

Fit Matters?
Asymmetrical Impact of Effectiveness for Sponsors and Event Marketers

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Abstract

This sport marketing study establishes a clearer demarcation between an *event sponsor* and a *sponsored event* in relation to investigating the potential value of congruity. Based on 1,615 field surveys, we uncover the asymmetrical impact of event-sponsor fit on the title sponsor and sponsored professional cycling event. Specifically, the study reveals how consumers' positive perceptions of the *sponsor* rise when they perceive greater fit with the event; yet, congruity does not influence consumers' attitudes toward the *event*. That is, even when the event and sponsor are perceived as a mismatch, it does not impact how the attendee assesses the event. Event-sponsor fit makes for a stronger sponsorship investment, especially when the sponsor is seen as socially responsible. The tested model illustrates how the transfer of corporate social responsibility serves to bridge favorable attitudes toward the event with positive sponsor brand associations and purchasing intent for the sponsor's brands.

Keywords: Congruity Theory, Event Marketing, Sponsorship-Linked Marketing, Cycling

Event sponsorship has emerged as a dominant component of marketing investments. Event sponsorship investments in sports, entertainment, causes, festivals, the arts, and professional associations accounted for \$48.6 billion in global sponsorship rights expenditures in 2011 (IEG, 2012). Measuring event sponsorship investments—and how they fit with the event is a key managerial priority. Recent research on sponsor fit (Groza, Cobbs, & Schaefer, 2012; Zdravkovic & Till, 2012) demonstrates that fit is key to: manage sponsorship portfolio congruence, enhance brand image via sponsorship strength of association effects, and parlay self-congruity and brand attitude to loyalty.

There are clear benefits of a fitting sponsorship; the unanswered question is who benefits—sponsors, events, or both? Does fit have a symmetric, proportioned impact on efficacy for *both* sponsors and events? Or does fit really matter more to sponsors, and to a lesser extent, events? Because the literature has not delineated this issue, some may presume that fit has a positive association that is proportioned, or symmetric equally for both parties (i.e., the sponsor and event). Symmetry refers to equivalence among constituents of an entity; a symmetric impact is one where fit drives efficacy in an equal way to the sponsor and the event. An asymmetry in sponsorship efficacy is a case where either constituent benefits more from the event-sponsor fit.

Event-sponsor fit is the extent to which an attendee perceives that an event and its sponsor have a similar image and values, along with a logical connection (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). While event-sponsor fit has emerged as a central tenet of sponsorship research, its dual influences on the sponsor and event has yet to be investigated in a real-world setting. Sponsorship researchers predominately conduct studies in lab settings, weakening external validity of findings (Gwinner, Larson, & Swanson, 2009). While advances have been made, research in sponsor fit has been “criticized for lacking theoretical rigor and lacking models of

processes” (Prendergast, Poon, & West, 2010, p. 223). Moreover, event-sponsor fit assesses impact on the sponsor, rather than simultaneously considering its effect on the sponsor and sponsored event (Coppetti, Wentzel, Tomczak, & Henkel, 2009). Therefore, the primary purpose of this study is to investigate the role of fit on *both* the event and title sponsor of a sports event.

We also assess the role of corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a mediator that links favorable attitudes toward the sponsored event to strengthened brand associations of the sponsor. According to Walker and Kent (2009), “while the study of CSR has become increasingly prevalent in the management and organizational behavior literature, the concept has only recently entered the sport management discourse” (p. 746). CSR represents a set of discretionary actions taken by a firm that benefit society beyond its legal obligations and financial interests (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). A firm’s CSR initiatives generally focus on serving outside constituencies, including consumers, not-for-profit organizations, and local communities (Ellen, Webb, & Mohr, 2006). One leading way that firms’ demonstrate CSR is through event sponsorships and related involvement in local communities.

Congruity Theory

As consumers desire cognitive consistency, or harmony among thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, they are motivated to maintain uniformity among these elements. After determining that a source or message (e.g., event sponsorship) is congruent with pre-existing beliefs, a consumer is more likely positive thoughts, as people tend to prefer conformity and predictability. With extreme incongruity, consumers often cannot understand why seemingly disparate elements are paired in the same message, which leads to frustration and negative evaluations (Mandler, 1982). Thus, depending on the incongruity level and the consumer’s ability to explain the incongruity, the association could make the consumer’s assessment of the sponsor or the event

more positive or negative. Congruity theory can also help explain attitudes when a source and an object become connected. Associative statements denote a positive connection. In this process, a consumer makes a positive connection when agreeing that the sponsor and event stand for similar things (Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O'Connor, 1987). This consumer may perceive a connection between the elements or a connection on a key dimension. Sponsorships that are congruent on a key dimension can increase brand equity and reinforce the sponsor's positioning. For instance, a sponsor and an event might share the same value of supporting the local community. Yet, if consumers perceive partners as standing for different things, the sponsorship may dilute the partners' brand equity (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). Similarly, sponsorships may be detrimental to marketing objectives when consumers perceive that a sponsored event is incompatible with a firm's image (Speed & Thompson, 2000).

Scholars contend that event marketing can transfer affect from events to sponsors' products; but scholars have not sufficiently explained how it helps shape a more positive attitude toward sponsors' brands (Weihe, Mau, & Silberer, 2006). Event marketing activation acts as a conduit to transfer affect associated with the event to the sponsor (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999). Perceived fit strengthens this affect transfer process by enhancing intangible associations (Lichtenstein, Drumwright, & Braig, 2004). *Thus, event-sponsor fit is thought to moderate extant linkages.* Transferable associations considered here include affect transfer and brand image transfer—two underlying processes working alongside event-sponsor fit.

Event-sponsor fit may be natural or contrived by marketing communications. Natural event-sponsor fit is "the extent to which the sponsored (event) is perceived as being congruent with the sponsor's image, independent of marketers' efforts to create a perceived congruity between the organizations" (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006, p. 156). Natural fit need not be

obvious; firms may sponsor events and their underlying causes (e.g., healthy living) due to a sincere interest. Natural fit is more cost-effective for sponsors because they do not have to promote messages that attempt to create or explain any tangential elements of congruity (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006), or invest more in traditional advertising to articulate a non-natural fit. Here, we examine natural fit between the tested professional cycling event (Tour de Georgia, a main Tour de France qualifier at the time of this study) and title sponsor (AT&T). It is not a contrived fit effort because the sponsor neither made an overt effort to create fit with the event nor articulates how telecommunications and cycling relate.

Conceptual Model and Hypothesis Development

Given the foundation in congruity theory; we now introduce a model to assess how attendees' perceptions of event-sponsor fit impacts sponsors and event marketers.

Figure 1 here

Event Entertainment

Event entertainment refers to the extent to which attendees feel that experiences are enjoyable (Chandon, Wansink, & Laurent, 2000). The entertainment level favorably influences attendee attitudes toward an event, which may transfer to the sponsor (Close, Finney, Lacey, & Sneath, 2006). At events, attendees experience promotional messages under favorable conditions where there is enthusiasm, excitement, and enjoyment (Nicholls, Roslow, & Dublisch, 1999). As a positive emotional orientation, event entertainment enhances attendees' feelings about an event. Further, event-sponsor fit favorably influences consumers' attitudes toward the event (Ruth & Simonin, 2003; Wakefield & Bennett, 2010). Hence, the relationship between event entertainment and attendee's attitudes towards the event is posited to intensify when the attendee perceives a greater event-sponsor fit. Sponsor activations allow the sponsor to interact with

attendees with the intent to improve their attitudes toward the sponsor (Weeks, Cornwell, & Drennan, 2008). Typically, activations take place at the sponsored event, thereby allowing sponsors to reach event attendees (Meenaghan, 1998). As the title sponsor of the Tour de Georgia, AT&T enjoyed marquee brand visibility, which afforded AT&T an opportunity to prominently display its role as the major financial underwriter of a statewide sporting event.

Note the hypothesized relationships here focus on the moderating influence of event-sponsor fit.

H₁: Event-sponsor fit moderates the positive association between event entertainment and attitude toward the event.

Sports Activeness

In addition to the entertainment qualities, consumers seek events consistent with their lifestyles (Kahle, Kambara, & Rose, 1996). As a form of fan involvement, activeness in sports refers to a person's degree of personal involvement in sports activities, beyond the role of spectator (Hawes & Lumpkin, 1984). Attendees who feel passionate about participating in recreational sports (e.g., cycling) are more likely to hold favorable attitudes toward an associated event (Bennett, Ferreira, Lee, & Polite, 2009; Close et al., 2006). Event-sponsor fit influences the relationship between an attendee's familiarity with the event and thoughts about it (Roy & Cornwell, 2004). Through activation, sponsors have the opportunity to interact and involve their brands with attendees. The sponsor anticipates that positive sponsored event attributes shared by attendees will transfer to the sponsor (Gwinner, 1997; McDaniel 1999). Moreover, the degree of an attendee's activity in a related sports event domain favorably shapes how they cognitively process the connection between the event and the sponsoring brand (Johar, Pham, & Wakefield, 2006; Koo, Quarterman, & Flynn, 2006). Hence,

H₂: Event-sponsor fit moderates the positive association between activeness in sports and attitude toward the event.

Attitude toward the Event

Attitudes are a consumer's relatively stable internal evaluations. Once attitudes toward the event have formed, they can have a strong impact on the sponsor (Dean, 2002). In the context of social sponsorships, consumers are more likely to perceive high fit if consumers perceive that the sponsor is doing what is right (Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2006). Social sponsorships are instances in which companies spend sponsorship money to promote worthy social causes in order to "play the good citizen" and "give something back to society" (Bovaired, Loffler, & Parrado-Díez, 2002, p. 422). A social sponsorship is a favorable action that consumers are expected to like (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). Positive sentiments about social sponsorships play a valuable role in strengthening the sponsor's CSR (Geue & Plewa, 2010). Because attendees' positive attitudes toward an event enhance their perceptions that the sponsor is socially responsible, we expect that event-sponsor fit will intensify the strength of this relationship.

H₃: Event-sponsor fit moderates the positive association between attitude toward the event and perceived CSR of the sponsor.

Sponsor's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Corporate social responsibility refers to a firm's activities and status relative to its societal or stakeholder obligations (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). CSR aims to benefit all stakeholders including the individual, organization, and community. In response to growing pressures to speak to societal interests, firms increasingly are aware of the importance of contributing to local communities (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006; Walker, Kent, & Vincent, 2010). One CSR platform to display community support is via sponsorships of local events that promote healthy lifestyles. While sponsorship often provides funding that makes it possible for an event to take place, a socially responsible partnership holds dual value to the firm by serving as a way to achieve marketing objectives while promoting the firm as a good corporate citizen (Simmons

& Becker-Olsen, 2006). A socially responsible sponsorship can improve attitudes toward the sponsorship, clarity about positioning, and enhance brand equity (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). Scholars have demonstrated that event-sponsorship fit accounts for a more genuine, effective investment opportunity (Cornwell, Weeks, & Roy, 2005). This is seen when event marketers help provide value to sponsors, in part, by looking for ways that enhance the fit between their hosted experience and sponsor. This is especially important when corporate social responsibility is a communication goal for the sponsor.

Product Knowledge of Sponsor

Product knowledge of the sponsor characterizes the consumer's awareness and level of experience or expertise associated with the sponsor's brand. Product knowledge enhances consumers' perceptions of the sponsors' products (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Sheinin & Biehal, 1999). Knowledgeable consumers are more engaged with the brand and its community activities (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005). Consumers need product knowledge to form favorable social associations about the sponsor in order to develop commitment to the sponsor's brands (Leung, Lai, Chan, & Wong, 2005). Consumers' familiarity with the sponsor influences what they think about the brand when they link the brand to sponsored events (Carrillat, Harris, & Lafferty, 2010; Meenaghan, 2001). For example, sponsorship of a sports event that is aligned with a cause provides a context for the attendees who have used the sponsor's products. Knowledge activated at the sponsored event may enhance attendees' perceptions of the sponsor as more socially responsible and commitment-worthy.

Walsh and Ross (2010) examine the impact of various levels of congruent brand associations on a professional sports team. These authors find that higher levels of fit favorably impact how consumers evaluate team brand associations though less fit does not markedly

weaken brand associations. In light of these results, we anticipate that stronger event-sponsor fit will intensify the strength of the relationship among attendees' product knowledge and their perceptions about the sponsor's CSR. Furthermore, we anticipate that event-sponsor fit strengthens the relationship between attendees' product knowledge and their level of commitment to the sponsor's brands.

H₄: Event-sponsor fit moderates the positive association between product knowledge and perceived corporate social responsibility of the sponsor.

H₅: Event-sponsor fit moderates the positive association between product knowledge and brand commitment.

Brand Commitment to Sponsor

Brand commitment entails attitudinal preference, reflected by a reluctance to consider competing brands (Raju, Unnava, & Montgomery, 2009). Attitude precedes behavior, and it is attitude that often produces consistent behavior (Oliver, 1980). Sponsors benefit from strong consumer perceptions of a sponsor; such perceptions strengthen the consumer's emotional attachment to the brand (Lichtenstein et al., 2004). When a brand sponsors an event that resonates with consumers, consumer's brand commitment may eventually strengthen due to the favorable affective association about the sponsor. Experiments show that event-sponsor fit leads to positive attitudes toward the sponsor (e.g., Rifon, Choi, Trimble, & Li, 2004; Roy & Cornwell, 2004). In turn, we posit that event-sponsor fit moderates the link between attendees' perceptions of the sponsor's CSR and attendees' brand commitment to the event sponsor.

H₆: Event-sponsor fit moderates the positive association between perceived corporate social responsibility of the sponsor and brand commitment.

Purchase Intent

Beyond brand commitment, companies sponsor events to elicit a variety of consumer behavioral responses, including increasing customers' willingness to buy their branded products

and services. CSR initiatives may indirectly influence consumers' purchasing decisions by creating a context for purchase intentions (Pirsch, Gupta, & Grau, 2007). Further, a company's communal efforts directly and indirectly impact consumers' intentions to purchase its products (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). Community support also contributes to more obligated purchase decisions (Dees, Bennett, & Villegas, 2008). Event-sponsor fit could influence whether consumers reward the sponsor for its community activities by purchasing the sponsor's products. More congruent perceptions between entities contribute to higher purchase intentions (Roth & Romeo, 2000). Thus, it follows that event-sponsor fit will intensify the relationship between event attendees' CSR perceptions and their purchase intent. Similarly, fit is anticipated to attendees' commitment for the sponsor's brands and their purchase intentions.

H₇: Event-sponsor fit intensifies the positive association between perceptions of corporate social responsibility and purchase intent.

H₈: Event-sponsor fit intensifies the positive association between brand commitment and purchase intent.

Method

We test the framework via a field study at a professional cycling event--the fifth annual Tour de Georgia (TDG). At the time of the field survey, the TDG was a sponsored, large-scale, free to the community event; TDG attracted 120 international cyclists and over a half a million attendees. Sponsored event research typically focuses on events that spectators pay to attend, with free-to-view events receiving considerably less focus (Davies and Tsiantas, 2008). Beyond the 658-mile professional cycling race, TDG event attractions included entertainment (e.g., music, food, and beverages) and, of interest here, sponsored event marketing activities and sponsors' exhibit booths. As the title sponsor of TDG, AT&T received prominent branding on all venues during the race week as well as in all pre-event promotions and on the TDG website. The

AT&T logo appeared on banners, tents, signs, volunteer apparel, and large-screens used to project the race. As part of its sponsorship agreement, AT&T enjoyed the naming rights to the leader jersey, awarded after each stage of the seven-staged event. AT&T personnel intermingled with attendees who visited the sponsor's exhibit booths that appeared at each host venue.

Tied in with multi-stage health expo initiatives, TDG provided AT&T with an opportunity to demonstrate CSR through its support of the large community-based professional cycling event and healthy lifestyles. The Georgia Cancer Coalition had a presence. While the "Livestrong" cause-related marketing championed by the controversial athlete Lance Armstrong may be an association, there was not an official Livestrong brand presence.

Sample and Field Research Procedures

As with similar field studies (Irwin, Lachowetz, Cornwell, & Clark, 2003; Wakefield & Bennett, 2010), event sponsorship effectiveness is captured using intercept surveys during the TDG. The lead author trained and supervised a field-research team consisting of community volunteers and undergraduate business students. The research team wore official volunteer shirts to signify their role to attendees. Adults who were attending the race were approached by field researchers and invited them to participate in the survey and received incentives (e.g., official tour shirts, souvenir pens, and large fans to wave at the cyclists) for their participation.

Surveys were distributed seven consecutive days throughout each of 12 host communities: Atlanta ($n=112$), Brasstown Bald Mountain ($n=273$), Chickamauga ($n=99$), Chattanooga ($n=121$), Dalton ($n=26$), Lake Lanier ($n=390$), Lookout Mountain ($n=51$), Macon ($n=171$), Peachtree City ($n=65$), Rome ($n=149$), Stone Mountain ($n=248$), and Thomaston ($n=34$). The authors went to both starts and finishes for each leg of the race. Overall, 1,739 participants completed the survey. After omitting those with missing variables, the adjusted

sample size is 1,615. Nonresponse rate is just over 10%, measured by tracking attendees approached versus the number administered, which is comparable to other event-sponsor field surveys (Alexandris, Tsaousi, & James, 2007; Gwinner et al., 2009, Irwin et al., 2003). The predominant reason for nonresponse was attributed to either that the attendees were on their way to visit an exhibit or watch the race. The majority (58.7%) of participants are men. Forty-four percent of participants are between 20 and 39 years old, with another 42.8% ranging from 40 to 60 years old. Forty percent of participants report household incomes between the range of \$50,000-\$100,000 and 27% report incomes of more than \$100,000.

Measurement and Scale Items

Understanding event sponsorships requires that researchers measure event attendees' perceptions. Existing scales are used to measure the constructs of interest with slight modifications to fit the study context. All constructs use five-point Likert-type scales, anchored by 1=strongly disagree/5= strongly agree. To embed the role of event sponsorship, all measures began with the following statement(s): *For each statement about the event, please rate your agreement, Please rate your agreement about the key tour sponsor, AT&T, or About AT&T sponsoring the Tour de Georgia Race....*

The five items to measure event-sponsor fit are adapted from Speed and Thompson (2000) and modified to fit the context for this study. The Lichtenstein, Drumwright, and Braig (2004) five-item measure of CSR assesses perceptions of the company's efforts regarding corporate giving and support. Given the study's broad definition of CSR, this scale assesses attendees' perceptions of the event title sponsor. Chandon, Wansink, and Laurent (2000) provide the three items to measure event entertainment as well as the three items to measure affect toward the event, respectively. The multi-scale items we use to measure attendees' activeness in

sports are taken from Lumpkin and Darden (1982). The authors adapt Bloch, Sherrell, and Ridgway's (1989) scale to measure product knowledge. Three items are adapted from Yoo, Donthu, and Lee's (2000) brand equity scale to measure brand commitment. Finally, to capture purchase intent, the authors adapt four scale items from Baker and Churchill (1977).

Table 1 here

Data Analysis, Reliability, and Validity

The hypothesized relationships are tested using the two-step structural equation modeling (SEM) procedure advocated by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). This method of measurement and testing relationships allows for rigorous testing of measurement reliability and validity of the data before subjecting the structural model to tests of fit. A covariance matrix was created and subjected to confirmatory factor analysis using LISREL 8.80. Although the chi-square is significant ($\chi^2_{(349)} = 2781.98, p < .01$), the measurement model provides a good fit of the data based on other absolute and incremental fit measures, including non-normed fit index (NNFI) = .99, comparative fit index (CFI) = .99, incremental fit index (IFI) = .99, and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .066. The NNFI, CFI, and IFI values exceed the recommended cutoff of .95 (Hu & Bentler, 1999) whereas the RMSEA value is more favorable than the conventional threshold of .08 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993).

The construct measures yield sound reliability and validity properties (Table 1). Analyses provide evidence of convergent validity in each construct with the parameter estimates ranging from $\lambda = .81$ to .98. In addition, Bagozzi and Yi (1988) suggest strong evidence of convergent validity results when the factor loading on an item of interest is significant. The squared multiple correlations for all of the items are large, ranging from .65 to .95. We assess discriminant validity by comparing the variance extracted for each construct to the square of each off-diagonal value

within the phi matrix for that construct. Average variance extracted ranges from .69 to .92, with each measure exceeding the .50 benchmark (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Finally, we assess internal reliability through composite reliabilities. Composite reliabilities range from .87 to .97; all well above the .70 threshold of acceptability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Table 2 presents the correlations, means, and standard deviations of the constructs.

Table 2 here

Results

The model is comprised of three exogenous constructs and four endogenous constructs. The fit statistics suggest a good fit between the model and data. The proposed structural model exhibits acceptable levels of fit with $\chi^2_{(241)} = 2191.75$, NFI = .99, NNFI = .99, CFI = .99, IFI = .99, and RMSEA = .071. Given the satisfactory fit of the structural model, next, the authors examine the standardized coefficients for the model's direct relationships. Table 3 reports that each path is highly significant ($p < .001$).

Table 3 here

Because event-sponsor fit is hypothesized to moderate each relationship of the model, attendees assess fit between AT&T (the sponsor) and TDG (the event). The authors then divided responses into three categories based on their average mean scores for fit via a five-point scale: a) *high-fit* (mean = 4.81 range = 4.2-5.0, $n = 649$), b) *medium-fit* (mean = 3.51, range = 3.0-4.0, $n = 613$), and c) *low-fit* (mean = 1.78, range = 1.0-2.8, $n = 353$). Then, the authors conducted multi-group analyses to facilitate a simultaneous examination across the three fit categories. As recommended by Joreskog and Sorbom (2006), structural parameters are constrained to be equal across fit categories, thus producing an estimated covariance matrix for each fit category and an overall chi-square value for the sets of sub-models as part of a single structural system. Next,

parameter equality constraints allow the authors to estimate the paths separately and without restraint- resulting in a second chi-square value with fewer degrees of freedom. For the fit categories, the difference between the two chi-square values is significant; therefore, we reject the null that structural parameters are identical across fit categories (parameter invariance). Then, a series of multi-group tests determines what accounted for unequal covariance structures. Table 4 displays the results.

Table 4 here

The chi-square difference test yields non-significant results across the three fit categories. Specifically, no evidence for a moderating effect is found for the path from event entertainment to attendees' attitude toward the event (H_1). There is no evidence that higher event-sponsor fit positively moderates the relationship between sports activeness and attitude toward the event compared to lower congruity perceptions (H_2). In addition, there are non-significant findings for H_3 , on the moderating relationship between attendees' attitude toward the event and sponsor's CSR; there is no difference in chi-square between attendees who perceived high fit versus low fit. Thus, fit does not moderate these factors related to the event.

However, highly significant differences in chi-square between high-fit and low-fit categories provide evidence for H_4 - H_8 . For H_4 , the multi-group comparison shows fit positively moderates the relationship between product knowledge and CSR. There is a significant difference in chi-square at $p < .001$ for high fit versus low fit, and for medium versus low fit. Moreover, significant differences in chi-square ($p < .001$) between high versus low fit categories provide evidence for the moderating effect that event-sponsor fit impacts the association between product knowledge \rightarrow brand commitment (H_5). For the three remaining hypotheses (H_6 - H_8), significant differences in chi-square are found between high event-sponsor fit and low fit

categories. Thus, there is support for moderating effects between: sponsor's CSR → brand commitment ($H_6: p < .001$), CSR → purchase intent ($H_7: p < .01$), and brand commitment → purchase intent ($H_8: p < .001$). When comparing high versus medium fit categories, significant differences in chi-square show moderating support at the $p < .001$ levels on these same last four hypothesized relationships. As an additional test, the authors examined group mean comparisons to determine whether the differences are in the hypothesized directions. All sponsor-related constructs are significant among the three fit categories in the predicted direction at $p < .001$.

Discussion

The fit between the sponsor and the event has emerged as one of the central tenets of sponsorship research; yet, studies often either focus on main effects or isolate impact to the sponsor. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the first study that explicitly examines indirect effects and differing levels of perceived fit on both the event and sponsor. Based on the literature review, the authors had anticipated balanced or symmetrical event-sponsor fit effects on both parties; instead, the results reveal an unexpected, striking asymmetry. Attendees do not let the identity of the sponsor influence their attitudes toward the event. Hence, fit matters—for the sponsor, but not necessarily for the event. Specifically, the study reveals how consumers' positive perceptions of the *sponsor* rise when they perceive greater fit with the event; yet fit does not influence consumers' attitudes toward the *event*. That is, even when the event and sponsor are perceived as a mismatch, it does not impact how attendees assess the event.

In aggregate, the multi-group SEM results reaffirm how event-sponsor fit plays a major role on attendees' assessments of the sponsor. But the results do not show that fit influences attendees' assessments of the relationships concerning the event; the results also do not show how those relationships impact attendees' CSR perceptions of the sponsors. When attendees

assess the sponsor's brands and their purchase intent regarding the sponsor, fit is relevant. This research helps delineate those occasions when fit is more relevant.

The results show that fit plays a role in consumers' perceptions of sponsors' brands and consumers' intentions to use those brands; yet perceived fit does not necessarily influence their evaluation of events. This study also investigates attendees' perceptions of the entertainment value of the event and the role of attendees' activeness in sports; surprisingly, perceived sponsor-event fit does not influence the impact of either one toward sharing their attitudes toward the sponsored event. Perhaps more surprising is the finding that perceived fit does not intensify the positive association between attitudes toward the event and attendees' perceptions that the sponsor is socially responsible. Taken together, these results suggest that so long as attendees have a positive attitude toward the event, the perceived sponsor-event fit does not matter regarding how consumers assess CSR for the sponsor. Yet as anticipated, the findings of this study confirm the role of fit for strengthening the links among product knowledge, brand commitment, sponsor's CSR, and purchase intent. For these sponsor-related constructs, the results are more equivocal regarding the influence of fit in regarding how attendees' attitudes toward the event connect to their assessments of the sponsor.

Contribution to Congruity Theory

Congruity theory helps explain the roles that attitude, transfer, and effectiveness play at sponsored events. Attendees maintain harmony in their assessments of a firm's sponsorship activities and how the firm gives back to local communities. Specifically, where attendees have high product knowledge and perceive a high event-sponsor fit, they are more likely to also perceive that the firm sponsor is socially responsible and to be committed to the sponsor's brand. Similarly, if attendees' perceptions about the sponsor's CSR are favorable and that there is a high

degree of event-sponsor fit, they are also more likely to be committed to the sponsor's brand and to have higher purchase intentions toward the sponsor's products. Finally, where attendees have high brand commitment and perceive high fit, they are more likely to have high purchase intent toward the sponsor's products or services. This study establishes a clearer demarcation between an *event sponsor* and a *sponsored event* when used in relation to investigating the potential value of fit. The study's findings explain how fit influences attendees' perceptions of the sponsor and, in turn, the effectiveness of sponsored events.

Implications for Sponsors and Event Marketers

On the surface, the asymmetrical impact of event-sponsor fit on the sponsor and sponsored event might suggest that the importance of fit holds no relevance to event marketing managers. Yet, aiming for strong fit between events and sponsors should be sought by event marketers due to the clear value of fit to sponsors. Hosting an event that is congruent with a particular sponsor may be an easier sell. It is also important to note that without the sponsor's financial and/or in-kind support, the event's likelihood for success may become severely compromised. This is evident in the case of TDG, which ended after six annual races due to the economy and sponsor funding. Therefore, event marketers still have ample incentive to create highly congruent event-sponsor partnerships; subpar perceptions of fit only weaken the desired impact of sponsors to strengthen brand associations and brand preferences. In other words, unsatisfactory sponsorship performance is not sustainable to either party.

Sponsors especially benefit from event sponsorships when attendees perceive a high degree of fit between the event and sponsor. When it is not an obvious association (e.g., between telecommunications and cycling), sponsors can strengthen the sponsorship effectiveness by clarifying otherwise vague associations. A lesson for sponsors is that it is in their best interest to

articulate, or explain any connections between their brand and the event if it is not obvious. For example, AT&T is in telecommunications, and communications is a central tenant in team sports. The athletes must communicate with each other, their coach, and with race officials; a visible way to do so is via cell phones. If AT&T was to advertise their sponsorship, it could be smart to show a cycling team in communication—using AT&T services to reach their goals.

Sponsors play a crucial role in helping make events possible. The impact of CSR as a mediator suggests to managers that sponsoring a community event can serve as a conduit between attitudes toward the event and sponsor. In doing so, the firm experiences stronger bonds between: a) product knowledge and CSR, and b) CSR and brand commitment. While entertainment and attendee activeness in sports enhances attitude toward a sporting event, (which, in turn enhances sponsors' perceived CSR), there is no evidence that event-sponsor fit makes a difference in these relationships. Regardless of sponsorship, consumers seek events that are consistent with their lifestyle and offer excitement. Therefore, the results imply that attendees use different processes to assess sponsored events and the sponsor-specific variables.

Limitations and Future Research

The results presented are based on field survey data. A trade-off when conducting a real-world study is the researcher's inability to control for event sponsor information possessed by respondents, including information held from previous brand associations. We only investigated the title sponsor of the tested event. Yet as is frequently the case, the tested event featured multi-tiered corporate sponsorship. Future field studies should extend beyond the highest level of sponsorship to more accurately reflect real-world practices. The current study examines a sponsored event in the domain of professional cycling. Another relevant extension would be to examine whether attendees at other types of sporting events care more or less about event-

sponsor fit. In the context of cycling, a healthy lifestyle sport, fit matters to the sponsor, who seeks to be connected with this family-friendly community event. Perhaps attendees of different kinds of sports events have one set of criteria for assessing the event and another set for assessing the sponsor of the event. Scholars and practitioners need more research to understand the extent to which fit matters in attendees' assessments of the event and if, in turn, their assessments of the event itself influence their assessments of the sponsor.

Future models should be expanded into other variables of interest. For example, in light of the controversies surrounding doping and competitive cycling, scholars may be interested in extending this model to include associations of the LiveStrong brand and sponsored cycling events. As Lance Armstrong is a past winner of the Tour de Georgia (his medal has been stripped due to allegations of doping), there is a loose connection with the LiveStrong brand and this event. To what extent any cognitive connections exist, and how they interplay with a cycling attendee's perception of an event or sponsorship is an interesting avenue for future research in the cycling domain.

Table 1
Scale Items and Confirmatory Factor Analysis

	Lambda Loadings ¹	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
<i>Event Entertainment</i>		.97	.92
These events are fun.	.93		
These events are entertaining.	.98		
These events are enjoyable.	.98		
<i>Activeness in Sports</i>		.91	.77
I cycle, play tennis, golf, or engage in other active sports a lot.	.84		
I exercise regularly to stay fit.			
Sports are a big part of my life.	.89		
<i>Attitude toward the Event</i>		.95	.85
I like this type of event a lot.	.97		
I wish there were more events like this.	.96		
With this type of event, I feel like giving my business to the sponsors.	.83		
<i>Event-Sponsor Fit</i>		.97	.86
There is a logical connection between TDG and AT&T.	.90		
The image of AT&T and the image of TDG are similar.	.91		
AT&T and TDG fit together well.	.95		
AT&T reflects the values of the TDG.	.94		
It makes sense to me that this company sponsors this event.	.92		
<i>Sponsor's Corporate Social Responsibility</i>		.95	.81
AT&T is committed to share profits to help community events.	.84		
AT&T is involved with the communities where it does business.	.91		
Local events benefit from AT&T's contributions.	.91		
AT&T puts charity into its business activities.	.92		
AT&T is involved in corporate giving.	.91		
<i>Product Knowledge of Sponsor</i>		.87	.69
I have experience with AT&T phone, cell, or internet services.	.81		
I have expertise with AT&T and their offerings	.85		
I regularly use AT&T phone, cell, or internet services.	.84		
<i>Brand Commitment to Sponsor</i>		.94	.84
I consider myself to be committed to AT&T.	.92		
AT&T would be one of my top choices.	.94		
I wouldn't seek a competitor if AT&T was available.	.90		
<i>Purchase Intent</i>		.96	.82
I am more likely to consider keeping or trying AT&T.	.91		
I would like to keep using or to have AT&T as my provider.	.89		
I would use AT&T if it happens to be easily available.	.91		
I would actively seek AT&T to be my provider.	.92		

¹Standardized solutions

Table 2
Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations

Constructs	M	SD	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
(1) Event-Sponsor Fit	3.68	1.20	1.00							
(2) Sponsor's CSR	3.43	1.13	.57	1.00						
(3) Event Entertainment	4.00	1.34	.48	.41	1.00					
(4) Activeness in Sports	3.76	1.36	.39	.32	.65	1.00				
(5) Attitude toward the Event	3.94	1.31	.49	.42	.79	.64	1.00			
(6) Product Knowledge of Sponsor	3.39	1.33	.43	.65	.34	.27	.34	1.00		
(7) Brand Commitment to Sponsor	3.30	1.24	.52	.70	.32	.27	.32	.67	1.00	
(8) Purchase Intent	3.43	1.21	.55	.77	.38	.32	.39	.70	.83	1.00

Table 3
Structural Model Direct Path Results

	Estimate ¹	t-value
Event Entertainment → Attitude toward the Event	.89	42.11**
Activeness in Sports → Attitude toward the Event	.10	6.33**
Attitude Toward the Event → Sponsor's CSR	.25	12.41**
Product Knowledge → Sponsor's CSR	.66	27.65**
Product Knowledge → Brand Commitment	.49	17.13**
Sponsor's CSR → Brand Commitment	.41	14.02**
Sponsor's CSR → Purchase Intent	.28	14.58**
Brand Commitment of Sponsor → Purchase Intent	.72	33.43**

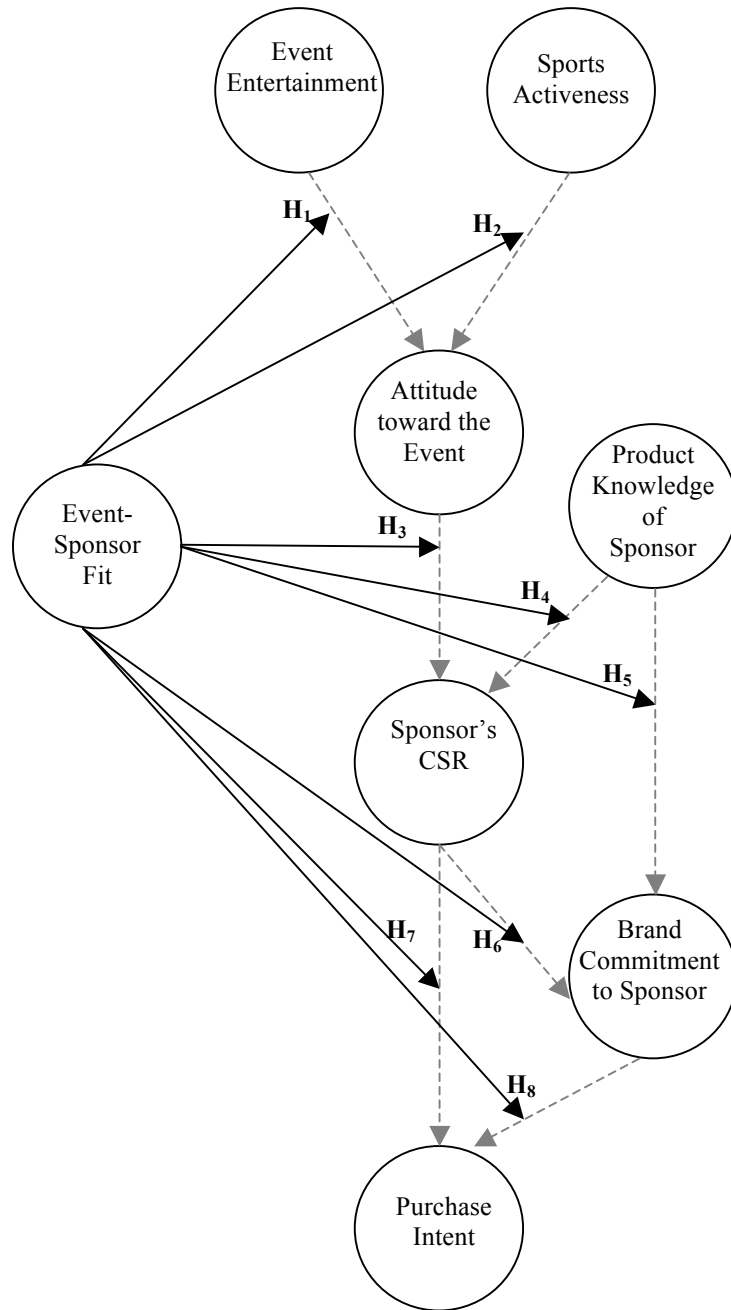
** $p < .001$ ¹ Standardized solutions

Table 4
Multi-group Chi-square Difference Test Results among Fit Categories

	High Fit vs. Medium Fit	Medium Fit vs. Low Fit	High Fit vs. Low Fit
H ₁ : Event Entertainment → Attitude toward the Event	2.65	0.09	1.04
H ₂ : Activeness in Sports → Attitude toward the Event	0.33	0.01	0.07
H ₃ : Attitude toward the Event → Sponsor's CSR	0.11	1.59	2.00
H ₄ : Product Knowledge → Sponsor's CSR	0.35	10.87**	16.85**
H ₅ : Product Knowledge → Brand Commitment to Sponsor	19.21**	0.90	31.38**
H ₆ : Sponsor's CSR → Brand Commitment	18.15**	3.20	29.07**
H ₇ : Sponsor's CSR → Purchase Intent	17.49**	0.01	9.64*
H ₈ : Brand Commitment of Sponsor → Purchase Intent	30.04**	0.37	16.31**

1 degree of freedom comparisons: * $p < .01$; ** $p < .001$

Figure 1
Conceptual Model



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