Media effect in commercial sponsorship

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Keywords Brand identity, Brand image, Consumer behaviour, Goodwill, Marketing communications, Sponsorship

Abstract Various elements of brand identity contribute to brand image development; however, the role of marketing communications is particularly important in achieving brand image effects. In the case of advertising, two separate elements of communications, a message and a medium, combine to deliver particular brand image values. In the case of sponsorship both the message and media elements are not separate, but are inextricably linked and imagery is delivered by association with particular activities and events. Presents the result of focus group research which sought to examine the images transferred by different categories of sponsorship, i.e. sports and arts. The results show that goodwill, which is generated amongst consumers as a result of corporate sponsorship involvement, varies by sponsorship category. The results have important implications for sponsorship managers in terms of the choice of sponsorship category and the manner in which sponsorship investments are leveraged.

Introduction Commercial sponsorship represents one of the most rapidly growing sectors of marketing communications activity. The scale and recency of development in the sector is evidenced by the fact that world-wide sponsorship expenditure has increased from $2 billion in 1984 to $18.1 billion in 1997 (Sponsorship Research International, 1998). Growth in sponsorship expenditure has been driven by factors such as corporate desire for cost effective access to target markets, technological change as manifested in media developments and an increasing event- and leisure-oriented society. For the corporate user, sponsorship represents a highly versatile method of communication, capable of achieving a variety of objectives, largely in terms of communication effects, with a diversity of corporate publics.

A particularly important sponsorship objective relates to the projection of brand imagery. While various image effects can be achieved through the usage of sponsorship, this paper seeks to examine the image effects generated and transferred by different categories of sponsorship such as sports, arts and the environment and to test if such differentiation by sponsorship category may provide a useful guide to practitioners. In effect, this paper seeks to examine the "media effects" of commercial sponsorship.

The development of commercial sponsorship

Sponsorship may have its origins in the patronage systems of earlier societies, but commercial sponsorship as it is experienced today is regarded by
corporations as being similar to advertising in that sponsorship investments are made in order to fulfil particular commercial objectives. In effect the sponsor, in agreeing to sponsor a particular event or activity, is purchasing the rights to associate with the profile and image of the event and to exploit this association for commercial ends.

Commercial sponsorship as a marketing activity has only developed over recent decades. This is indicated by the fact that total UK investment in this medium was only £4 million as recently as 1970 (Buckley, 1980). However by 1996 the scale of expenditure in the UK market had grown to £491 million (Mintel, 1997). On a world-wide basis, sponsorship expenditure has grown significantly in recent years and this is indicated by reference to Table I. This shows that in 1984 the world-wide sponsorship market was valued at $2 billion, but by 1997 this had risen to $18.1 billion, a growth in excess of nine-fold over the period. Europe and North America continue to dominate the world sponsorship market, each accounting for approximately 33 per cent of total world-wide expenditure (Sponsorship Research International, 1998). The estimates of sponsorship expenditure only refer to the costs of purchasing the property rights to events; effective sponsorship exploitation is of course reliant on support advertising and promotions to leverage the initial investment.

### Theoretical foundations of paper

Traditionally image development in marketing has been discussed at three levels of analysis, namely corporate, retail and product/service. Increasingly the term “brand” is used generically to refer to the employment of marketing imagery at all these levels (Blackson, 1992; King, 1991). Analyses of marketing imagery of necessity distinguish between identity and imagery. Identity refers to the elements controlled and “sent” by the brand owner while image is essentially that which is received by the consumer. Identity and image inevitably differ as the consumer is the recipient of communication stimuli beyond those controlled by the brand owner. These stimuli will include

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<td>1996</td>
<td>16.57</td>
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<td>1997</td>
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**Table I.**

World-wide sponsorship market

Source: Sponsorship Research International (1998)
competitor communications, media and opinion leadership commentary and their interaction with the consumer's subjectivity as evident in his/her own predisposition and reaction.

The elements of identity obviously vary at the differing levels of brand analysis, viz. corporate, retail and product/service level. At the corporate level Olins (1989) suggests four main elements of identity – viz., products/services, physical environment, information and staff behaviour, although other categorisations are proposed (Abratt, 1989; Balmer, 1995; Gray and Smelzer, 1985; Marguiles, 1977; Topalian, 1984). At the level of the retail brand categorisations of identity are proposed by Brooks and Davies (1989); Kunkel and Berry (1968); Martineau (1958); and Mazursky and Jackoby (1986). At the product/service level the elements of identity available to the brand owner are essentially the marketing/services mix variables.

Brand image as noted above is formed in the mind of the consumer as a result of various stimuli including, though not exclusively, the brand identity elements. Brand image is variously defined as “the set of beliefs held about a particular brand” (Kotler, 1988, p. 197) or “a set of associations, usually organised in some meaningful way” (Aaker, 1992, pp. 109-10). A recurring, though seldom explicitly stated, theme in the literature of branding is that the physical product satisfies the functional benefits sought by consumers while the “brand” provides the requisite symbolism (Kim, 1990). In effect, the consumer is being “sold” at two levels of values, viz. intrinsic values centering on perceived product attributes and quality levels and extrinsic values focusing on the symbolic content of the brand. Intrinsic values derive from consumer beliefs about the product’s capacity to satisfy functional desires while extrinsic or added values largely derive from the brand imagery, created principally by advertising. The distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic values is captured succinctly by McWilliam and De Charnatony (1989, p. 30):

It is this symbolic or totemistic content to a brand which has given rise to the notion of brands having “personalities”. These “personalities” are the sum of the emotional “added values” which the product carries, over and above its inherent quality and obvious functional purpose.

Advertising – its role in marketing imagery
In the case of a product or service brand the elements of identity controlled and sent by the brand owner are the marketing mix elements. The basic 4Ps framework is illustrated in Figure 1. While each mix element and its various sub-ingredients all contribute to received brand image, this paper will focus on the marketing communications mix and in particular on advertising and sponsorship. In the case of advertising, both message content and media/media vehicle effect are reviewed as these two elements are essential ingredients of brand image formation. In the case of sponsorship, the media and message ingredients are not separate but are embodied in the chosen sponsorship.

The role of advertising in brand image development is complex and whilst alternative perspectives continue to be held on this role and indeed on the capacity of advertising to create and influence perceptions of the brand, it is
possible to suggest that in driving brand imagery advertising fulfils two broad functions. Firstly, it encourages beliefs about the functional/intrinsic attributes of the brand and secondly it seeks to add symbolic, emotional or extrinsic values to the brand. This summary position is broadly in line with the varying classifications of advertising along informational/transformational lines (Puto and Wells, 1984), central/peripheral routes to persuasion (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986), utilitarian/value expressive appeals (Johar and Sirgy, 1991), think/feel delineations of advertising (Rossiter and Percy, 1987; Rossiter et al., 1991; Vaughan, 1980) and practical and symbolic attitudes to branding (Lannon and Cooper, 1983) which represent the major themes in commentary on this topic.

Methods of creating brand imagery in advertising
Marketing communications theory and in particular advertising has drawn on a variety of theoretical approaches to assist understanding of the image transfer and formation process. These include congruity theory (Osgood and Tannenbaum, 1955), cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), semiotics (Barthes, 1964, 1983; Cooper, 1985; Mick, 1986; Williamson, 1978), meaning transfer model (McCracken, 1986), presenter effect (Smith, 1972), symbiosis and branding (Cooper, 1979, 1980) and media/media vehicle effect. The latter theoretical principles, media effect and media vehicle effect, suggest a particularly fruitful area of possible common ground between advertising and sponsorship and are explored more fully as the basis for understanding in this paper.

Advertising represents a key method of endowing a brand with specific values. Two separate elements of an advertisement are involved in creating desired brand associations, namely message content and media/media vehicle effect.

1. Message content
The content of an advertisement, which is controlled by the advertiser, represents the principal method of driving brand imagery. This is achieved by focusing on strategically selected intrinsic and extrinsic values, which it is hoped will become the set of associations, which the brand engenders for the consumer. In using intrinsic values as the brand positioning platform the advertisement may focus on centrally-processed cues through copy message
extolling the brand attributes or through product demonstration in the advertisement. In focusing on symbolic extrinsic values of the brand the creator of the advertisement functions in the manner of a drama/film director in that he is attempting to achieve rub-off or association effect to the brand from the brand context created (Cooper and Kaye, 1987). The use of context in advertising to transfer imagery to the brand is expressed in the following quotation:

The product becomes embedded or “situated” in a symbolic context that imparts meaning to the product beyond its constituent elements or benefits … The symbolic association thus established brings the product into a meaningful relationship with abstract values and ideas signified by a natural or social setting such as a landscape, the workplace, the household, a cluster of artefacts of daily life, a historic moment, or a recognisable tradition or myth … The fusion of product code and setting code, which formulates the basis of the product image, depends largely on narrative techniques like metaphor, implied use, allusion, allegory, story line, and simple juxtaposition to expand the symbolic dimension of the interpretation (Leiss et al., 1986, p. 190).

2. Media/media vehicle effect
The second major aspect of advertising which forms part of the image creation process is concerned with the audience effects achieved by placing an advertisement in a particular medium. Communication theory generally focuses on three key elements of meaning transfer; source (e.g. celebrity advertising), medium and media vehicle effects. As this paper is concerned with media effects in brand image creation, viz. source effect is not further discussed, although all three concepts are broadly similar in terms of process and indeed may occasionally overlap in terms of relevant attributes (Hovland and Weiss, 1951; Hovland et al., 1953; Kelman, 1961; Percy and Rossiter, 1980).

Media effect refers to the qualitative aspects of media such as television, radio and press and is widely believed to affect audience reaction (Crane, 1972; Dommermuth, 1974; Grass and Wallace, 1974; McConnell, 1970; Stewart and Ward, 1994). Joyce (1981) in analysing this issue of media values or rub-off effect from the medium to the message suggests that inter-media comparisons are complex and that it is difficult to substantiate the different moods which it is claimed are induced through variation in “authority”, “climate” and “environment”. Joyce (1981, p. 609) suspects that media effect judgements are subjective rather than research based when he suggests that:

the belief that an advertisement will act more effectively in one medium rather than in another is unconsciously built into most media planning, but few people would be able to justify their faith in it.

Media vehicle effect is the third level at which the phenomenon of image association effect can be examined (Aaker and Brown, 1972; Blair, 1966; Fuchs, 1964; Hafstrand, 1988; Laurent, 1990; Newland, 1962; Winick, 1962; Woodside and Soni, 1990). This level can encompass specific magazines, newspapers and individual radio and television stations and at a further level of analysis,
individual programmes broadcast on such stations. A particular media vehicle possesses its own individual characteristics as perceived by the receiver and thereby induces a specific mood of receptivity that affects the impact of the persuasive communications. It is termed the “media-option source effect” by Aaker and Myers (1987, pp. 473-4), who suggest that it “is not a measure of a vehicle’s capacity to attract readers ... nor is it the quality of the audience ... It is, rather, the differential impact that the advertisement exposure will have on the same audience member if the exposure occurs in one media option rather than another”. That is, that the media vehicle influences the receptivity of the message or more particularly that the media vehicle and its imagery is in a sense part of the message.

**The role of sponsorship in marketing imagery**

Sponsorship is highly prized for its ability to achieve particular communications effects with selected audiences. Where corporate or product awareness is sought the sponsor will seek linkage to an event or activity which intrudes on societal consciousness thereby ensuring exposure for the brand.

Where sponsorship is used to create brand image the process is somewhat more complex than with awareness creation, though these two are inevitably linked. The belief is that each sponsored activity possesses its own personality, embodying a unique set of attributes or values in the perceptions of the audience and the sponsorship literature contains many examples of such usage of sponsorship for image purposes. At the corporate “umbrella” brand level notable examples include American Express and the Bicentennial Statue of Liberty Project, Volvo and selected sports (Golf, Equestrian and Tennis), Timberland and the Iditerod, Iveco and Boxing and Barclay’s Bank and English soccer. At the retail brand levels examples include Sears and popular music and Mobil’s “Live at the Met” sponsorship. At the product/service brand level examples include Coca-Cola and the Olympic Games, Pepsi and popular music (Michael Jackson, Madonna and Tina Turner), Guinness and the Irish national game of Hurling, and Mars and the London Marathon.

**Achieving image effects through sponsorship**

It was argued earlier that in the case of advertising, two separate components, a medium and a message, combine to achieve brand image effect. Sponsorship is different in that both medium and message elements are not separate, but are inextricably linked.

**Sponsorship as medium**

A sponsored event fulfils the central function of a marketing communications medium in that it simultaneously attracts, and provides access to, an audience. Indeed each sponsored event is capable of reaching differently defined audiences. For example, the 1994 Soccer World Cup provided access to a global television audience of 32 billion viewers while the World Series in Baseball is
essentially a US-media event reaching 30 million viewers in that market, and only one million viewers outside that market (Sponsorship Research International, 1998).

Sponsorship as message
Sponsorship epitomises McLuhan’s (1964) dictum that the “medium is the message” in that the message content of a sponsorship is inextricably bound up with the personality attributes which an event or activity possesses in the mind of the audience. Thus it could be suggested that motor sport is glamorous, exciting, colourful, dangerous and youthful while boxing might be regarded as bloody, macho, violent and aggressive.

As in the case with conventional advertising, the media impact of sponsored events in terms of audience size and profile is routinely and easily subjected to analysis and quantification. Message content however in terms of the personality of an event or activity is rarely subject to rigorous scientific analysis and selection decisions are generally based on “informed” judgement. Nevertheless there are examples of the personality attributes of particular sports and athletes being profiled for sponsorship purposes.

The Sofres (1987) report examined the popularity and personality aspects of several major French sports. Research results analysed the perceptions of sports fans as well as those specific sports. For example cycling, a French sport with popular appeal, was seen as high on “endurance”, “team spirit”, “will to win”, “self-control”, and “aggressiveness” and was deemed “appropriate for ordinary people”. It did not score highly in terms of being an “executive sport”, and was seen as low in aesthetic appreciation and deemed inappropriate for the young and more fashionable segments of the market. The most negative feature of cycling was that it involved “trop de magouilles” – indicating that not everything about the sport was seen as fully “above board”. In terms of audience, cycling was reported as a sport which “interested” 22 per cent of respondents but was “preferred” by only 3 per cent of respondents and these exhibited a strong male and rural bias. In a similar vein a personality profile of individual sports athletes can be generated. For instance research into tennis players Ivan Lendl and Boris Becker showed Lendl to be self-controlled, withdrawn, cold, calculated and inaccessible while Becker was shown to be less self-controlled, more gregarious, warm and likeable as well as more friendly and spontaneous (Ryssel and Stamminger, 1988).

This issue of event personality points up an essential difference between sponsorship and advertising. In the case of advertising, message content is controlled by the advertiser and created specifically to comply with the advertising brief. In the case of sponsorship the sponsor is essentially buying ready-made images “off the shelf”, though there have been examples of events being created to satisfy sponsor requirements such as the Rothman’s World Match Play series.
The image transfer process in sponsorship

While the theoretical approaches (semiotics, congruity etc.) identified earlier have applicability in understanding the image transfer process in sponsorship, the concepts of media and media vehicle effect are for the reasons stated above, paramount and form the theoretical basis of this paper. Media effect appears to have sponsorship parallels at the category level (sports, arts) while the media vehicle level has close parallels with the individual sponsored activity. Indeed the applicability of these concepts to the sponsorship transfer process has been previously suggested:

The choice of a medium, and within a medium, the choice of a particular media vehicle, will often carry direct implications for company or product image. Individual activities or events are possessed of particular personality attributes in the public mind and much sponsorship activity is garnering a rub-off effect to the company or its products through association with a particular sponsorship activity or event (Meenaghan, 1983, p. 29).

In a sponsorship both the sponsor and sponsored activity become involved in a symbiotic relationship with a transference of inherent values from the activity to the sponsor. The activity audience, finding the sponsor and his name, logo and other marks threaded through the event, learn to associate sponsor and activity with one another. The task facing the sponsor is ostensibly to ensure his presence is clearly associated with the activity and where necessary to “drain” the activity values onto the brand. This latter aspect is achieved through proper exploitation using support promotions or by integrating the sponsored activity into mainstream advertising, e.g. Pepsi and Michael Jackson. However the management of that process requires finesse as is evident from the results of the empirical research discussed later in this paper. The sponsorship image transfer process is suggested in the Figure 2.

While both advertising and sponsorship can be used to achieve image objectives, sponsorship differs in the manner in which these are achieved. Essentially sponsorship allows the sponsored brand to live in the reflection of the sponsored activity. This reflective approach differs somewhat from the

![Figure 2. Sponsorship image transfer](image-url)
more direct approach offered by traditional advertising, (although a degree of transference from the contextual backdrop in the advertisement also occurs) and enables sponsors to suggest associations for the brand which advertising can only convey in a more overt and somewhat clumsier fashion. For example, by association with a charitable activity the values of caring, concern etc. reflect onto the sponsor. The use of advertising to achieve similar types of effects is likely to encourage cynicism and consumer disbelief.

Case examples in sponsorship image effects
Awareness effects have received greater research attention than have image effects in the case of both advertising and sponsorship. This is inevitable and is related to the problematic nature of the image evaluation task. A number of recent studies (Ferrand and Pages, 1998; Grimes and Meenaghan, 1998; Hansen and Scotwin, 1995; Javelgi et al., 1994; Rajaretnam, 1994; Stipp, 1998) have examined sponsorship image effects and three particular case examples are briefly examined to more fully illustrate the process.

Case A: Barclay’s Bank and the English football league (Jones and Dearsley, 1989)
In the late 1980s, Barclay’s Bank in the UK was seeking a major national sponsorship to increase its public profile. In 1987, following the sudden termination of the sponsorship arrangement with Today newspaper, the English Soccer League became available for sponsorship. This opportunity, involving football, a part of the fabric of British society, was national in character and provided a major event offering high profile association and was therefore appropriate for image enhancement. Furthermore it provided an ideal vehicle to reach the youth market, a key recruitment area for the bank. The benefits to the bank were media exposure through television, radio and the press, with the transmission of live and recorded matches, match reports, fixture lists and result sequences. The deal further provided in-stadia advertising at all 91 league grounds as well as in-programme advertising, ticket provision and provision for corporate hospitality. The original agreement was for two years with a further one year option for an initial investment of approximately £5 million.

Subsequent qualitative research found that there was a two-way transfer of values. This is illustrated in Figure 3 which shows that Barclay’s Bank was seen as “modernising”, “adventurous” and a “contributor to British culture” as a result of its sponsorship of English soccer.
Case B: Memphis Cigarettes and football (Bachmayer, 1986)
This case focuses on the cigarette brand, Memphis and its sponsorship association with soccer. Given the regulatory environment for cigarette advertising in Europe and the importance of the youth sector as a prime target market for cigarette manufacturers, the association with soccer was particularly apposite. The research study involved two test groups, one of which was exposed to soccer sponsorship and the other which was not. The results of these tests showed that image was generally enhanced through association with the soccer sponsorship. In particular the cigarette brand was perceived to be more masculine, dynamic and young as a result of its association. Indeed the brand showed improvement on almost all measured image dimensions as indicated in Figure 4.

Case C: Philips and Dire Straits (Kohl and Otker, 1985)
In 1984 Philips Electronics decided to sponsor the rock band Dire Straits in order to improve the brand image of its compact disc player and by association the image of its overall hi-fi line. The deal involved Philips in sponsoring the band’s 250-concert world tour. Philips established specific objectives for the sponsorship and a research programme was undertaken in the Austrian market to determine the success of the sponsorship. Two key consumer segments were specifically examined as part of the research study which involved both pre- and post-research waves. The first group was the broader “normal hi-fi” market with whom Philips brands found ready acceptance. The

![Figure 4. Memphis Cigarettes and soccer – the image transfer effect](image-url)

**Key**
- Memphis isolation
- Memphis/football

**Source:** Bachmayer (1986)
second group, “hi-fi freaks”, were more problematic for Philips because the brand registered less well with this group, who though not overly important in volume terms, were hugely important in terms of their opinion-leadership role.

Among the “hi-fi freaks” segment, the research results showed that spontaneous awareness of Philips as a leading CD brand increased from 36 per cent to 48 per cent. As indicated in Figure 5, brand image showed considerable improvement on a range of product-specific image criteria, most notably sound quality, a factor for which Dire Straits was particularly renowned. There was an improvement in overall buying intention among this discriminating and influential segment. Among “hi-fi freaks”, overall Philips hi-fi image improved slightly, being driven perhaps by both the CD and Dire Straits effect, showing a heightened quality association between waves. Furthermore, there was an increased propensity among hi-fi users to recommend Philips hi-fi equipment.

Philips was already perceived more positively by the broader “normal” hi-fi buying segment than among “hi-fi freaks”. While image was enhanced on a range of specific criteria, most notably sound quality, there was no real effect

![Figure 5](image-url)

**Figure 5.** Effects on Philips product-specific criteria of Dire Straits sponsors

**Source:** Kohl and Otker (1985)
on Philips’ image among this broad hi-fi segment, upon whom Philips depended commercially, but who were not directly targeted by the Dire Straits sponsorship.

**Research study**

This paper has drawn together a theoretical perspective from the somewhat dispersed literature and has examined the creation of brand image through both advertising and sponsorship. In the case of advertising, both media effect and media vehicle effect are acknowledged as contributing to image development. In the case of sponsorship, research and discussion has to date focused on the image delivered by specific sponsorship vehicles as instanced in the cases documented. However, it may be argued that image effect can be observed at several levels of aggregation in the case of both advertising and sponsorship. These are indicated in Figure 6.

The image values likely to be delivered at a higher level of aggregation, i.e. by different categories of sponsorship, have not hitherto been researched. It is this aspect of sponsorship which forms the focus of the remainder of this paper. In particular, the research study sought to provide a preliminary classification of images transferred by different categories of sponsorship, e.g. sports and to determine whether there are inhibitors which limit the level of effective exploitation associated with different categories of sponsorship.

In order to facilitate understanding of the image phenomenon in sponsorship, a major research study was undertaken (Meenaghan, 1994). This study comprised three related research interventions, using two rounds of in-depth interviews with world experts in the sponsorship field, followed by focus group research with consumers as recipients of sponsorship imagery. Both in-depth interviews and focus group research discussions concentrated on a range of issues based on the researcher’s pre-understanding derived from consultancy experience, desk research and previous field research.

While the study focused broadly on all aspects of sponsorship imagery, the results described in this paper concentrate on the findings with regard to image delivered by different categories of sponsorship, e.g. sports and the arts, and derive principally from the focus group discussions. These discussions focused on issues such as respondents’ perceptions of sponsorship, the comparison of sponsorship and advertising, the generation of goodwill and its variation by sponsorship category and individual programme and on the factors which enhanced or impeded consumer goodwill.

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<td>Category Effect</td>
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<td>Media Vehicle Effect</td>
<td>Individual Sponsored Programme</td>
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**Figure 6.** Levels of aggregation for advertising and sponsorship
Three specific findings with regard to image and categories of sponsorship are now outlined.

1. The goodwill factor in commercial sponsorship

Perceived benefit to society arising from a sponsor’s investment and related goodwill derived from this investment is one of the key distinguishing factors between sponsorship and advertising, a fact that had previously been noted by both McDonald (1991) and Meenaghan (1991). The research results showed that the goodwill factor can be detected at the category level of analysis. More specifically the following results were found:

   • **Goodwill varies by sponsorship category.** The findings showed that while undoubtedly respondents saw benefit to society as a key distinguishing factor between sponsorship and advertising, the levels of benefit and goodwill reciprocated are not distributed across all categories of sponsorship equally. Social causes and environmental programmes deliver greatest benefit and returned goodwill while sponsorship categories such as sports and the popular arts generate lower levels of goodwill. In the case of the latter, consumers believe these categories to be highly commercialised with sponsors deriving considerable commercial benefits from their investment/funding. Holding these beliefs, consumers accord lower levels of goodwill to commercialised categories of sponsorship which are seen as somewhat similar to, but not exactly the same as, advertising. Figure 7 indicates respondents’ positioning of varying categories of sponsorship with varying levels of goodwill indicated by the proximity/distance of the category to mainstream advertising.

   • **Goodwill varies by degree of exploitation.** It also was evident that a critical factor influencing the perception of benefit and returned goodwill is the degree of exploitation by sponsors, with the research results suggesting that the perception of benefit may be negatively related to the degree of perceived exploitation. To date the issue which researchers have been most insistent on drawing to the attention of sponsorship managers has been the need to leverage their sponsorship investments in order to gain both awareness and image benefits. These findings introduce a cautionary note in pointing to the fact that the goodwill dimension is variably determined by category of sponsorship as well as by the nature and intensity of exploitation activity. Indeed both these factors must be taken into account in framing an appropriate and effective leveraging programme.

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**Figure 7.**

Sponsorship category and perceived goodwill

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<td>Environmental Programmes</td>
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2. Image of sponsorship categories
Respondents were asked to consider the images generated by involvement with different categories of sponsorship. Five main categories of sponsorship involvement were proposed for discussion and the results are indicated in Figure 8. Involvement in sports transfers the image values of being healthy, young, energetic, fast, vibrant and largely masculine while the sponsorship of social causes enables the sponsor to be seen as admirable, concerned, caring intelligent and potentially exploitative.

At this level of analysis a number of factors should be noted with regard to the image derived from sponsorship category involvement:

- The transferred image values indicated in Figure 8 are summary descriptions arising from the research conducted. An individual consumer, based on his/her particular pre-dispositions, may derive image values which vary from the summary values presented above.

- At the category level of sponsorship, e.g. sports, the image formed is derived from the composite view of all activities making up that category and can by definition vary greatly from the image formed for any particular sport or indeed specific event within that category. An obvious case in point is that the image of snooker or boxing as individual sports is likely to be very different from the composite image of “sports” as a category. The physical setting, the atmospherics, the very nature of the activity, and indeed the commercial history of snooker and boxing lend an air of raffishness and perhaps of dubious ethics, suggesting a very specific area of value perception.

- Image values transferred are not necessarily always positive. In the case of both social causes and environmental programmes there is a danger that the associated sponsor may be seen as exploitive and manipulative in that respondents appear to exhibit lower tolerance for excessive sponsor exploitation of activities in these categories.

- At the sponsorship category level of aggregation the image formed is less precise than that formed for an individual sponsorship activity, e.g. sport generally versus boxing or yachting.

- In the case of broadcast/programme sponsorship, e.g. Croft Port’s sponsoring of the television show *Inspector Morse*, there was little evidence that a multi-dimensional image was formed for this category of sponsorship. Generally regarded by respondents as being similar to advertising, the lack of a precise image for broadcast sponsorship may be partially due to the recency of broadcast sponsorship, the tendency towards identification of sponsors through programme signage (“tops and tails”) and the inexperience of respondents with this category of sponsorship. However, even with greater levels of penetration of broadcast sponsorship, it is likely that consumers will continue to regard this category of sponsorship as “pseudo-advertising” and not...
Figure 8.
Image values derived from various categories of sponsorship
form multi-dimensional images as in the cases of other categories of sponsorship. Where an individual broadcast programme such as “Coronation Street” is sponsored, it is more likely to possess particular values than will broadcast sponsorship as a category.

3. Latitude to exploit
The third major finding suggests that different categories of sponsorship require varying degrees of sensitivity in terms of how the sponsor manages his association. This is illustrated in Figure 9. Categories such as sports and the mass arts permit the greatest level of exploitation without giving offense, especially because they ultimately share some of the positioning of advertising in the consumer’s perceptions, whilst social and environmental causes are only capable of limited exploitation without causing consumer anxiety and reactance. These findings are consistent with the results on category goodwill illustrated in Figure 5.

Implications for sponsorship management
The findings with regard to media effects in sponsorship have several implications for sponsorship management. The research results show that returned goodwill to the sponsor varies by category, with highly commercialised categories of sponsorship being adjudged to be similar to advertising and deserving of less “pure” goodwill. Furthermore, goodwill generated varies by degree of exploitation. Perceived over-exploitation reduces the level of goodwill accorded to the sponsor. In pursuing particular image benefits, managers must carefully select areas of sponsorship concentration and be aware that the manner and intensity with which they manage their sponsorship involvements will have image consequences and will determine ultimate success in achieving specific image objectives.

The findings with regard to category image suggest that sponsors who adopt a policy of concentrating on a particular category of sponsor, as in the

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<th>Permissible Level of Exploitation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Social Causes</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9. Latitude to exploit by sponsorship category
case of Coca-Cola (sports and popular music) or Budweiser (sports) will derive image values from association with that particular category of sponsorship. This has obvious implications for the formation of sponsorship policy and subsequent activity selection.

The findings with regard to latitude to exploit also have major implications for sponsorship management. Sponsors seeking high profile, exploitable sponsorships are best directed towards mass arts and sports. Sponsors seeking a caring/concerned image must logically direct their sponsorship policy towards the environment and social causes. However involvement in these sponsorship categories must be sensitively handled, otherwise negative image consequences for the sponsor may ensue from the very nature of their presence and the associated leveraging activities.

Summary
In creating imagery for a brand, the brand owner has available the elements of brand identity of which marketing communications is critically important. Advertising as the main method of marketing communications seeks to influence brand image through both the message content and media/media vehicle elements of the advertisement. In the case of sponsorship both the media and message aspects are interwoven with the message implicit in the perceived personality attributes of the sponsored event or activity.

This paper has sought to examine the role of sponsorship in marketing imagery. In particular, it has focused on the image transfer process in sponsorship and highlighted a number of case examples of this process in action in the areas of sport and the arts. Finally it has reported on the findings of a research study focusing on the goodwill and image values delivered by particular categories of sponsorship and the latitude which the brand owner has in terms of exploitation of the various categories of sponsorship with specific reference to the potential and limitations of sports and sports events as sponsorship media.

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Media effect in commercial sponsorship


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