CHANGE IN A SPONSORSHIP ALLIANCE AND THE COMMUNICATION IMPLICATIONS OF SPONTANEOUS RECOVERY

Anna R. McAlister, Sarah J. Kelly, Michael S. Humphreys, and T. Bettina Cornwell

ABSTRACT: As the marketplace for sponsored properties approaches saturation and sponsorship contracts come up for renewal, a new communications challenge has been born: spontaneous recovery of the previous sponsor. Changed sponsors may result in unwelcome recall of the previous alliance partner—unwelcome from the new sponsor's perspective, that is. Presented here, a field study and an experiment confirm that spontaneous recovery of a past sponsor, while not arising immediately, does, over time, influence recall of the current sponsor. The pattern of memory found in this research presents new knowledge to the researcher and practitioner that can inform sponsorship decision making, implementation, and measurement.

Marketing has embraced the potential value of strategic alliances for decades. Strategic alliances can be viewed as a form of interorganizational cooperative strategy that "entails the pooling of specific resources and skills by the cooperating organizations in order to achieve common goals, as well as goals specific to the individual partners" (Varadarajan and Cunningham 1995, p. 282). While historically much of the focus of alliance formation was on market entry and access (taking the form of buyer or supplier partnerships), lateral partnerships with nonprofits, government, and even with competitors have been represented in this thinking. These lateral partnerships often took the form of social marketing campaigns that paired for-profit firms with nonprofit charities (Bloom, Hussein, and Szykman 1995). More recently, sponsorship of sports has been argued as an important strategic alliance (Farrelly and Quester 2005). The vast majority of sponsorship relationships have brand awareness and image enhancement as their objective (Cornwell and Maignan 1998). Thus, while they follow the form of an alliance, like nonprofit alliances, they do so in the public eye. In fact, it is through the public linking of sponsor and the sponsored partners that brand associations are built (Cornwell 2008).

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All strategic alliances have stages, such as formation, implementation, and outcome (Das and Teng 2002), and may eventually dissolve. Ending strategic alliances has garnered far less research attention than alliance formation, perhaps because vertical relationships are largely business-to-business and the termination of an alliance does not find the public heavily involved. Changes in sponsorship alliances differ in this regard. Because sponsorship alliances are largely communications platforms, the change of a sponsorship partner holds strategic implications for consumer recall and image management.

The purpose of the present research is to examine situations where a long-term sponsor is replaced by an incoming sponsor, to determine whether there is residual awareness of the relationship between the long-term sponsor and event. In particular, we are interested in addressing lagged effects through a longitudinal design allowing examination of the possibility that consumers might show good knowledge of the current sponsor (i.e., the replacement sponsor) during the time of an event, but that they may revert to associating the past sponsor (i.e., the former sponsor) with the event after a period of time. We examine sponsorship replacements across a variety of event types, using both a field study for ecological validity, as well as a lab-based experiment to control for extraneous variables. The field study is designed to establish the existence of the phenomenon. This is then followed by presentation of the experiment that is conducted with the purpose of testing the parameters of the observed phenomenon. The goal of the studies is to understand the memory effects of sponsorship for incoming and exiting sponsors, and shed light on the effectiveness of immediate measures of success in sponsor awareness in contrast to lagged measures.

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OVERVIEW OF SPONSORSHIP REPLACEMENT HISTORY, FORM, AND CHALLENGES

Sponsorship has become a mainstay marketing tool, with annual global expenditure estimated at $48.7 billion in 2011 (International Events Group 2011). In the past few decades, many sports, events, festivals, and arts-related activities have come to have corporate sponsors. For example, between 1985 and 2000, 49 U.S. sports stadiums acquired corporate names (Clark, Cornwell, and Pruitt 2002), most for the first time. This same phenomenon can be seen with bowl games during the 1980s and 1990s, when names such as the Peach Bowl became the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl and the Orange Bowl became the FedEx Orange Bowl. While this trend may be most obvious with sports since the majority of sponsorship dollars are spent on sport (68% in 2010; Kane 2011), the trend is present across a vast array of sponsorship properties. Because sponsorship growth of the 1980s and 1990s was mainly fueled by new sponsorship properties coming into agreements, the replacing of "old" sponsors with "new" sponsors was not a significant issue. Hence, it has been largely unexamined.

For the purpose of this study, "sponsorship replacement" occurs when a new sponsor secures a relationship with a sponsorship property previously held by another sponsor for any length of time (the departing sponsor may have held sponsorship rights for as little as one sport season or for as long as an event or stadium's history). We use the term "replacement sponsor" to refer to the new sponsor and "former sponsor" to refer to the departing sponsor whose contract has been replaced. Sponsorship replacement may occur for a number of reasons. Olkkonen and Tuominen (2006) suggest that sponsorships end due to (1) changes in the relationship between organizations, (2) changes in the characteristics of the sponsor and the sponsored partners, (3) changes in the competitive environment, or (4) changes in the business environment.

Table 1 highlights examples of sponsorship replacement across a variety of events over the past decade. These examples suggest that replacement is often confined to a product category and highlight the extent of the replacement phenomenon.

Despite the growing frequency of sponsorship replacement, extant research has scarcely examined the topic. Mason and Cochetel's (2006) study of residual brand awareness following an instance of sponsorship replacement is one exception. Their field survey found that the previous long-term sponsor of a South African surfing event was well known to event attendees after the long-term sponsor had been replaced by a different sponsor. These authors did not test the extent to which event attendees associated either the long-term sponsor or the current sponsor with the event. They did, however, note that some respondents continued to refer to the event using its former name, which incorporated the name of the long-term sponsor brand.

Although it has been suggested that long-term sponsors may continue to benefit even after a sponsorship agreement has been terminated (e.g., Crimmins and Horn 1996), few studies have considered these effects empirically. Lacey et al. (2007) did not examine sponsorship replacement, but they did report enhanced brand image and purchase intentions as benefits that accrued to event sponsors following multiyear attendance by event patrons. Quester and Farrelly (1998) provide one study of sponsorship replacement with their longitudinal field survey of the Australian Formula One. These researchers anticipated that recall of a sponsor–event relationship would be stronger for brands that had been repeatedly associated with the event compared with brands that had less association with the event. This proposition was not supported. Despite this, the authors argue that any awareness benefit might be subject to a lagged effect only observable years later. Other researchers suggest that possible residual effects of sponsorship may be evidenced after termination of a sponsorship. Pitts and Slattery (2004) observe that most research focuses on awareness at individual events, thus overlooking lasting effects of extended exposure to the sponsor. Walliser (2003) calls for research into the decay effects of sponsorship, and Stotlar (2004) raises the notion of residual effects in modeling sponsorship effects but without measuring them.

RESIDUAL EFFECTS OF SPONSORSHIP AND SPONTANEOUS RECOVERY

The theoretical frame for this research is found in the cognitive psychology literature on spontaneous recovery. Historical foundations for the concept begin with Pavlov's animal studies and his observation: "Left to themselves, extinguished conditioned reflexes spontaneously recover their full strength after a longer or shorter interval of time" (1927, p. 58). While this original behavioral research has continued and is predecessor to research into response resurgence in humans (see Doughty and Oken's review [2008]), the theoretical thinking examined here begins with the offshoot of verbal learning studies begun by Underwood (1948). Our theorizing is in keeping with current network theories of memory, but focuses on the changing context of memory where the cues that are most likely to be used change over time.

Memory for the relationship between a former sponsor and an event and a replacement sponsor and this event is not unlike the paired associate studies found in psychology. Underwood (1948) had participants learn a list of pairs (each word A paired with word B was denoted as an AB pair) and then learn a second list where the cue stays the same, though it is paired with a new target (AC). Following the learning of the second list, participants were given a single test after 1 minute, 5 minutes,

TABLE 1
Examples of Sponsorship Replacement Relating to Major Events

Event	Exit sponsor	Replacement sponsor
Australian Open	2009: GE Money (Financial services) 2009: Garnier (Cosmetics) 2009: MasterCard (Credit card)	2010: enter Lacoste (Apparel) 2010: enter Rolex (Watch)
FIFA World Cup	2006: Philips (Electronics) 2006: MasterCard (Credit card)	2010: enter Sony (Electronics)* 2010: enter Visa (Credit card)*
Formula One (BMW Sauber)	2009: Credit Suisse (Financial services) 2009: Dell (Computer systems)	2009: enter FXPro (Financial services)*
Grammy Awards	2009: CBS Interactive (Online media) 2009: T-Mobile Sidekick (Telecommunications) 2009: *USA Today* (Newspaper) 2009: Nokia (Telecommunications)	2010: enter Waste Management (Waste management)
National Basketball Association	2009: McDonald's (Fast food)	2009: enter Taco Bell (Fast food)*
Summer Olympics	2008: Eastman Kodak (Photographic and optical) 2008: Lenovo (Computer systems)	2008: enter Manulife (Financial services) 2008: enter General Electric (Electronics)
Sundance Film Festival	2009: Volkswagen of America (Automotive) 2009: Adobe Systems (Computer software)	2009: enter Honda (Automotive)* 2009: enter Google (Internet, computer, software)*
Tour de France	2008: Nestlé Aquarel (Water)	2008: enter Vittel (Water)*
Wimbledon	2007: Buxton (Water)	2008: enter Evian (Water)* 2007: enter HSBC (Bank)
Winter Olympics	2008: Lenovo (Computer systems) 2008: Eastman Kodak (Photographic and optical) 2008: Manulife (Financial services) 2008: Johnson & Johnson (Drugs and health care)	2010: enter Acer (Computer systems)*

Note: FIFA = Fédération Internationale de Football Association.

* Category competitor.

24 hours, or 48 hours. On this test, participants were asked to produce the first of the two response words that they thought of. The recall of the List Two target declined from 1 minute to 48 hours, while the recall of the List One target increased slightly from 1 minute to 24 hours. Underwood (1948) referred to this finding as evidence for "spontaneous recovery," which he thought of as being similar to "spontaneous recovery" in classical conditioning (Pavlov 1927). In the verbal learning tradition, and in particular in paired associate learning, there is no longer considered to be similarity with classical conditioning. "Spontaneous recovery" is now used in the human memory literature in an entirely descriptive sense, which is how it is used here. We refer to spontaneous recovery when the probability of producing the Time One response relative to the probability of producing the Time Two response increases, following delay (i.e., when there is an increase in the interval between Time Two learning and test). This is spontaneous in the sense that the researcher did not intervene (i.e., did not provide additional training) to increase the probability of the Time One response emerging.

Why does spontaneous recovery occur? Brown (1976; see also Wheeler 1995) reviewed research on spontaneous recovery and determined that absolute recovery (where memory for the Time One pairing is greater on the delayed test than on the immediate test) is relatively rare. However, relative recovery (memory for the Time One pairing declines at a slower rate than memory for the Time Two pairing) is common. In general, to observe spontaneous recovery in the classic AB AC paradigm (here, A is event and B is former sponsor, and again, A is event with C, the replacement sponsor), it would be necessary for the strength of the AC association to decline at a faster rate than the strength of the AB association and/or for the strength of the AB association to be suppressed during AC learning and then for the AB association to recover.

In keeping with this general observation, a parsimonious explanation for spontaneous recovery would be that an individual's use of context, which gradually changes over time, explains the recovery of old associations (Dennis and Humphreys 2001; Sederberg, Howard, and Kahana 2008; Weeks, Humphreys, and Hockley 2007). It is important to note that this theory about context also has implications for the different time scales under which lab experiments are conducted and under which memory for real sponsorships needs to be measured. Note also that the use of context is largely independent of the other aspects of the memory theory considered. For example, context was incorporated into the connectionist model proposed by Chappell and Humphreys (1994), which specifically addressed AB AC learning. With the addition of the assumption that context is changing over time, this model would exhibit spontaneous recovery. Context is also incorporated into the network theory of Reder, Park, and Kieffaber (2009), which would also exhibit spontaneous recovery with the same assumption. Specifically, when a recall test occurs shortly after an event (e.g., within the same month), participants may try to reinstate the context of the event to retrieve the names of the sponsors (Dennis and Humphreys 2001; Humphreys et al. 2010). This produces accurate recall of the information learned during the last event and poor recall of information learned earlier. When the recall test occurs six months after the event, however, individuals may not try to reinstate the context of the last event. Instead they may use the name of the event as their retrieval cue. If the person has a strong memory for the former sponsor (possibly a semantic memory), this memory does not require the use of a specific context to be retrieved (they just "know" the answer) (Humphreys, Murray, and Maguire 2009). Alternatively, an individual may try to reinstate the context of the last event. In this case, though, the reinstated context will be similar to the contexts of many prior events (Weeks, Humphreys, and Hockley 2007). Thus, the recall of the sponsor of the last event will be interfered with and the recall of the prior long-term sponsor may be, in a relative sense, more available.

To document whether spontaneous recovery is an issue in sponsorship, we conduct a longitudinal field survey across four sporting events. In relation to three of these events, a new sponsor had replaced a long-term sponsor. In the remaining event, a new broadcaster had taken over from a long-term broadcaster whose rights had recently terminated. We sought to determine whether people were more likely to associate the current sponsor/broadcaster with the event, or whether they might mistakenly recall the former long-term sponsor/broadcaster who was no longer formally associated with the event. Moreover, we were interested in assessing whether spontaneous recovery occurred in relation to any of the events. Will the proportion of people who mistakenly recall the former sponsor/broadcaster increase after a six-month delay?

STUDY 1

Four globally recognized events were chosen for study: a Tennis Open tournament, an Auto-Racing event, a Horse-Racing event, and an Olympic Games broadcast. In relation to the first three, the long-term major sponsor (with naming rights) had been replaced by an incoming sponsor (having never before held the position of major sponsor of the event). For the fourth event, long-term broadcasting rights changed hands in 2008. While sponsorship of televised broadcasts differs contractually from sponsorship (i.e., the property of interest is the broadcast not the event), it functions like sponsorship in communicating a connection to the event.

A longitudinal design is necessary to allow examination of sponsor recall at the time of the event, as well as some time later. For the purpose of this study, we refer to Time One and Time Two for each event. Time One is defined as the actual time at which each event took place. Time One surveys were always conducted during the event period (i.e., the relevant week or month of the event). Time Two surveys were always administered six months after each event, to maximize the lag following an event while also not coming close to the build-up surrounding the next instance of an annual event. Time One data were collected in the later months of 2008 and, for one event, in the first month of 2009. Time Two data were collected mid-2009.

Method

Participants

Eight independent samples were used to obtain data about the four events across Times One and Two. These samples were always comparable from Time One to Time Two for each event. For example, in response to surveys regarding sponsorship of the Tennis Open, Time One participants included 98 university staff and students with a mean age of 36 years. At Time Two, respondents were 86 university staff and students with a mean age of 37 years. Full details regarding each of the samples are provided in Table 2.

Design

An independent-samples longitudinal design was employed to assess sponsor recall in relation to four events across two time points. Time was the independent variable and mistaken recall of former sponsor/broadcaster was the dependent variable.

Materials

Events were chosen for study if they met four criteria. First, all events were of international interest. Second, with the exception of the Olympics, which has a worldwide following, all

TABLE 2
Field Survey Data Collection: Overview of Survey Response Samples at Time One and Time Two

Event	Respondent sample at Time One (at time of event)	Respondent sample at Time Two (following six-month delay)
Tennis Open Time One: Jan. 2009 Time Two: July 2009	98 university staff and students (27 males, 71 females) aged 21–79 (*M* = 36.19, *SD* = 12.37)	86 university staff and students (28 males, 58 females) aged 20–64 (*M* = 37.76, *SD* = 12.62)
Olympic Broadcast Time One: Aug. 2008 Time Two: Feb. 2009	214 university staff and students (53 males, 161 females) aged 22–72 (*M* = 38.21, *SD* = 11.48)	244 university staff and students (43 males, 201 females) aged 19–68 (*M* = 38.48, *SD* = 12.39)
Auto-Racing Event Time One: Oct. 2008 Time Two: April 2009	64 adults, students and nonstudents (22 males, 42 females) aged 18–63 (*M* = 29.27, *SD* = 8.80)	58 adults, students and nonstudents (25 males, 33 females) aged 20–50 (*M* = 27.68, *SD* = 7.32)
Horse-Racing Event Time One: Nov. 2008 Time Two: May 2009	57 undergraduate students (26 males, 31 females) aged 18–29 (*M* = 21.10, *SD* = 2.38)	37 undergraduate students (14 males, 23 females) aged 17–28 (*M* = 20.92, *SD* = 2.30)

events had regional access to maximize the likelihood of event familiarity among participants. Third, the sponsorship/broadcaster replacement had to involve changeover of a major alliance. We did not address changes in lower-level sponsorships, which often receive less media attention. Finally, each event needed to have had a "long-term" alliance (lasting longer than three years), and that long-term sponsor/broadcaster needed to have been replaced. For the events that met these criteria, the duration of long-term sponsorships ranged from four to 18 years. The time since sponsorship replacement had occurred varied across events, with the shortest time being one year and the longest being seven years (see Table 3 for details).

Short online surveys were developed for each event. These surveys were virtually identical across events. The first question required the participant to name the major sponsor (broadcaster). The participant then clicked to the next screen and was required to name the former major sponsor (broadcaster). Responses to these questions were unaided (i.e., pull-down options were not provided). The online survey restricted participants from moving backward in the survey; thus, they could not alter their responses as they progressed. Two items assessed how much of the event the participant had viewed on television (a) this year, and (b) in prior years. Responses to this question were broken down across six options ranging from none to the total number of hours for which the event had been broadcast (details of total broadcast hours were obtained from the relevant television stations). A further two questions asked whether the person had attended the event (a) this year, or (b) in a prior year. Age and gender were also recorded. The Time Two survey was identical to the Time One survey for each event. The first survey question, "Please name the major sponsor of _____," was worded identically and always presented first at Times One and Two, since it is the focal question for this research. The survey software prevented repeat participation by blocking multiple responses from the same IP address.

Procedure

Adults were recruited via e-mail to complete the surveys online. To recruit participants for the Auto Racing surveys, we distributed e-mails to separate contact lists for racing enthusiasts at Time One and Time Two. Time Two participants were asked to click a box in the survey if they had participated in the survey at Time One; however, no participant reported having completed both surveys. For the Horse Racing surveys, a class of undergraduate students was invited to participate at Time One. At Time Two, a separate class of undergraduate students (from the same field of study) was invited to participate. We ensured a unique sample at Time Two by checking there was no overlap in enrollment across classes. For the Olympic Broadcast and Tennis Open surveys, recruitment occurred via a call for volunteers placed in a campus newsletter distributed via e-mail to all staff and students. To ensure a unique sample for each event at Time Two, our advertisement indicated that this was the same survey conducted earlier in the year and advised that people should not respond again if they had already participated.

The link to each online survey was valid for one week only. Data were then extracted into SPSS for preliminary data cleaning that involved removal of any participant who was considered to be ineligible to respond because they were unfamiliar with the event about which they were surveyed. Details of the final eight participant samples are available in Table 2. All subsequent analyses are based on samples of people who were familiar with the event about which they were surveyed

TABLE 3
Field Survey Data Summary: Spontaneous Recovery of the Association Between Event and Former Sponsor/Broadcaster

	Identification of replacement Time One (at time of event)		Identification of replacement Time Two (six-month delay)		Summary % increase
Event: Tenure of former sponsor and replacing contract	**Percentage correct recall of replacement sponsor/ broadcaster**	**Mistaken recall of former sponsor/ broadcaster**	**Percentage correct recall of replacement sponsor/ broadcaster**	**Mistaken recall of former sponsor/ broadcaster**	**Spontaneous recovery of former sponsor/ broadcaster**
Tennis Open Former sponsor (1986–2001); replacing (2002–2013)	53.1%	**5.1%**	31.7%	**8.5%**	**3.4% increase** $Z = 1.42$ $p = .08$
Olympic Broadcast Former sponsor (1992–2008); replacing (2009–2012)	18.7%	**26.2%**	5.3%	**79.1%**	**52.9% increase** $Z = 18.89$ $p = .001$
Auto Racing Former sponsor (2003–2007); replacing (2008–2009)	20.3%	**23.4%**	12.1%	**39.7%**	**16.3% increase** $Z = 2.91$ $p = .002$
Horse Racing Former sponsor (1985–2003); replacing (2004–2010)	47.4%	**12.3%**	32.4%	**40.5%**	**28.2% increase** $Z = 5.22$ $p = .001$
Average	34.9%	**16.8%**	20.4%	**41.9%**	**25.2%**

Note: Values in boldface were used to assess spontaneous recovery over time.

(i.e., they had attended the event or watched it on television at some time). The reported results do not show breakdowns across groups according to frequency of prior attendance or television viewing, since preliminary analyses found no significant differences using these variables. We did not exclude participants who responded "don't know" to the first two questions about sponsorship because they were nevertheless familiar with the event.

Results

To determine whether spontaneous recovery was significant in relation to each event, we examined whether the proportion of people who mistakenly recalled the former sponsor six months after an event (i.e., Time Two) was significantly greater than the proportion who had mistakenly associated the former sponsor with the event at the time the event was running (i.e., Time One). To test these proportions, Z scores were calculated using the following formula:

$$Z = \frac{\hat{p} - p}{\sqrt{pq / n}}.$$

Here, $\hat{p}$ is the Time Two proportion, p is the Time One proportion, q is equal to $1 - p$, and n is the sample size at Time Two. This formula provides a valid test of proportion only when n is large. "Large" is defined as n being greater than the outcome of the equation: five divided by either p or q (whichever is smaller). The number five is used as a standard numerator in this equation and is not dependent on the specifics of the present research. In relation to each of the four events we studied, our final sample was always larger than the required "large" number.

Table 3 provides full details of the percentage of respondents who mistakenly associated the former sponsor/broadcaster with the event at each survey time, and lists the Z-scores for

spontaneous recovery. In relation to three of the four events, spontaneous recovery of the former sponsor or broadcaster was significant. In relation to the fourth event, Tennis Open, there was a marginal increase in mistaken recall of the former sponsor at Time Two (p = .08).

Discussion

The results of Study 1 suggest that communication effectiveness for the replacement sponsor is diluted by attributions of sponsorship efforts to the former sponsor. From a practical perspective, incoming sponsors need to be aware that former sponsors stand to benefit from continued association with the event in consumers' minds even after their formal sponsorship has ended. In three of the four cases we examined, spontaneous recovery of the former relationship was significant. Where spontaneous recovery was only marginally significant, the sponsorship replacement had occurred seven years ago. Although the long-term sponsorship of the Tennis Open had spanned 25 years, seven years of exposure to the new alliance partner seems to have reduced the level of spontaneous recovery. Hence, we suggest spontaneous recovery may reduce with repeated opportunities to learn to associate the replacement sponsor with the event; however, this would be offset by any communications during this period by the former sponsor.

While we did not directly address the longevity of spontaneous recovery in this study, our findings suggest that incoming sponsors would be wise to establish a long-term sponsorship of their own, with a view to reaping benefits that stabilize over time. This suggestion reckons with past research showing that managers find that greater financial value and brand distinctiveness stem from long-term sponsorships (Cornwell, Roy, and Steinard 2001).

The value of this first study has been to observe spontaneous recovery in a natural setting. We chose participants who were familiar with the events; however, there is undoubtedly natural variation among participants. It is impossible to guarantee that our Time Two samples are similar to Time One samples in potentially important characteristics (e.g., past opportunities to have learned about sponsor–event relationships). To address this issue, we turn to Study 2, which uses a lab setting in which participants learn event sponsorship arrangements. In this setting, fictitious events are used to control for familiarity. Study 2 will also allow contrast to sponsor recall when there is no replacement of sponsorship (i.e., the long-term sponsor continues as event sponsor). Our research questions for the experiment are: "Will the likelihood of correct sponsor identification differ according to whether or not a change in sponsorship was announced?" and "If there is an effect of sponsorship replacement on accuracy of sponsor recall, will this differ as a function of lag time between the time of learning and the time of recall test?"

STUDY 2

This second study complements Study 1 by providing a controlled investigation of spontaneous recovery. We limit the study to event sponsorship where the replacement sponsor is a direct industry competitor of the long-term sponsor of each event. As described subsequently, participants learn about these sponsorships during a series of multimedia exposures. To maximize ecological validity, the sponsorship information is embedded among announcements involving other sponsorships and irrelevant filler material. While it is true that this filler material adds noise to the learning environment, it limits undue attention toward the sponsorship information presented. Note also that the original learning environment in our field studies was undoubtedly noisy.

Method

Participants

Forty undergraduate students (23 males, 17 females) were recruited from a subject pool at a large state university. Participants were paid $10 for each day that they took part in this three-day study. All participants spoke English as their first language. Thirty-seven participants were retained for the second day of testing, and at day three there were 34 participants. The mean age of participants was 26 years.

Design

A within-subjects, repeated measures, 2 × 2 factorial design was used. The independent variables were sponsorship replacement (no replacement, replacement) and length of delay before test (one day, two days). The dependent variable was cued recall of event sponsor.

Procedure

The study was divided across three days. At the beginning of the experiment, participants were instructed that they were to read and listen to a variety of media for the purpose of evaluating different news media formats. Participants were not informed that their memory for sponsor–event pairings would be tested, nor were they to direct special attention to embedded sponsorship announcements. Hence, sponsorship exposure was incidental, low-involvement, and communicated across multiple media. The three-day design provided a scenario where a long-term event sponsor is replaced by a replacement sponsor. In this study, the long-term sponsor was learned via repeated exposures to a sponsor–event pairing, while the replacement sponsor was learned in just one pairing with the event. The replacement sponsor was always an industry competitor of the long-term sponsor.

TABLE 4
Event–Brand Pairings Used in Study 2

Event	Sponsoring brand, Day One	Replacement brand, Day Two
Australian Art Exhibition	Visa	American Express
Makeover for Mum	L'Oréal	Revlon
Moonlight Music Festival	Sony	Panasonic
Motor Show Spectacular	Toyota	Ford
Pacific Surfing Contest	Billabong	Quiksilver
Safe Swimming Day	Arena	Speedo
Christmas Is for Kids Toy Drive	Energizer	No replacement
Evening Wear Parade	Armani	No replacement
Family and Friends Lunch	Kodak	No replacement
House-Building Day	IKEA	No replacement
International Relay Run	Gatorade	No replacement
Think Tank Trivia (T3) Challenge	Google	No replacement

On Day One, participants read the mock magazines, viewed the online news forums, and listened to the mock radio presentation via headphones. This activity served to create memories of 12 sponsor–event pairs via repeated exposures. To balance the need to control for event familiarity while ensuring realism, pairings consisted of real brands and fictitious events. Each brand–event pair was presented three times (one radio announcement, one online news announcement, and one print media announcement). Table 4 provides a full list of these sponsor–event pairs.

To simulate replacement with a "new" sponsor on Day Two, participants learned new sponsor–event pairings for half (i.e., six) of the events. These new sponsor–event pairings were learned by one press release exposure embedded in an online news media format. Participants then completed a five-minute distracter task of general knowledge and math questions, unrelated to the study materials. Participants were then tested on a cued recall task, using event as cue. Specifically, they were asked to respond to the question "Name the sponsor of the [event]." Hence, six event–brand pairings were tested in total, with half of these being replacement sponsors, and half being nonreplacements (i.e., Day One pairings continued). Three of six replacement and nonreplacement events tested on Day Two were randomly determined for each participant. For the three tested events that had replacement sponsors, participants should have recalled the replacement sponsor. For the three events that had appeared on Day One only, participants should have recalled the original sponsor (since it had not been replaced by a new sponsor). Note, though, that the question simply asked participants to "name the sponsor."

On Day Three, participants did not receive any exposures but completed the same cued recall task as Day Two, except that all 12 events were tested on Day Three. Thus, half of the events tested had a replacement sponsor and half did not have a replacement sponsor. The dependent variables were the recall of the Day One sponsor and the recall of the replacement sponsor when appropriate. The delay between each of the study days was one day between Days One and Two, and two days between Days One and Three.

Materials

Twelve sets of mock press releases were prepared for Day One, three per event. Each set comprised three press releases that were similar in wording, but differed with respect to the delivery medium: one radio announcement, one announcement embedded in an online news forum, and one announcement delivered via a printed version of a general interest mock magazine. Each sponsorship announcement was a passage of text, four sentences in length, announcing a sponsorship deal between a company and event. The first sentence included the name of the company, a brief description of the company in relation to the industry (to ensure participants were familiar with the company's domain), and the name of the event. The second sentence described the event. The third and final sentences described and reinforced the reason for the sponsorship. In each press release, the name of the sponsor was mentioned three times across the four sentences and the event name was mentioned twice. To enhance ecological validity, the delivery media included the press releases embedded among filler material. For instance, sponsorship announcements made via radio were surrounded by music, weather updates, and a comedy show. Announcements in print magazines were surrounded by cartoons, recipes, horoscopes, and unrelated news stories. Online announcements were surrounded by filler news stories and general interest articles that were unrelated to the target brands and events.

Six press release announcements were prepared for Day Two. Each press release was three sentences in length, announcing that a company was taking over sponsorship of an event men-

TABLE 5
Average Likelihood of Correct Sponsor Identification on the Cued Recall Task in Study 2

	Day Two *n* = 37	Day Three *n* = 34	Overall average by condition
Nonreplacement condition	.62 (37 × 3 data points)	.51 (34 × 6 data points)	.57
Replacement condition	.30 (37 × 3 data points)	.44 (34 × 6 data points)	.37
Overall average by day	.46	.47	

tioned in the announcements on Day One. The first sentence included the name of the company, mention of sponsorship takeover, and the name of the event. The second and third sentences described and reinforced the reason for the sponsorship. In each press release, the name of the sponsor was mentioned three times and the event name was mentioned once. The previous sponsor was not mentioned in these announcements. On Day Two, the press releases were always presented online, embedded among unrelated news filler material.

Results

A two-way ANOVA (analysis of variance) was conducted to explore the impact of sponsor replacement (present, absent) and lag time (one day, two days) on levels of cued recall, as measured by the proportion of participants recalling the original sponsoring brand. Results revealed a significant main effect for replacement on cued recall, $F(1, 33) = 9.9$, $p = .003$, $\omega^2 = .23$. As expected, the mean cued recall level for replacement ($M = .37$) was found to be lower than for the nonreplacement condition ($M = .57$). This indicates that participants were more likely to recall the original sponsor of the event when no sponsorship replacement had occurred than when it did occur. The result also demonstrates that the replacement manipulation was successful. There was no significant main effect of lag time, indicating that cued recall overall for Day Two ($M = .46$) was not significantly different from cued recall for Day Three ($M = .47$), $F(1, 33) = .12$, $p = .733$.

There was, however, a significant interaction between replacement and lag time, indicating that the effect of replacement was different for Day Two compared with Day Three, $F(1, 33) = 13.10$, $p < .001$, $\omega^2 = .28$. To examine this interaction, the simple effects of replacement on each day were analyzed with a paired samples *t*-test. There was a significant increase in recall of the former sponsor for replacement from Day Two ($M = .30$, $SD = .32$) to Day Three ($M = .44$, $SD = .20$), $t(33) = 2.20$, $p = .035$, indicating that memory for the former sponsor strengthened over time, despite having been replaced. For nonreplacement, there was a significant decrease in recall from Day Two ($M = .62$, $SD = .32$) to Day Three ($M = .51$, $SD = .30$), $t(33) = 2.80$, $p = .008$. For Day Two, the recall of the original sponsor was lower in the replacement group ($M = .30$, $SD = .32$) than in the nonreplacement group ($M = .62$, $SD = .32$), $t(33) = 3.72$, $p < .001$, because the replacement sponsor was dominating recall in the replacement group at that time. For Day Three, however, recall between replacement ($M = .44$, $SD = .20$) and nonreplacement ($M = .51$, $SD = .30$) did not differ significantly, $t(33) = 1.48$, $p = .149$. This indicates that participants in the replacement condition were recalling the incorrect (i.e., former) sponsor, at similar levels to the nonreplacement group. See Table 5 for a summary of cell means.

Discussion

The findings of Study 2, like those of Study 1, demonstrate spontaneous recovery of established sponsorship information, despite participants having learned of a new sponsorship pairing. Participants showed a tendency to revert to thinking that the original sponsor was associated with the event, even after a replacement sponsor had been announced. A notable limitation of Study 2 is that the brand–event pairings were not counterbalanced across participants. For example, Ford was always presented as a replacement sponsor for the Motor Show Spectacular event and Toyota was always used as the former sponsor. If there were any brand-specific effects on participants' memory for sponsorship pairings, those effects would have added unnecessary noise to the data. While the use of 12 different events (and their associated sponsors) allows for good generalizability of results, future research would do well to counterbalance pairings to help rule out any brand-specific and/or brand-event specific effects.

GENERAL DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Key Findings and Implications

Across both studies, findings demonstrate the value of holding a long-term sponsorship as well as the risks associated with taking up a long-held property. All findings can be viewed from two perspectives. Long-standing sponsors continue to benefit

from consumers associating their brand with the sponsored event, after the sponsorship arrangement has formally ended. These findings align with previous suggestions regarding residual benefits of long-term sponsorship (e.g., Crimmins and Horn 1996). At the same time, these findings suggest that memory for the replacement sponsor may be threatened by recall of the former sponsor over time. The empirical findings here demonstrate that recall of the former sponsor may not be captured by immediate measurement of recall. This holds implications for sponsorship selection in that sponsors may want to closely consider how long a sponsorship has been previously held. Moreover, the findings suggest there may be enhanced equity with being the first to sponsor a new annual event. Findings of spontaneous recovery also imply the need for continuous monitoring and long-term measurement of recall when sponsorships change hands.

Our explanation for spontaneous recovery applies both to sponsorship changes involving unrelated brands and sponsorship changes involving direct competitors. However, something additional may occur with competitors that may make the effect particularly pronounced when a close competitor is replaced as a sponsor. Humphreys et al. (2010) presented participants with simulated press releases announcing new sponsorships. They then gave their participants a cued recall test in which the participants were asked to recall the event given the sponsor as a cue. Half the cues were actually competitors of the named sponsor, though this was unknown to the participants. Under these conditions, the event was recalled approximately 10% of the time to a competitor cue. Furthermore, an analysis of intrusion errors showed that this was not due to guessing. Instead it appears to be a cue substitution effect (Eich 1982) in which a nonpresented cue retrieves a target that had been studied with a similar cue. Thus, when the replacement sponsor is a direct competitor to the former sponsor, the similarity of the two sponsors may make it difficult for the replacement sponsor to come to dominate over memory of the former sponsor. In these instances, the replacement sponsor may want to develop a unique articulation platform (see Cornwell et al. 2006) that strengthens a link between some characteristics that the replacement sponsor has that the former sponsor does not. Extending from these findings, it seems that any ambushing-type strategies by the former sponsor (e.g., taking up a lower level sponsorship after having been title sponsor) may serve as rehearsal of the previously learned relationship and function to keep recall for the former sponsor high. While all sponsors may be somewhat vulnerable to ambushing attempts, this research suggests that replacement sponsors may be particularly vulnerable to ambushing attempts initiated by recently departed sponsors.

In sum, our findings may translate to strategic implications for both former sponsors and replacement sponsors. For incoming sponsors, there is a need to firmly establish a link to the event that is unique and distinct from the event's association with its former sponsor. Furthermore, it is suggested that a replacement sponsor should link itself to the event regularly to combat spontaneous recovery in non-event periods. This might be achieved via advertising that is thematically linked to the event, or which explicitly reminds consumers of the sponsorship relationship. This suggestion is based on the notion that continual association would facilitate opportunities for repeat learning of the sponsor–event relationship, thus reducing opportunities for intrusion of old memories and overriding confusion. Logically extending from these findings are implications for former event sponsors. Once a sponsor has forged a relationship with an event, team, or athlete, as long as the relationship is positive, there are a myriad of ways to preserve this connection. Although this research does not test these strategies, the findings suggest that any regular communication that reinforces the past link will support recall for the pairing of brand and event. This thinking is discussed further in terms of future research.

Limitations

Our field studies used a retention interval of approximately six months and our lab study used a retention interval of one day. This raises the question as to whether the same processes are involved. Unlike decay theory, contextual change theory suggests that time is relative. That is, what is important is not the absolute length of the retention interval but rather the interval between Time Two and Test divided by the interval between Times One and Two. This ratio was broadly similar in our field studies (approximately .5) and in our lab study (1.0). Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that the same processes are involved in our lab and field studies.

The field study presented here has the advantage of being longitudinal; however, because each of the events under study considered a different type of sponsorship, it is difficult to identify which characteristics inherent in each event may have contributed to the findings. For example, is it the case that noisy, cluttered auto-racing events have a natural sponsorship dilution that reduces replacement sponsor awareness, or that the calm, socially quiet context of tennis is supportive of replacement sponsor learning? Are findings differing based on being a broadcast sponsor versus a live event sponsor? Would the results differ if smaller niche events such as snowboarding or cycling had been considered? The research presented here generally holds a mass communication perspective on sponsored events where the goal is to drive awareness and brand image, but for some events where sponsorship is clearly a financial supporter that enables the event, sponsor awareness may be driven by a deeper sense of reciprocity, which may in turn result in superior sponsor recall. At this time, relatively little is known about the factors that are likely to strengthen or

weaken the effect of spontaneous recovery. Additional research is needed to test the parameters of the phenomenon.

Future Research

Further research is needed to determine the point at which former sponsors cease to benefit and replacement sponsors begin to capitalize on their investment. The marginal result from Study 1 regarding the Tennis Open sponsorship suggests that it may take some time (in this instance seven years) for spontaneous recovery of the former sponsor to begin to dissipate; however, research is needed to investigate various time frames. The conclusion will no doubt vary as a function of the length of the tenure of the former sponsor. It is also likely to vary across event types and be influenced by factors such as the replacement sponsor's attempts to actively differentiate their relationship with the event from the relationship shared between the event and the former sponsor. Leveraging a sponsorship in other media and articulating a unique link between the event and the replacement sponsor (Cornwell et al. 2006) may be successful strategies to limit recovery of the former sponsor, but these would need to be studied longitudinally to learn their effects on spontaneous recovery.

Future research might also investigate any protection that acquiring a sponsorship property sponsored by an out-of-industry competitor might have. Our field study results suggest that spontaneous recovery may plague replacement sponsors in most situations, but strong head-to-head competitors (e.g., Gatorade and Powerade) might be particularly subject to spontaneous recovery since other elements (e.g., product, use, and packaging similarity) may contribute to links between the two in memory. To acquire the sponsorship previously held by a direct competitor might present more spontaneous recovery risk as well as more simple confusion. While it is only logical that a running shoe maker might replace another running shoe maker as sponsor of a running event, if sponsorship recovery is exacerbated by confusion, it may be of more strategic value to select a different unique event. This contrasts to extensive findings in sponsorship (for a review, see Cornwell, Weeks, and Roy 2005) that suggest that fit or match between sponsor and event is supportive of recall and other sponsorship outcomes. Even if it means taking a sponsorship with less obvious fit, it may be desirable to avoid taking over a direct competitor's previous sponsorship alliance. Moreover, a unique combining of sponsor and event may, over time, build an irreproducible competitive advantage.

With an understanding of spontaneous recovery, a host of research topics is also opened in terms of the strategies available to the former sponsor. If a valued association has been built between a sponsor and event over time, then how might this association be preserved even after a particular official link ends? In practice, one sees sponsors changing from high-cost, high-exposure relationships such as title sponsor, to lower-cost, lower-exposure positions such as team sponsor. Future research is needed to explore this and other strategic options available to the former sponsor.

In summary, this research has presented a field and lab perspective on the importance of spontaneous recovery to sponsorship-based marketing alliances. Spontaneous recovery is a phenomenon that may be influencing the effectiveness of sponsorship investments, but is, at this point, largely unrecognized as a research topic and not accounted for in measures of sponsorship success. This is particularly the case when sponsorship awareness is measured immediately following replacement and not tracked over time.

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