate sponsorship by investigating the key concept of congruence in the underserved domain of sponsor portfolios of various sizes. The results offer guidance for firms interested in sponsorship as a marketing tool but without inherent congruence to most commonly sponsored properties. Specifically, the study's findings demonstrate that incongruent sponsors should aim to align with sponsored properties that possess either small portfolios inclusive of another incongruent sponsor, or larger

portfolios composed primarily of co-sponsors congruent to the sponsored property. Conversely, situations that pair the incongruent sponsor with a single congruent co-sponsor or within a larger group of incongruent sponsors should be avoided. Thus, the tactic adopted by USATF of building its sponsorship portfolio by securing primarily incongruent sponsors (Schoettle, 2015) is likely to be suboptimal for its current sponsors.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

In evaluating sponsorship opportunities, firms would be wise to appraise the holistic portfolio of brands present in the sporting environment. Where a single co-sponsor exists or a title sponsor is prominently featured with the property, potential new sponsors—particularly those incongruent to the sponsored property— need to assess the congruence of the current (or title) sponsor in comparison with their own brand. If that current sponsor is congruent to the property, other incongruent sponsors may be wise to look for other opportunities. Of particular interest for potentially incongruent sponsors should be sponsored properties with an existing portfolio of many congruent sponsors. For instance, if retailer Walmart is considering presenting sponsorship of a race in the IndyCar Series, Walmart brand managers would be prudent to select a race with a title sponsor also seemingly incongruent to motorsport, such as the Angie's List Grand Prix of Indianapolis instead of the Honda Indy Grand Prix of Alabama.

In line with Cobbs' (2011) suggestion, sponsored properties should leverage their position as a potential connector of its sponsors and give adequate consideration to the network implications of adding particular firms as new sponsors, such as sponsors with existing business relationships or in complementary

TABLE 3: 2-way ANOVA results (F-value) for Study 2		
	Brand Distinctiveness	**Brand Clarity**
Co-Sponsor Congruence	.024	.02
Portfolio Size	1.513	2.742
Interaction	4.264*	4.491*
Note: Gender and age as covariates, F(1,100), * p < .05		

FIGURE 1:
Study 2 interaction effects of congruence of co-sponsors and
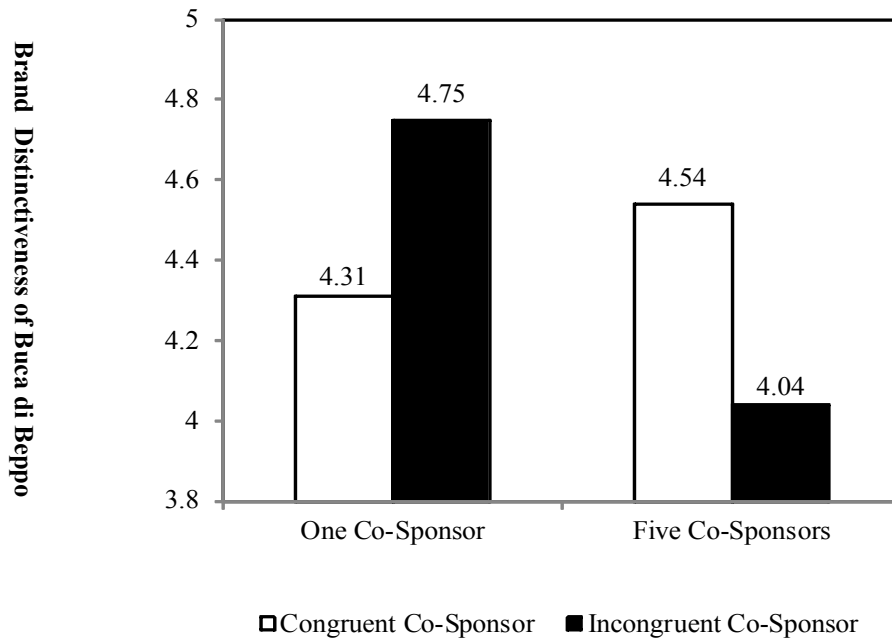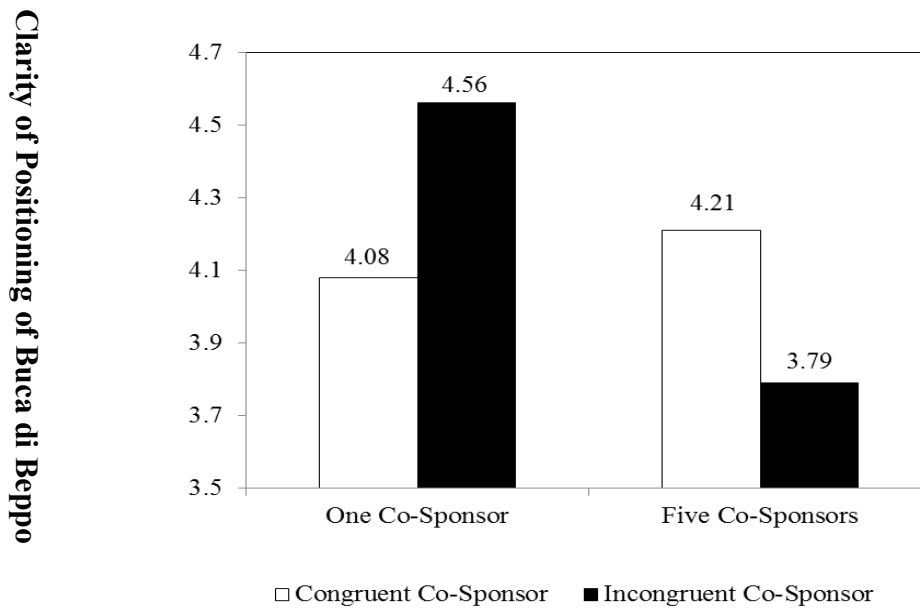**portfolio size on the brand distinctiveness of incongruent sponsor.**

FIGURE 2:
Study 2 interaction effects of congruence of co-sponsors and
portfolio size on the brand clarity of incongruent sponsor.

categories (e.g., AT&T and LG). The National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) has adopted this tactic with its Fuel for Business Council that connects NASCAR sponsors in a speed dating format designed to spark cooperative sponsorship promotion and further business-to-business relationships (IEG, 2011). Scholars can facilitate this initiative by utilizing the analytical tools of network analysis to engage a full sponsorship portfolio in investigations of inter-organizational relational dynamics that include network constraints, power, and brokerage (Erickson & Kushner, 1999).

This set of studies has demonstrated the plausibility of brand spillover within sponsor portfolios. Specifically, the other brands sponsoring a common sports property are likely to influence one another's brand image. As a result, when evaluating sponsorship opportunities, marketing managers must assess not only the brand of the sponsored property but also the brand of potential co-sponsors within the portfolio. Those marketers managing a brand incongruent to sponsored properties also need to be cognizant of the size and general congruence of the sponsor portfolio. Previous to this work, managers had to rely on assessments of dyadic sponsor-property relations in making decisions. However, these studies offer empirical evidence to direct managers toward more informed decision making when evaluating a multi-sponsor environment.

LIMITATIONS

While this investigation has penetrated a domain common to industry practice (simultaneous co-sponsors), several limitations are evident in these two studies. First, each study is purposefully designed as an experiment and thereby makes a tradeoff of controlled theory testing but limited immediate field application. While the results are valuable in empirically demonstrating the influence of co-sponsor brands within multiple portfolio conditions, the studies' stimuli are contrived for the testing purpose and viewed in a computer-aided fashion as opposed to sport consumers digesting sponsor portfolios as part of their actual leisure routine.

Likewise, the portfolios evaluated here featured either two, four, or six sponsoring brands, but sponsor portfolios in practice can encompass a group of co-sponsors well beyond just five other brands. For instance, teams in the NBA commonly maintain sponsor portfolios that include 50 or more companies (e.g., Atlanta Hawks list 60 corporate partners; Boston Celtics 56; Sacramento Kings 52). Yet, the difference in portfolio size tested here (two versus six sponsors) was sufficient to generate differential effects. Finally, the use of actual brands common to sponsorship enhances the realism of the experiments but also raises the question of respondents' preconceived brand notions. In future research using real brands, larger samples that also employ random assignment may help to further reduce such concerns.

FUTURE RESEARCH

As related to the limitations discussed above, future research should evaluate sponsorship portfolios of sizes beyond two, four, and six to determine if the spillover effects supported here are consistent as the number of sponsors increases. The potential for diminished recall and recognition of sponsors as portfolio size rises may also be worthwhile to test. Likewise, various dimensions of congruence (e.g., functional versus image; Gwinner & Eaton, 1999) could be studied within sponsorship portfolios to gauge if the effects demonstrated here in the context of nationality congruence are applicable to other fit dimensions. Each side of the sponsorship exchange relationship could realize positive implications from such research perspectives.

Future work should also add the detail of various sponsorship levels (i.e., title sponsor, presenting sponsor, etc.) and related affiliations (e.g., team versus league versus player sponsorship) that have permeated sponsorship practice. Do sports consumers make a distinction between team, league, event or venue sponsors; or do fans mix these related sponsored properties' portfolios into one larger portfolio? For example, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) boasts twelve top sponsors; whereas the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) and the British Olympic Association (BOA) claim 26 and seven domestic team sponsors respectively.

Furthermore, the Rio 2016 Olympic Games maintains a sponsor portfolio of five corporate partners and nine additional 'official supporters.' Advancing beyond past work, future research in this domain should take a broader perspective of the sponsorship environment. Instead of focusing on a single alliance between a sponsor and a team, which has dominated previous research, the full context of the commercial sponsorship portfolio needs to be considered.

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APPENDIX A:
Study 1

Dependent variable measures of brand equity: loyalty, quality, value (via Aaker, 1996; Yoo & Donthu, 2001; Yoo, et al., 2000; 7-point agree/disagree scale)**, and purchase intentions** (via MacKenzie, et al., 1986)

I would consider Marriott a top choice for hotel accommodations.
The likely quality of Marriott is extremely high.
The likelihood that Marriott would be practical for hotel accommodations is very high.
I would seriously consider Marriott for my next hotel stay.
Marriott provides good value for the money.
There are reasons to select Marriott over competitors.

If you were in the market today for hotel accommodations, how likely do you feel it is that you would select Marriott?
Very unlikely/Very likely
Very improbable/Very probable
Very impossible/Very possible

APPENDIX B:
Study 2

Press release stimuli example from congruent, single co-sponsor condition

USAFL and Buca di Beppo Announce "The Buca di Beppo United States Australian Football League presented by Australian Gold"

Together with Buca di Beppo, the United States Australian Football League (USAFL) recently announced a three-year title sponsorship agreement between the official Australian-rules football league in the United States, the USAFL, and Buca di Beppo Italian Restaurants. The USAFL also announced that Australian Gold sunscreen will be the presenting sponsor of the league for the next three seasons beginning in 2011. The USAFL hopes to use the sponsorship agreements to help popularize Australian-rules football (also known as Footy) in the United States.

The league will be officially referred to as: "The Buca di Beppo United States Australian Football League presented by Australian Gold."

Dependent variable measures of brand distinctiveness and clarity (Curras-Perez et al., 2009; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006; 7-point agree/disagree scale)
To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Buca di Beppo…
...is different from the other brands in the sector
...is different from the rest of its competitors
...stands out from its competitors
...clearly communicates what it stands for
...has an image that is difficult to understand
...conveys a clear image in all of its actions