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# Sponsorship congruence and brand image

## A pre-post event analysis

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – Existing research on sponsorship effects shows that the congruence (i.e. fit) between sponsor and sponsored cause is critical for a change in brand image. Congruence between sponsor and sponsored cause is seen as static in nature. From a dynamic perspective it is unclear why congruence should be seen as constant, and why it is critical for sponsorship effects. This paper aims to address this issue.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This paper analyzes effects of sponsorship evaluative congruence on brand image over time using individual difference measures. Individual level data were obtained from two surveys before and after the 2006 FIFA World Cup™, including 268 respondents who participated in both surveys.

**Findings** – Findings show significant positive effects of learning and remembering of a sponsorship stimulus on brand image over time. In contrast to existing literature, positive incongruence of brand image (i.e. sponsor) and event image (i.e. sponsored cause) in the pre-analysis results in a significant increase of brand image over time. Moreover, a change in event image over time has a positive effect on the change in brand image.

**Research limitations/implications** – Further research should replicate this study in different contexts, including event- and brand-related contexts. Future studies should use a more detailed scale to measure brand (event) image, which would allow a more rigorous assessment of image transfer on an attribute level. A replication of the relationship between event image and brand image over time would be especially interesting in a setting, in which event image is negative or a negative  $\Delta$  event image could be expected.

**Practical implications** – Linking explanatory variables such as ( $\Delta$ ) event image and  $\Delta$  brand image over time is important for a reliable assessment of the positive (negative) consequences of sponsorship activities. A sponsorship that might have been positively incongruent in the beginning can turn out to be congruent over time. Hence, the current view that incongruent sponsorships are less promising might be misleading.

**Originality/value** – In experimental studies, congruence between sponsor and sponsored event is seen as static in nature. From a dynamic perspective, this viewpoint can be challenged. Both sponsor and event image are subject to change over time. Hence, this study determines the impact of event image change over time on brand image.

**Keywords** Sponsorship, Brand image, Consumer behaviour

**Paper type** Research paper



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## Introduction

Overall, estimated global sponsorship expenditures reached US-\$38 billion in 2007, up 12 percent from US-\$34 billion in 2006 (Expo, 2007). Sponsorship of worldwide sports events has become increasingly popular as a marketing tool during the last two decades. Events like Formula One Racing, the Olympic Games, and the FIFA World Cup™ are fully globalized in terms of media coverage. Consequently, large international companies in particular use the FIFA World Cup™ as a platform for building, strengthening, and maintaining brand image. For a sponsorship license, companies have spent about US-\$53 million each, which allows them to market their partnerships with the 2006 FIFA World Cup™ worldwide (*The Telegraph*, 2006). Hence, companies that engage in sponsorships must be certain of their investments' effectiveness (Johar *et al.*, 2006). Consequently, over 80 percent of the sponsoring companies see a need for advanced methods of sponsorship control (Bob Bomlitz Group, 2004).

In the past, academic marketing research has been criticized for an insufficient concern about sponsorship in general, and specifically about the measurement of sponsorship effects (Cornwell and Maignan, 1998; Walliser, 2003). Existing research can be classified into two groups:

- (1) studies using field data; and
- (2) experimental studies.

Early studies on sponsorship effects were focusing either on sponsorship recall (e.g. Easton and Mackie, 1998; Lardinois and Derbaix, 2001; Pitts and Slattery, 2004; Pham, 1992; Pham and Johar, 2001; Tripodi *et al.*, 2003) or on the evaluation of brand effects at one point in time using field data (e.g. Javalgi *et al.*, 1994; Lardinois and Quester, 2001; Pope, 1999; Pope and Voges, 2000; Ruth and Simonin, 2003; Speed and Thompson, 2000; Stipp and Schiavone, 1996; Turley and Shannon, 2000). Moreover, some field studies that base their results on longitudinal data use different respondents over time and compare the results of the different measurement points on an aggregate level (e.g. Akaoui, 2007; Easton and Mackie, 1998; Nebenzahl and Jaffe, 1991; Quester and Farrelly, 1998; Stipp, 1998). As a consequence, the effects of sponsorship on the individual level over time remain unclear. Relatively little academic research on longitudinal individual sponsorship effects exists (Becker-Olsen and Simmons, 2002; Grohs *et al.*, 2004; Pitts and Slattery, 2004; Simmons and Becker-Olsen, 2006). However, in these studies congruence is either not analyzed (Pitts and Slattery, 2004), or seen as a constant variable over time (Becker-Olsen and Simmons, 2002; Grohs *et al.*, 2004; Simmons and Becker-Olsen, 2006).

Experimental studies on sponsorship effects show that congruence (i.e. fit) between sponsor and sponsored event is critical for image transfer (e.g. Becker-Olsen and Hill, 2006; Menon and Kahn, 2003; Rifon *et al.*, 2004; Simmons and Becker-Olsen, 2006) and memory effects (Cornwell *et al.*, 2006). Experimental studies provide a higher level of internal validity than field studies. However, the external validity of the findings is unclear. In experimental studies, congruence between sponsor and sponsored event is seen as static in nature. From a dynamic perspective, this viewpoint can be challenged. Both sponsor and event image are subject to change over time. Hence, it is unclear, why congruence should be seen as a constant.

The present article attempts to close the research gaps described above. Based on learning-theory, a dynamical perspective of sponsorship effects on brand image is developed. In order to ensure a high level of internal and external validity over time, a

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pre-post event survey was conducted. Individual level data was obtained from two surveys before and after the 2006 FIFA World Cup™ including 268 respondents that participated in both surveys. Besides the measurement of brand image changes over time due to effects of learning and remembering, the empirical study assesses whether congruence between the event image of the FIFA World Cup™ and a sponsor's brand image plays a decisive role in the process of brand image change. Moreover, it is the purpose of this study to determine the impact of event image change over time on brand image, a relationship that has been seen as constant in existing research.

#### *Theoretical background and hypotheses development*

Keller (1993, p. 3) defines brand image "as perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory". Learning of stimuli that are related to the brand (e.g. trademark, sponsorships) is a way to build, strengthen, and maintain these associations. The predominant – but not exclusive – channels for communication of these associations are mass media channels. Thus, international sport events like the FIFA World Cup™ are promising suppliers of pictures, episodes, experiences, and stories that may be relevant for building new associations.

In existing research, which often focuses on the assessment of sponsorship effects at one point in time, explanations of these effects are often based on learning- and consistency-theories, i.e. congruity and balance theory (Cornwell *et al.*, 2005; Dean, 2002; Olson and Thjømmøe, 2003). For instance, the mere exposure effect suggests that, in the absence of other stimuli (Baker, 1999), repeated exposure to a stimulus will lead to a positive affective reaction (Zajonc, 1968). In a similar manner to advertising, sponsorship often targets consumers in a situation in which they pay relatively low attention to the stimulus (e.g. because of concentration on the sports event itself). Therefore, repetition of the stimulus is mandatory in order to attract the respondent's attention (Baker, 1999). In existing field studies, sponsorship recall is often used as an explanatory variable for sponsorship effects (e.g. Javalgi *et al.*, 1994; Lardinoit and Quester, 2001; Pope, 1999; Pope and Voges, 2000; Ruth and Simonin, 2003; Speed and Thompson, 2000; Stipp and Schiavone, 1996; Turley and Shannon, 2000), despite related causality issues (e.g. Pham and Johar, 2001).

Several studies find evidence for a positive effect of sponsorship recall on brand perception (e.g. Javalgi *et al.*, 1994; Lardinoit and Quester, 2001; Pope, 1999; Pope and Voges, 2000; Ruth and Simonin, 2003; Speed and Thompson, 2000; Stipp and Schiavone, 1996; Turley and Shannon, 2000). Therefore:

*H1.* Sponsorship recall has a positive effect on brand image.

This study expects the improvement of brand image to be stronger for those individuals who learn that the brand is linked to sponsorship of the event in the second survey, in comparison to those individuals who recall the brand as a sponsor in both surveys. Repeated exposure of the respondents to the stimulus increases the likelihood of a successful recall of the sponsor and leads to an affective reaction (e.g. the enhancement of brand image). Hence, the recall of the sponsorship stimulus is the result of a learning process. In the latter group, respondents have already learned that the brand is connected to the event before the first measurement point. Therefore, it can be assumed that at least parts of the affective reaction happened before the pre-event survey. Consequently,  $\Delta$  brand image should be more positive in the group that recalls the sponsor only in the post-event survey:

H2. Learning the association between a sponsor and an event leads to a stronger improvement of brand image than remembering the association.

However, whether a change in brand image occurs, and the direction in which it changes, also depend on the image of the sponsored object (i.e. event image) and the brand image. Many authors claim that congruence between the sponsored event and the sponsoring brand is essential in order to realize an image transfer (e.g. Becker-Olsen and Hill, 2006; Cornwell *et al.*, 2005; Dean, 2002; Simmons and Becker-Olsen, 2006). In existing research, congruence between sponsor and sponsored event is conceptualized as match between sponsor and sponsored event in terms of perceived similarity, consistency, and sense making (Becker-Olsen and Hill, 2006, Simmons and Becker-Olsen, 2006). However, such a conceptualization cannot be applied in a panel study without uncovering the purpose of the study. A direct measurement of fit reveals the connection between sponsor and sponsored cause to the respondents and causes learning or at least a reinforcement of the normal learning process between the pre- and post-event surveys. Moreover, the definition of congruence as similarity is not without problems. Existing studies only analyze congruent pairs with two positive images (i.e. image of the sponsor and image of the sponsored unit), neglecting a congruent negative constellation. Additionally, several biases contribute to an ex ante evaluation of congruence, e.g. brand equity (Roy and Cornwell, 2004).

Furthermore, a fit between sponsor and sponsored event might not even be necessary for a sponsorship to influence brand image. In various cases, the fit between sponsor and an event initially seems low, and increases over time as individuals become accustomed to the association. In experimental designs, congruence is seen as a constant state, which makes sense from a static viewpoint. Over time, however, not only brand image but also congruence is subject to change, i.e. learning. Trendel and Warlop (2007) claim that existing findings on congruence effects lack of theoretical underpinning. From a perspective of learning, a change in brand image is a hypothesis-testing process in which individuals compare new information (e.g. the information that a brand is related to an event) with their existing attitude towards the sponsoring brand (Hoch and Deighton, 1989). Existing attitudes toward a sponsoring brand (i.e. a positive brand image) can prevent the processing of new information (i.e. learning of a link between the brand and an event which is evaluated positively), because the dominance of existing attitudes results in a confirmatory processing of new stimuli (Erdem *et al.*, 1999). Following Gettys and Fisher (1979), clear evidence that the existing attitude toward the brand is wrong (i.e. incongruence between event image and brand image) is necessary for individuals to reconsider brand image. As a result, learning is less likely to take place if individuals perceive the sponsor and the sponsored event as congruent.

Fleck and Quester (2007, p. 993) propose that “a relative weak fit between sponsor and event may [...] be deemed stimulating, inducing consumers to engage in a deeper processing of the association.” Low fit sponsorships are perceived as incongruent and cause psychological tensions in consumer minds. Consistency theories such as balance and congruity theory propose that people generally strive for balanced (congruent) structures between cognitive elements (Festinger, 1957; Heider, 1946, 1958; Osgood and Tannenbaum, 1955). Consistency theories are often used to explain attitude change caused by sponsorship (e.g. Cornwell *et al.*, 2005; Dean, 2002). In a sponsorship context, three cognitive elements (person, sponsor, and event) form a triadic relationship. Relations between these elements can be positive or negative, and the number of negative relations determines whether a specific situation is balanced or imbalanced.

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Since the sponsor and the event are clearly linked positively through the sponsorship, the relations between the elements “person-sponsor” and “person-event” can potentially be negative. If a person evaluated sponsor and event the same (i.e. negatively or positively), the situation is balanced. If the sponsor is evaluated more (less) favorably than the event, the situation is unbalanced. As a consequence, consumers will strive to reestablish congruence. Therefore, we assume that a change in brand image over time only takes place if the sponsor is evaluated differently than the event in the first place. We follow McDaniel’s (1999) definition and conceptualize evaluative congruence as perceived similarity between sponsor and sponsored event attributes. While the existing definition of congruence spans a continuum between incongruence and congruence, evaluative congruence distinguishes a continuum between negative incongruence, congruence and positive congruence.

In accordance with our conceptualization, incongruence exists when the event image is evaluated more favorably than the brand image of the respective sponsor or vice versa. Thus, respondents will evaluate the brand more positively over time if they have identified a brand that is evaluated negatively to be a sponsor of a positively rated event. The perceived connectedness of a weak brand to a strong event works as signal of quality for the weak brand (Rao *et al.*, 1999). We refer to this state as a state of “positive incongruence”. In conclusion, following congruity theory, positive incongruence at  $t = 1$  leads to a stronger brand image at  $t = 2$ . The direction of the effect is valid if the attitude toward the event is relatively stronger than the attitude toward the sponsoring brand – an assumption that is likely to be true when the event is very prominent. Based on congruity theory, brand image should be weakened at  $t = 2$  if brand image is evaluated stronger than event image at  $t = 1$ , a state of “negative incongruence”, using the same explanation as above: Due to a difference between brand image and event image at  $t = 1$ , the knowledge of a negative cue (i.e. a strong brand is associated with a weak event) leads to a less favorable brand image at  $t = 2$ .

Evaluative congruence between brand image and event image will not cause a change in brand image. In this condition, individuals have congruent attitudes toward the event and the brand. Both, brand image and event image are positive, neutral, or negative. Hence, an attitude change is unnecessary since all cognitive elements are in a balanced situation. No change in brand image will take place. Thus:

- H3a.* A positive difference between event image and brand image at  $t = 1$  leads to an improvement in brand image at  $t = 2$ .
- H3b.* A negative difference between event image and brand image at  $t = 1$  leads to a negative change in brand image at  $t = 2$ .
- H3c.* Congruence between event image and brand image at  $t = 1$  does not lead to brand image change at  $t = 2$ .

Not only brand image is subject to a continuous evaluation over time. In the existing literature, event image is generally seen as stable over time (Grohs *et al.*, 2004). However, it is possible that consumers will also adjust their opinions about the event itself, when their expectations are exceeded or not met. Several factors can affect a change in event image, such as the attractiveness of the event itself, doping scandals or politics. Therefore, even if there is no difference between event image and brand image at  $t = 1$  (i.e. congruence), a more positive (negative) evaluation of both variables can be expected over time as a result of experiencing the event. According to congruity theory,

a change towards a more positive (negative) evaluation of event image over time should result in a more positive (negative) evaluation of the sponsor's brand image. Congruence remains, but on a higher (lower) level. Therefore:

- H4. A positive (negative) change of event image results in a positive (negative) change of brand image.

## Method

### *Object of analysis and sample*

The object of study is the German mobile phone operators T-Mobile which is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Deutsche Telekom. With approximately 34.5 million customers, T-Mobile is the market leader in Germany. In order to achieve higher brand awareness and stronger brand image worldwide, T-Mobile uses sponsorship as a corporate communication instrument. As well as the sponsorship campaign of T-Mobile in the 2006 FIFA World Cup™, Deutsche Telekom is engaged in other sport sponsorships for more than 15 years - especially, in soccer, basketball, and sailing. Moreover, Deutsche Telekom is official partner of the German national soccer team (DFB), the German Soccer League (DFL), and sponsor of the most prominent German soccer club Bayern Munich. As the market leader in Germany, T-Mobile is well known in Germany with an awareness beyond the 90 percent-level (Deutsche Telekom, 2004). Results of a pretest with 24 undergraduate students show an average fit ( $m = 3.6$ ,  $s = 1.44$ ) on the seven-point semantic differential scale developed by Simmons and Becker-Olsen (2006).

Data for the empirical study derive from two online studies using a web survey design. In contrast to face-to-face studies, online surveys do not require interviews to be conducted and, therefore, avoid interviewer effects, which could be an issue in this context (Duffy *et al.*, 2005). The sample consists of users of an online research portal that includes more than 5,000 individuals who have registered their personal information (including email addresses). Invitations for participation in this study were sent to 2,000 individuals one week before the first match of the FIFA World Cup™ started. A number of prizes from a small lottery were offered to ensure a high response rate. Respondents were informed that they would participate in an image study about various brands. Besides T-Mobile, a number of other telecommunication brands were included in the survey to draw attention from the goals of the study. Between May 29 and June 7, 2006, 433 German respondents participated in the first survey, as a response rate of 22 percent. Individuals were not notified that they would be contacted a second time. One week after the finals of the 2006 FIFA World Cup™, a second invitation was sent out to the 433 participants of the first round. A total of 268 respondents (61.9 percent) participated in the second survey. About 69 percent were male, with an average age of 28.3 ( $s = 8.7$ ). A check for differences between the respondents who participated only once and those who took part in both surveys shows no significant differences in age, gender, and event involvement.

### *Measures*

In order to measure sponsorship recall, respondents were asked to name brands from different sectors (including telecommunication brands) that they could remember sponsoring the 2006 FIFA World Cup™ (Tripodi *et al.*, 2003). Following Baker *et al.* (1986) and Keller (1993), asking for sponsorship recognition is subject to several biases, for example interest of a person in the brand (Bennett *et al.*, 2002) and, more

importantly, a bias in the second survey. For the latter reason, we avoided to ask for the perceived fit between sponsor and the event.

Next, respondents evaluated the event image of 2006 FIFA World Cup™, the brand image of T-Mobile, and indicated their event involvement. We measured both brand image and event image with a short set of three (seven-point) items, with anchors of 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree: “[Brand/event] is likeable,” “I can identify myself with [brand/event],” “[brand/event] is attractive.” The favorability and uniqueness of brand (event) image permit the brand (event) to be strategically differentiated and positioned in the consumer’s mind. We use a short set of items from a scale by Woisetschlager (2006) that reflect this favorability. Event involvement was measured with three items: “I am very interested in the FIFA World Cup 2006,” “I plan to follow broadcasts of the FIFA World Cup 2006”, “The FIFA World Cup 2006 is a great event for me.” Results of a confirmatory factor analysis show a satisfactory assessment of the validity and reliability of all constructs for both measurement points (see Table I).

The coefficient alpha’s are larger than 0.7, the threshold generally proposed in the literature (Nunnally, 1978). Also, composite reliabilities of both constructs are larger than 0.6 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). Moreover, discriminant validity between the constructs is given, since none of the squared correlation coefficients between any of the constructs exceeds the average variance extracted for a construct (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). A check for measurement invariance over time, as Baumgartner and Steenkamp (2006) propose, shows that both constructs of interest (i.e. brand image and event image) are composed of the same items over time (i.e. configural invariance). Moreover the constructs are partially metric invariant. Full metric invariance over time is assessed for brand image, only one item of event image (“I can identify myself with event”) is found to vary over time.

Moreover, event image is evaluated more positively ( $m = 5.1, s = 1.38$ ) than brand image, which receives an average evaluation ( $m = 3.3, s = 1.39$ ), in the pre-event study. This positive evaluative incongruence indicates that once consumers learn that T-Mobile

Item	CFA <sup>b</sup> Factor loading pre- (post)-event (> 0.5)
Brand image (0.84, (0.82); 0.63, (0.61)) <sup>a</sup>	
[Brand] is likeable (Mean value = 3.6 (4.0), Standard deviation = 1.6 (1.6))	0.86 (0.85)
I can identify myself with [Brand] (MV = 2.9 (3.3), SD = 1.6 (1.7))	0.80 (0.79)
[Brand] is attractive (MV = 3.4 (3.7), SD = 1.5 (1.5))	0.72 (0.69)
Event image (0.87; (0.82), 0.69, (0.61))	Factor loading
[Event] is likable (MV = 5.2 (6.4), SD = 1.5 (1.0))	0.86 (0.86)
I can identify myself with [Event] (MV = 4.3 (5.7), SD = 1.8 (1.5))	0.77 (0.64)
[Event] is attractive (MV = 5.7 (6.4), SD = 1.4 (0.9))	0.86 (0.82)
Involvement (0.94; 0.85) – pre-event measure	Factor loading
I am very interested in the FIFA World Cup 2006 (MV = 5.6, SD = 1.7)	0.96
I plan to follow broadcasts of the FIFA World Cup 2006 (MV = 5.9, SD = 1.4)	0.91
The FIFA World Cup 2006 is a great event for me (MV = 5.4, SD = 1.7)	0.90

**Notes:**  $n = 268$ ; <sup>a</sup>Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted, pre-event (post-event) scores; <sup>b</sup>Goodness-of-fit statistics: CFI (0.97); TLI (0.96); RMSEA (0.08); SRMR (0.06); Correlation brand image/event image = 0.31,  $p < 0.01$ , brand image/involvement = 0.16,  $p < 0.05$ , event image/involvement = 0.78,  $p < 0.01$

**Table I.**  
CFA of brand image and  
event image (pre- and  
post-event)



is a sponsor of 2006 FIFA World Cup™, a positive change in brand image should occur over time according to the theoretical reasoning above. The respondents show a high level of event involvement ( $m = 5.6, s = 1.53$ ), which can be explained by the popularity of soccer in Germany. Moreover, it can be assumed that Germany being the host of 2006 FIFA World Cup™ at the time of the survey also influenced event involvement.

**Results**

Recall of the official sponsor before and after the 2006 FIFA World Cup™ shows an increase from 59 percent of all respondents in the first survey to 73 percent in the second study. False recall – due to familiarity with other brands or ambush marketing activities – drops from 25 percent to 18 percent. In the first (second) survey, a total of 16 percent (9 percent) of all respondents could not name a telecommunication brand as a sponsor for the 2006 FIFA World Cup™ (see Table II). These results indicate that part of the respondents have learned the official sponsor in the second survey.

Besides the improvement of sponsorship recall after the event, both brand image ( $m_{t=2} = 5.5, \Delta m = 0.4, p < 0.01$ ) and event image ( $m_{t=2} = 4.4, \Delta m = 1.1, p < 0.01$ ) are evaluated significantly more positively relative to the pre-event factor mean value (see above).

Conducting ANOVAS for the two measuring points tests the effect of sponsorship recall on brand image. Before the event, consumers who recalled the sponsor (i.e. T-Mobile) report a significantly higher brand image compared to those respondent who did not recall the official sponsor (recall<sub>t=1</sub>:  $m = 3.4, s = 1.34$ ; no recall<sub>t=1</sub>:  $m = 3.1, s = 1.45$ ;  $F = 3.10, p < 0.05$ ). The second study after the event shows the same result (recall<sub>t=2</sub>:  $m = 3.8, s = 1.36$ ; no recall<sub>t=1</sub>:  $m = 3.3, s = 1.30$ ;  $F = 5.44, p < 0.05$ ). As a first result, the brand image is stronger in interaction with the recall of sponsorship stimuli in comparison to a situation in which no recall has taken place. This result confirms existing findings as hypothesized in *H1*. Moreover, the relations between recall and brand image are even stronger after the event ( $\eta^2_{t=1} = 1.2$  percent;  $\eta^2_{t=2} = 2.1$  percent). The increase in effect size could result from two sources: First, from individuals that did not recall the sponsor in the pre-event analysis but recall the sponsor in the post-event survey (building of brand image), and second from individuals that were already aware of the sponsorship in the pre-event analysis (strengthening of brand image).

	Post-event recall											
	Pre-event recall		T-Mobile		Vodafone		O2		Other		No recall	
	<i>n</i>	% <sup>a</sup>	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
T-Mobile	157		139	89	9	6	5	3	0	0	4	3
Vodafone	38		24	63	9	24	2	5	0	0	3	8
O2	25		12	48	2	8	8	32	0	0	3	12
Other	4		1	25	1	25	0	0	1	25	1	25
No recall	44		20	45	3	7	5	11	2	5	14	32
Total	268		196	73	24	9	20	7	3	1	25	9

**Table II.**

Sponsorship recall before and after the event

**Note:** <sup>a</sup>*n* relative to column 2 (pre event recall). Reading example: 139 out of 157 respondents that recall T-Mobile before the event, also recall the brand after the event (88 percent)

However, a limitation of the static analyses is that the assessment of brand image changes over time and the role of moderating effects (e.g. event image) that influence this process are impossible. Therefore, the following analysis takes into account data of two measurement points to assess brand image differences over time based on individual difference measures (repeated measures).

As *H2* proposes, brand image is more stable in the group that recalls the sponsor twice, in comparison to the group that recalls the sponsor only in the second survey. Results in Table III lead to a rejection of *H2*. Brand image is evaluated more positively over time in both groups. The distinction between learning and remembering of a sponsorship stimulus is subject to the validity of sponsorship recall as an indicator of learning. Findings of the pre-post event analysis reveal that sponsorship recall is not a valid explanatory variable for sponsorship effects.

Existing attitudes can influence brand image differences between the two measuring points. As hypothesis *H3a* proposes,  $\Delta$  brand image should be positive if individuals evaluate brand image in  $t = 1$  as positively incongruent to the event image in  $t = 1$ . The analysis includes only consumers who recall T-Mobile as an official sponsor of the 2006 FIFA World Cup™ at least once. As results in Table IV indicate, a positive ex ante evaluation of event image relative to brand image leads to a more favorable evaluation of brand image over time for all respondents ( $\beta = 0.26, p < 0.01$ ). To test *H3a*, *H3b* and *H3c*, three groups were built according to the congruence between event image and brand image in the first survey (event image – brand image = positively incongruent, congruent, and negatively incongruent).

The individuals in the group that evaluate brand image as relatively worse compared to the event image before the event in the first place (i.e. the positive incongruent group) evaluate the brand image significantly better over time ( $\beta = 0.25, p < 0.05$ ), giving support for *H3a*. Furthermore, the findings lead to a rejection of *H3b* because the change of brand image in the negative incongruent constellation is not negative as expected. Results show that a relative congruent (negatively incongruent) event image does not contribute positively to (harm) brand image ( $\beta = 0.06, p = n.s.; \beta = 0.17, p = n.s.$ ). However,  $\Delta$  brand image is strong and significant in the group with positive incongruence ( $\Delta m = 0.75, p < 0.01$ ), only small and not significant in the congruent group ( $\Delta m = 0.21, ns.$ ) and not significant in the group with negative

	Brand image in $t = 1$		Brand image in $t = 2$		Change in brand image <sup>a</sup>		Significance of difference over time
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
1. T-Mobile not recalled in both surveys ( $n = 50$ )	3.09	1.39	3.31	1.28	0.22	0.95	$t = 1.63, p > 0.1$
2. T-Mobile recalled in both surveys ( $n = 123$ )	3.37	1.32	3.78	1.26	0.41	1.06	$t = 4.28, p < 0.01$
3. T-Mobile recalled only in 1 <sup>st</sup> survey ( $n = 17$ )	3.51	1.60	3.33	1.23	-0.18	1.13	$t = -0.643, p > 0.1$
4. T-Mobile recalled only in 2 <sup>nd</sup> survey ( $n = 52$ )	3.21	1.55	3.67	1.61	0.46	1.02	$t = 3.27, p < 0.01$

**Notes:** <sup>a</sup>Mean in  $t = 2$  - mean in  $t = 1$  (standard deviation). Significance of difference btw. Groups 1 and 2:  $t = 1.09, p > 0.1$ ; Groups 1 and 4:  $t = 1.24, p > 0.1$ ; Groups 2 and 4:  $t = 0.30, p > 0.1$

**Table III.**  
Change in brand image over time by recall groups (paired samples  $t$ -tests)

**Table IV.**  
Change in brand image  
over time

	Overall <i>n</i> = 192 <sup>a</sup>		Group with positive eval. incongruence <i>n</i> = 119 <sup>a</sup>		Group with evaluative congruence <i>n</i> = 47 <sup>a</sup>		Group with negative eval. incongruence <i>n</i> = 26 <sup>a</sup>	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Regression of (event image in <i>t</i> = 1 – brand image) on $\Delta$ brand image <sup>b</sup>	0.26***	adj. <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = 6.4%	0.25**	adj. <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = 5.2%	0.06 <sup>n.s.</sup>	adj. <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = 0.4%	0.17 <sup>n.s.</sup>	adj. <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = 0.7%
$\Delta$ brand image <sup>c</sup>	0.42***	1.05	0.75***	1.12	0.21 <sup>n.s.</sup>	0.93	0.17 <sup>n.s.</sup>	0.97
Regression of $\Delta$ event image on $\Delta$ brand image <sup>b</sup>	0.14**	adj. <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = 1.6%	0.19 <sup>n.s.</sup>	adj. <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = 2.6%	0.25**	adj. <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = 5.1%	0.32**	adj. <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = 8.6%
$\Delta$ event image over time <sup>c</sup>	1.11***	1.12	0.73***	0.74	1.16***	0.91	1.77***	1.66

**Notes:** <sup>a</sup>Repeated measures; <sup>b</sup>Standardized Beta. \*\*\**p* < 0.01; \*\**p* < 0.05; \**p* < 0.1 (standard deviation), \*\*\**p* < 0.01; \*\**p* < 0.05; \**p* < 0.1

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incongruence ( $\Delta m = 0.17$ , *ns.*). Therefore, *H3c* cannot be rejected. A potential explanation for the disconfirmation of *H3b* can be derived by analyzing the change of event image between the two measurement points.

The change of event image shows a significant but small (adj.  $R^2 = 1.6$  percent,  $p < 0.05$ ) influence on the change of brand image over time, giving support for *H4*. This effect is small (adj.  $R^2 = 2.6$  percent) and only marginally significant for the group that evaluates the event already positively relative to the brand in the first study. The effect in the reverse constellation (negative incongruence) is much stronger and significant (adj.  $R^2 = 8.6$  percent,  $p < 0.05$ ). The improvement of event image is a possible explanation why – in this setting – the brand is not harmed for sponsoring an event that is seen as relatively negative in the beginning. The respondents reconsidered their attitude towards the event. Hence, the negative attitude towards the event in the beginning has no effect on brand image – which is in line with congruity theory.

### Implications and further research

These findings provide the basis for several implications for practice and theory. First, the use of data at the individual level over time is more adequate to analyze sponsorship effects over time (e.g. change in attitudes) than the pre-post comparison of results on an aggregate level. Thus, results of the empirical analysis confirm findings documented in existing sponsorship research but also show limitations of existing studies. In the present static analysis, sponsorship recall is positively related to brand image, which is in line with the literature. Also, sponsorship recall effects brand image over time. However, we found no significant differences between learning and remembering of a sponsorship stimulus. The distinction between learning and remembering is subject to the validity of sponsorship recall as an indicator of learning. Findings of the pre-post event analysis reveal that sponsorship recall is not a valid explanatory variable for sponsorship effects, i.e. brand image change over time.  $\Delta$  brand image depends on the relative evaluation of event image versus brand image and is influenced by  $\Delta$  event image as suggested by consistency theories. Moreover, existing studies found congruence between sponsor and event to be a prerequisite for a change in brand image. In contrast, our results show that a positive incongruence (i.e. event image is evaluated better than brand image) before the event can lead to an improvement in brand image after the event. Both results are in accordance with learning and congruity theory.

For the management of sponsorship activities, three aspects are relevant. First, linking explanatory variables such as ( $\Delta$ ) event image and  $\Delta$  brand image over time is important for a reliable assessment of the positive (negative) consequences of sponsorship activities in particular and marketing communications in general. Second,  $\Delta$  event image should be assessed since changing attitudes toward the event over time have a significant impact on  $\Delta$  brand image. A sponsorship that might have been positively incongruent in the beginning can turn out to be congruent over time. Hence, the current view that incongruent sponsorships are less promising might be misleading. Third, the impact of sponsorship of mass-events is not only limited to the creation of brand awareness, as Cliffe and Motion (2005) state, but also affects brand image, as is proven in this study. Therefore, the four strategic alternatives that Cliffe and Motion (2005) discuss (mass media broadcasted events for creation of brand awareness, differentiation for creation of brand image, event communication for creation of brand experience and loyalty, and cause related marketing for creation of

goodwill) have to be adjusted, in the sense that mass events are also suitable to raise brand image, at least to a certain degree.

Nevertheless, the method employed is not without limitations. First, the panel design may have prompted individuals who participated in the initial survey to watch the event more closely and may have a heightened their level of attention to brands displayed during the event. Experiments are particularly suitable to deepening the understanding about processing of the sponsorship message in comparison to field studies. However, especially from a practitioner's perspective, rigorously conducted field studies with longitudinal data in a real context can lead to an improvement of current sponsorship evaluation practice, which is often based on recall measures solely, evaluation of broadcast time or a cross-sectional analysis of sponsorship recall on brand image. Second, generalizability of results could be achieved through replications of this study in different contexts, including event- and brand-related contexts. Third, the scales to measure brand (event) image do not fully capture the broad set of associations that are linked to the brand and to the event. Future studies should use a more detailed scale to measure brand (event) image, which would allow a more rigorous assessment of image transfer on an attribute level. Fourth, a replication of the relationship between event image and brand image over time would be especially interesting in a setting, in which event image is negative or a negative  $\Delta$  event image over time could be expected (e.g. the Olympic Games in China). It would be meaningful to assess if a decreasing evaluation of event image over time can harm a sponsor's brand image. Therefore, the present study can be an avenue for further investigations as it has clearly pointed out that brand image effects of sponsorships engagements heavily depend on the congruence between sponsor and event.

Finally, other potential moderators that could affect the relationship between sponsorship and brand image should be analyzed longitudinally. For instance, consumers' general attitudes towards sponsorship or their attitudes towards commercialization (Lee *et al.*, 1997) could have a moderating influence on sponsorship effects over time.

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