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The Olympic Games and associative sponsorship: Brand personality identity creation, communication and congruence

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The Olympic Games and associative sponsorship: Brand personality identity creation, communication and congruence

Purpose - This research explores the brand relationships between a mega-sports event, the Olympic Games, and its branded main sponsors, using the lens of brand personality.

Methodology - The study uses the internet-based website communications of the sponsor and event brands to assess congruence in brand personality identity exhibited in the communications of sponsors and how these relate to the event brand itself. A lexical analysis of the website text identifies and graphically represents the dominant brand personality traits of the brands relative to each other.

Findings – The results show the Olympic Games is communicating Excitement as a leading brand personality dimension. Sponsors of the Olympics largely take on its dominant brand dimension, but do not adapt their whole brand personality to that of the Olympics and benefit by adding Excitement without losing their individual character. The transference is more pronounced for long-running sponsors.

Practical Implications - Sponsorship of the Olympic Games does give brands the opportunity to capture or borrow the Excitement dimension alongside building or reinforcing their own dominant brand personality trait or to begin to subtly alter their brand positioning.

Originality – This study is the first to examine how the sponsor's brand aligns with the event being sponsored as a basis for developing a strong shared image and associative dimensions complimentary to the positioning of the brand itself.

Keywords

Brand Personality; Sports Marketing; Website Communications; Mega-events; Olympic Sponsorship

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1. Introduction

Sponsorships have garnered increased attention from scholars and practitioners because of the ability to cut through the communication clutter in a marketplace. Sponsors attempt to link themselves to events, celebrities or other properties to increase their relevance to consumers. Sponsorships exist when a brand partner makes a significant investment with an expectation that they will receive benefit from the relationship (Crompton, 2004). In 2018, marketers spent $65.8 billion in sponsorship partnerships, increasing 4.9% over 2017 spending levels and exceeding growth in other categories (Anonymous, 2018). The magnitude and growth of spending elevates the importance of brand communication issues within sponsorship partnerships.

The Olympic Games, with a broad range of sponsors, provides a strong basis for exploring sponsorship partnerships because of the uniquely large audiences for the mega-event, which provide sponsors with strong opportunities to extract value (Florek et al., 2008). These sponsorships can command large investment. For instance, Toyota entered into a sponsorship agreement with the International Olympic Committee, reportedly worth $835m, for three events up to and including the 2024 Tokyo Olympic Games (Armstrong and Wilson, 2015). The substantial size of this investment signifies and reinforces the importance of sponsorships to major brands as part of their communication strategy.

However, entering into a sponsorship agreement and paying the fees is not usually enough to extract value. Brand managers need to actively leverage this sponsorship investment through additional communication efforts, which can be up to eight times the initial sponsorship agreement value (OReilly and Horning, 2013). As well as placing a brand logo on event-based communications, activation can include many different tactics from traditional advertising to on-site consumer engagement promotions. The sponsor's brand should align with the event being sponsored and it is important that the similarities between the brand personalities provide a basis for developing a strong shared image (Deane, 2003).

While the area of brand personality has been long established (Aaker, 1997), brand personality in the sponsorship area is an understudied topic that requires further investigation. Research has investigated the fit between sponsors and the sponsored properties (Deane, 2003; Donahay and Rosenberger, 2007; Lee and Cho, 2009). Further, previous research has tended to focus on consumer perceptions of brands, but has not examined the portrayal and construction of image from the brand perspective.

This research focuses on the projection of brand identity for sponsors and the Olympic Games through their respective websites. In an omni-channel universe for brand communications and with the importance of digital platforms, the internet and websites provide critical insight into the projection of brand identity. The motivation for this research is to explore the brand relationships between the Olympic Games and its sponsors using the lens of brand personality, as expressed on their websites. The primary question driving this study is: *What are the similarities and differences in brand personality identity exhibited in the communications of sponsors and how do these relate to the event brand itself?*

This paper begins with a review of the Olympic Games context, brand personality and related sponsorship research, in order to construct a theoretical framework of associative learning to establish a set of hypotheses which are tested empirically. Specifically, we examine brand personality differences from an actual (awareness) and aspirational (image transfer) brand self as well as investigating congruence, based on data drawn from the

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Olympic Games sponsors' websites. The results are presented and discussed, followed by conclusions and implications for practice.

2. Literature Review

The Olympic Games is characterised as a mega-event as it draws uniquely large audiences (Florek et al., 2008). Television viewership for the last three Summer Olympic Games reached between 3.2 and 3.6 billion people, while the last two Winter Olympic Games achieved 1.8 to 2.1 billion viewers (Takeda, 2018). The digital and social media environment has rapidly surpassed traditional television viewership, with another 8.5 billion viewers for the 2016 Rio Summer Games (Takeda, 2018), now a critical aspect of the Olympic Games audience. This literature review examines the Olympic Games context, brand personality theory and the role of brand and brand personality in sponsorships.

2.1 Olympic Games Context

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) first staged its meeting of athletes in 1896, which quickly evolved into an internationally hosted event every four years (Takeda, 2018). Following an Olympic Games congress in Lausanne in 1921, it was decided to stage additional and separate winter events. From its inception, the Olympic brand was designed to be inclusive, with the emblem representing all of humanity and with its colours denoting some hue from every national flag (Guttmann, 2002). The principle of inclusivity was augmented during the 1960 Rome Summer Games, with a parallel Games of athletes with disabilities, which eventually morphed into the Paralympic movement, now staging prestigious events at every Olympic Games host city. The Olympic Games' brand is described by the IOC as including the "*values of peace, joy, friendship, solidarity and fair play*" (Takeda, 2018). The Olympic brand generated $5.16 billion revenue between 2013 and 2016 to support the Olympic movement and its related organisations (Takeda, 2018).

Sponsorship of the Olympic Games has evolved, broadening to include the Torch Relay and now encompassing many related goods and services (Takeda, 2018). The most notable development in sponsor partnerships was the implementation of The Olympic Partner (TOP) programme in 1998, which includes category exclusivity for the sponsor brand. This distinguishes the TOP programme global sponsors from the intranational level sponsors. The current TOP programme includes 13 brands: *Coca-Cola, Alibaba Group, Atos, Bridgestone, Dow, GE, Intel, Omega, Panasonic, P&G, Samsung, Toyota* and *Visa* (Takeda, 2018). The National Olympic Committees then organise their own sponsorship deals with brands in non-competing categories. During the 1996 Atlanta and 2000 Sydney Games, the IOC was criticised for allowing too much sponsorship and has since restricted sponsor co-branding with the Olympic Games and instituted "clean" venues, where commercial communication is limited.

There are some risks associated with the Olympic Games which can impact consumer attitudes towards the sponsor brand, for example the Rio Summer Games was criticised for spending on the games despite the country's economic challenges, there was controversy around the 'running blades' worn in able-bodied events (Rushgrove, 2012), a series of doping allegations against the Russian national team leading to a ban (Harlan, 2018) and accusations of corruption within the IOC itself (Kelner, 2017). These have led to some sponsors

questioning their Olympic marketing strategies and how these issues reflect on their own brand image (Withnall, 2015).

2.2 Brand Personality

Brand personality forms part of a brand image held by consumers and refers to the anthropomorphisation of brands, where human attributes are attached to the brand object (Aaker, 1997; Fournier, 1998), which is treated like a person with whom they might like to form a relationship (Bennett and Hill, 2012). As with interpersonal relationships, consumers choose brands to form relationships with and to decide which type of relationships to form based on their perception of the brands' character. This character can be conceptualised as brand personality (Plummer, 1984), described as the human characteristics associated with a brand (Keller, 2003). Individuals infer a brand's personality based on information absorbed from their direct and indirect contacts with the brand (Johar et al., 2005).

Brand personality emerged in the 1970s to differentiate brands. It was later used to study self-image congruity (e.g. Sirgy, 1982; Johar and Sirgy, 1991), defined as the degree to which stakeholders identify with brands and the match between consumer and brand. As evidence of a brand personality's effects on consumers' emotions (Ogilvy, 1985, p. 14; Biel, 1993), trust and loyalty (Fournier, 1994; Kumar et al., 2006), customer satisfaction (Brakus et al., 2009), and general brand preference (Venkateswaran et al., 2011) mounted, the need for a clear conceptualisation of brand personality became apparent. Aaker (1997) developed a trait-based brand personality framework with five dimensions (*Competence, Excitement, Ruggedness, Sincerity and Sophistication)* that echoes the existing Big Five personality scale that psychologists had developed to measure human personality. Other multi-dimensional brand personality measures (e.g. Geuens et al., 2009) have since been developed, but none rival Aaker's impact or wide application, although her framework is yet to be applied to mega-events and their sponsorship brands.

The next significant development within the brand personality literature was a shift from multi-dimensional brand personality conceptualisations towards a more parsimonious approach. Bosnjak et al. (2007) identify four dimensions of brand personality; *drive, conscientiousness, emotion, and superficiality*, while Okazaki (2006) takes a two-dimensional view, describing brands as either *exciting* or *sophisticated*, and Aaker et al. (2004) categorise them as either *sincere* or *exciting*. The most prevalent two-dimensional brand personality conceptualisation is *warm* versus *competent* brands, aligning with common dimensions used to describe and differentiate people (Fiske et al., 2007). In social psychology, Fiske (1999) developed the Stereotype Content Model (SCM), which outlines the significance of warmth and competence for social judgments. Following the example of Aaker (1997), Kervyn et al. (2012) apply a tool, called the Brand as Intentional Agents Framework (BIAF), which is based on the SCM but explains factors that determine how people perceive brands rather than other people, which is reasonable if brands are conceived as active entities with agency (Fournier and Alvarez, (2012). Within the BIAF, *warmth* relates to the brand's intentions towards the consumer and *competence* in its ability to meet those intentions (Aaker et al., 2010; Fiske et al., 2012; MacInnis, 2012). Previous conceptualizations of brand personality focused on a consumer perspective, where brand personality expresses brand image (Bosnjak et al., 2007; Valette-Florence et al., 2011) as perceived by the customer (Stern, 2006). While the consumer perspective is important to describe the intangible facets of a brand (Azoulay and Kapferer, 2003), how companies create their brand personalities should also be considered.

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The brand personality concept is well studied in many sectors, such as beauty products (Guthrie et al., 2008), cars (Fetscherin and Toncar, 2010), fashion (Rageh Ismail and Spinelli, 2012), fitness (Pinto and Yagnik, 2016), government (Rutter et al., 2018b), infrastructure (Rutter et al., 2018c), luxury (Sung et al., 2015), sport (Braunstein and Ross, 2010), tourism (Opoku and Hinson, 2006) and universities (Rutter et al., 2017). However, the concept of brand personality is under researched in the brand sponsorship literature, despite its increased importance to brand managers in practice.

2.3. Brand Personality and Sponsorships

Sponsorship is often categorised into two types of outcome: cognitive and economic (Bruhn, 2017). Research into the sponsorship of events typically aligns with the cognitive, particularly in terms of the brand image and resultant positive associations (Cornwell et al., 2005), although the ultimate long-term objective is to increase revenue and profit. The event and the sponsors' communication aims are to communicate these associations actively, which leads to an economic outcome. Brands as associative networks are recognised as important in guiding sponsorship decisions (Cornwell et al., 2005) related to the behavioural conceptualisation of a brand (Bruhn, 2017). Potential sponsors understand and cultivate their associations as behaviour, which influences their personality traits to allow for brand differentiation and competitive positioning (Chien et al., 2011). A consumer's opinion of brand personality is based on their contact with the brand (Johar et al., 2005), so it is important for companies to consider how they present their brands in marketing communications, how brand associations are created via events, and how communications and events relate to each other.

In previous research, Deane (2003) assesses the brand image of IBM (sponsor) and the Ryder Cup (event) and argues that more similarities between the two brand personalities would lead to consumers having a stronger shared image. Lee and Cho (2009) examine the brand personality image held by consumers for ten different events and sponsoring brands. They find that positive attitudes and purchase intentions are better given a higher level of congruence between the sponsor and event brand personalities. Donahay and Rosenberger (2007) examine the brand personality in Formula One racing and find image transfer effects for a racing team and sponsor brand. However, none of these studies examine the brand personality of the sponsor or event brands as explicitly communicated to their audiences.

3. Theoretical Framework: Associative Learning

Sponsorships are about mutually beneficial partnerships, where the event benefits from funds or other support and the sponsor expects to extract some value through the association (Crompton, 2004). Coca-Cola has been a sponsor of the Olympic Games since 1928 and extracts value through use of the Olympic rings, sporting imagery and the inclusion of Olympic brand values in its advertisements. The Coca-Cola brand makes the explicit connection between its own identity and that of the Olympic Games. This relates to associative learning theory, defined as *"learning of the ways in which concepts are related"* (Van Osselaer, 2012, p.699), as a temporal process of exposure to a communication cue and an object and the resulting mental connection between the two (Mao et al., 2013). It describes what is happening for consumers when exposed to sponsorship activities, as the evaluative-based process strengthens the relationship with increased exposure and is foundational for consumers to learn about brand associations.

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Sponsors are motivated to showcase their brand amid an event to build awareness and transfer positive event image aspects onto the sponsor brand image (Gwinner, 1997; Kim et al., 2009; Gwinner and Eaton, 1999). Associative learning effects exist for building awareness (Gupta et al., 2014; Shimp et al., 1991) as well as positive image transfer (Mao et al., 2013; Smith, 2004). From an awareness building perspective, associative learning can have strong effects for a lesser known brand and Shimp et al. (1991) demonstrate that the conditioning effects of associated learning are stronger for unknown or moderately known brands when the cue is communicated with the object stimuli. While introducing a brand image can be a benefit of sponsorship, the development of a brand image can be an important aspect of associated learning for a lesser known brand. Cunha and Laran (2008) found that later learned brands can effectively develop unique attribute associations despite a previous market entrant. So, there may be a sponsorship advantage for lesser known brands to develop a unique image within a market.

Image development and maintenance are important to brand sponsors. The transfer or maintenance of positive event brand attributes onto the sponsor brand through explicit association is therefore more likely to be the sponsor's goal. Image transfer occurs through the promotional activities of the sponsor brand in their activation of the initial sponsorship rights investment (Simmons and Becker-Olsen, 2006). The activation of sponsorships can vary in terms of how marketers evaluate their opportunities and context. O'Reilly and Horning (2013) argue that tactics and their suitability to a sponsorship situation are critical to success. Apostolopoulou et al. (2017) examine three TOP sponsors during the 2016 Rio Olympic Games to identify increasing digitalisation of activation tactics, as well as the maintenance of the more traditional tactics of advertising, associative packaging and on-site engagement initiatives. The increased digital media use in sponsors' activation raises questions around how sponsors are using digital media to leverage their sponsorship.

In summary, this literature can be interpreted as either a sponsor seeking to be associated with an event brand personality that mirrors its own brand personality, or a sponsor trying to form new brand associations through that event.

3.1 Sponsorship as Aspirational Self-image

Sponsorship can be aspirational, aiming to change the identity of a sponsor's brand (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2012, p.213), based on an event's brand identity, as opposed to a 'halo effect' (Mahlke, 2007). This is known as property-to-sponsor image transference (Cornwell et al., 2005, p.42), similar to ideal self-image congruity for people, where a consumer seeks a brand that allows them to improve their self-image. A sponsor may seek an event with a brand personality that mirrors its ideal brand personality or use the event to develop secondary associations if it is not fully satisfied with its current brand image and wants to use sponsorship to improve it.

H1: The brand personality communicated by the sponsors will be significantly different from the brand personality communicated by the event when measured over all dimensions

3.2 Sponsorship as Actual Self-Image

Sponsorship is used to increase brand awareness and reinforce or increase existing associations linked to the brand. This is akin to actual self-image congruity. A sponsor seeks an event that matches its own position, in the same way a consumer is satisfied if they find a

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brand that reflects their actual self-image (Yooa and Donthub, 2001; Brakus et al., 2009). Low (2000) explains image congruence effectiveness as the key measure of event fit in sponsorship. A company that is happy with its current brand image would find an event which closely matches it to reinforce that image in the minds of consumers.

H2: On the event's dominant brand personality dimension the brand personality communicated by the sponsors will not be significantly different from the brand personality communicated by the event

3.3 Event and Sponsorship Congruence based on Longevity

Bloch et al. (2003) explain that whilst a sponsorship could initially be incongruent, over time the congruence should increase. The current view that incongruent sponsorships are negative could therefore be misleading. The longevity of the sponsor-event partnership is influenced by economic conditions, clutter, brand strength and fit (Jensen and Cornwell, 2017). Harsher economic conditions for a corporation or increased clutter with multiple sponsorship relationships can lead to partnership dissolution. The long term success of a sponsor partnership is also enhanced when there is a strong brand and a good fit with the event brand and its co-sponsors (Jensen and Cornwell, 2017) over time.

H3: Brand personality strength between the event's dominant brand personality dimension and the sponsor will be positively and significantly related to longevity of the relationship.

3.4 Sponsor Brand Image: Co-sponsorship Congruence vs. Categorical Exclusivity

As category brands are often unique, it is possible that they would communicate less between-sponsor congruence (Ruth and Simonin, 2003). The Olympic Games' TOP sponsorship programme offers category exclusivity to address the clutter concern, but there remain risks at the national organising committee level. Therefore, a low level of congruence could exist between sponsors.

H4: Comparing sponsors to each other, the brand personality communicated will be significantly different when measured over all dimensions

However, a contrasting stream of research indicates that the co-sponsorships of a brand can positively impact the sponsor brand's image (Wiedmann and Gross, 2013; Carrillat et al., 2010; Carrillat and Harris, 2002; Schnittka et al., 2009) and can result in image transfer effects between sponsors in sponsorship alliances with an event. Therefore, it is likely that the event and all sponsors would be highly congruent.

H5: Comparing sponsors to each other, the brand personality communicated will not be significantly different when measured on the event's dominant brand personality dimension

Finally, just as Bloch et al. (2003) explain that congruence between the sponsor and event could increase over time, so could the level of congruence between sponsors.

H6: Brand personality congruence between the sponsors will be positively and significantly related to longevity of the relationship.

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4. Methodology

The literature review highlights the significance of the associations between an event and its sponsors and the benefits of the brand personality lens for interpretation. This study is designed to explore the website marketing communications of a mega-event, the Olympic Games, and its main sponsors, using a lexical brand personality analysis of the website text.

4.1 Sample Selection – Event and Sponsors

The Olympic Games is chosen as the mega-event, with income from commercial partnerships with brands accounting for over 40 percent of its revenue (IOC website). Some of its TOP sponsors, themselves big brands with a global reach and worldwide reputation, also provide technical services to the Olympic Games, usually when the event is underway. The universal popularity of the Olympic Games, held every two years in its summer and winter versions, as well as the Youth Olympics and Paralympic Games, means that TOP sponsors gain global exposure in a way that few other brand associations afford.

The 2016 Rio Olympic Games is chosen as the specific event with TOP sponsors: *Coca-Cola, Omega, GE, Panasonic, Visa, Atos, Dow, P&G, Samsung and Bridgestone*. In addition and for comparison, this study includes a new 2017 TOP sponsor. *Toyota* is chosen as a global brand with broad consumer appeal, rather than Alibaba or Intel. Table 1 shows the sample used in this study and each brand's sponsorship of the Olympic Games since 2010.

Table 1: Olympic Games sponsorship sample

Sponsor	TOP (2017)	Rio (2016)	Sochi (2014)	London (2012)	Vancouver (2010)
Coca Cola	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Omega	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
GE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Panasonic	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Visa	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Atos	✓	✓	✓	✓	x
Dow	✓	✓	✓	✓	x
P&G	✓	✓	✓	✓	x
Samsung	✓	✓	✓	✓	x
Bridgestone	✓	✓	x	x	x
Toyota	✓	x	x	x	x

While the Olympic Games and TOP sponsor brands are all individually significant, there is a wide variance in the volume of visitors to their websites, as summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Website statistics (source: SimilarWeb)

Sponsor/Event	Homepage URL	Unique World Average Visitors per Month 2016	Average time on site
Coca-Cola	https://us.coca-cola.com	921,639	5m 36s
Omega	https://omegawatches.com	659,287	3m 36s
GE	https://www.ge.com	1,315,000	6m 23s
Panasonic	https://www.panasonic.com/global/	7,604,000	3m 12s

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Visa	https://usa.visa.com	1,099,000	1m 33s
Atos	https://atos.net/en/	742,208	3m 41s
Dow	https://www.dow.com/en-us/	454,513	2m 28s
P&G	https://us.pg.com	401,527	1m 36s
Samsung	https://www.samsung.com/us/	273,000,000	3m 17s
Bridgestone	https://www.bridgestone.com	103,248	5m 17s
Toyota	http://www.toyota-global.com	249,179	1m 52s
Olympic	https://www.olympic.org	898,146	2m 20s

4.2 Data Collection

The text on the English language (US) website pages for each brand was downloaded during the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, with the exception of Toyota, which was downloaded in 2017 when their sponsorship started. The process involved spidering each website's homepage (see Table 2) to obtain URLs which were then checked manually. The depth was set to the homepage and one link away (depth 2). The main limitation of a content analysis method is data reliability (Krippendorff, 2004), therefore checks were undertaken to prevent bias. Criteria were defined to safeguard that the webpages included were related to consumers (for example, contractual and policy pages are excluded). This provided 1,421,159 words for analysis, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Word counts for each website

Sponsor	Website URL		No. of Words
Coca-Cola	https://us.coca-cola.com		114,955
Omega	https://omegawatches.com		74,604
GE	https://www.ge.com		44,499
Panasonic	https://www.panasonic.com/global/		**6,850**
Visa	https://usa.visa.com/		30,263
Atos	https://atos.net/en/		62,102
Dow	https://www.dow.com/en-us/		173,691
P&G	https://us.pg.com		40,721
Samsung	https://www.samsung.com/us/		312,291
Bridgestone	https://www.bridgestone.com		22,479
Toyota	http://www.toyota-global.com		17,842
Olympic	https://www.olympic.org		**520,862**
		Total	1,421,159
		Mean	81,845
		Standard Deviation	151,329

Bold font highlights extrema.

4.3 Content Analysis

Code was developed to content analyse the textual data using Aaker's (1997) framework of brand personality. The data were pre-processed using Python's Natural Language Toolkit to remove non-English words, tokenize and word-stem. Subsequently, the synonyms were measured through the number of occurrences across Aaker's five dimensions for each brand, using Opoku's (2005) synonyms dictionary (Table 4).

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Table 4: Examples of synonyms (Opoku's (2005) dictionary)

Trait	Synonyms
Competence	*Competent, outstanding, secure, successful, superior, technical*
Sincerity	*Authentic, charitable, natural, positive*
Sophistication	*Beautiful, elegant, exclusive, luxurious, stunning*
Ruggedness	*Challenge, extreme, hazardous, resilient, tough*
Excitement	*Courageous, exciting, extreme, inspiring, unique*

Table 5 shows the frequency of mention for all five dimensions for all sponsor brands. Competence, Excitement and Sincerity are generally the dominant brand personality traits across all brands, followed by Ruggedness and Sophistication.

Table 5: Word frequencies for each trait

	Competence	Excitement	Ruggedness	Sincerity	Sophistication
Bridgestone	*157 (47.3%)*	*35 (10.5%)*	*23 (6.9%)*	*110 (33.1%)*	*7 (2.1%)*
Coca-Cola	*283 (17.9%)*	*360 (22.8%)*	*59 (3.7%)*	*841 **(53.3%)***	*36 (2.3%)*
Dow	*1318 (43.4%)*	*707 (23.3%)*	*331 (10.9%)*	*566 (18.6%)*	*115 (3.8%)*
GE	*508 (44.8%)*	*287 (25.3%)*	*61 (5.4%)*	*256 (22.6%)*	*22 (1.9%)*
Omega	*364 (32.2%)*	*221 (19.6%)*	*53 (4.7%)*	*290 (25.7%)*	*201 **(17.8%)***
P&G	*98 (18.8%)*	*192 (36.9%)*	*46 (8.8%)*	*154 (29.6%)*	*31 (6.0%)*
Toyota	*100 (28.9%)*	*89 (25.7%)*	*41 **(11.8%)***	*94 (27.2%)*	*22 (6.4%)*
Visa	*180 (42.6%)*	*72 (17.0%)*	*43 (10.2%)*	*111 (26.2%)*	*17 (4.0%)*
Atos	*715 (52.7%)*	*255 (18.8%)*	*112 (8.3%)*	*250 (18.4%)*	*25 (1.8%)*
Panasonic	*55 **(50.5%)***	*14 (12.8%)*	*8 (7.3%)*	*25 (22.9%)*	*7 (6.4%)*
Samsung	*1927 (30.1%)*	*1099 (17.2%)*	*160 (2.5%)*	*2402 (37.6%)*	*806 (12.6%)*
Olympic	*1082 (12.4%)*	*3314 **(37.9%)***	*461 (5.3%)*	*3205 (36.6%)*	*685 (7.8%)*

Bold font highlights extrema.

4.4 Correspondence Analysis

Correspondence analysis reduces the five-dimensional model to a two-dimensional axis or correspondence analysis map (Hoffman and Franke, 1986). The sponsoring brands' communications can then be interpreted. A two-dimensional multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) plot aids visual interpretability (Hoffman and Franke, 1986) and is appropriate given the large amount of variance accounted for in the first two eigenvectors (81.4 + 12.8% = 94.2%). The data collection provides significant textual content, which yields a high number of brand personality synonyms. The MCA provides a method where interpretation is possible by expressing the relative frequencies of the respective word totals (Greenacre, 2010). The two-dimensional plot both aids interpretability and removes problems related to inter-spatial differences.
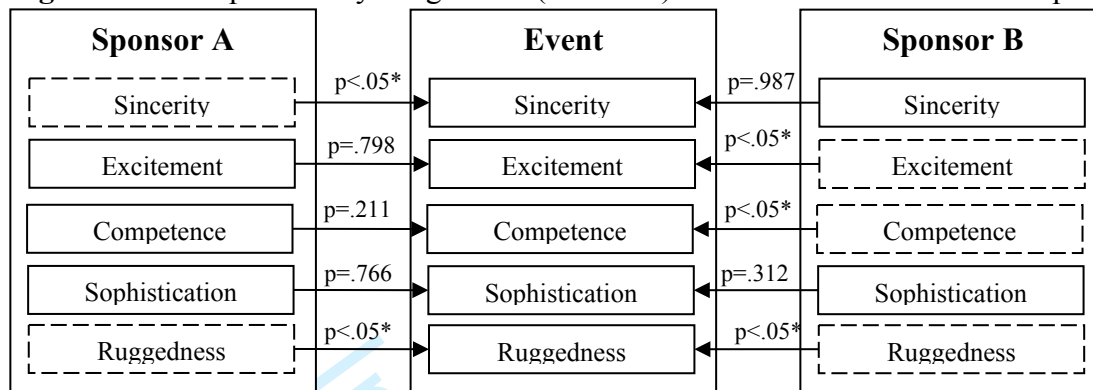
As recommended by Markus and Visser (1992), boot-strapped 95% confidence ellipses were computed for these estimates by simulating data drawn from a multinomial distribution with probabilities equal to the observed probabilities of words in each of the five brand personality categories. We then projected 1,000 simulated data sets into the space of the existing MCA solution. The data plots are in Figures 2[a] and 2[b].

4.5 Statistical Analysis

Brand personality congruencies between sponsor and event and within sponsors are tested using analysis of variance (ANOVAs). If a brand personality dimension is significantly different, it is classed as incongruent (Rutter et al., 2018a). Therefore, incongruence is

rejected at 95% or higher significance ($p>0.05$). Figure 1 highlights that three and two of the five dimensions of brand personality are congruent for sponsors A and B respectively. Multiple linear regressions are used to test the relationships over time.

Figure 1: Brand personality congruence (ANOVA) between the event and each sponsor

Sponsor A		Event		Sponsor B
Sincerity	p<.05*	Sincerity	p=.987	Sincerity
Excitement	p=.798	Excitement	p<.05*	Excitement
Competence	p=.211	Competence	p<.05*	Competence
Sophistication	p=.766	Sophistication	p=.312	Sophistication
Ruggedness	p<.05*	Ruggedness	p<.05*	Ruggedness

* significantly different (incongruent) at the $p<.05$
- - - - indicates the incongruent dimension

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Figure2[a]: Sponsor and event brand positions
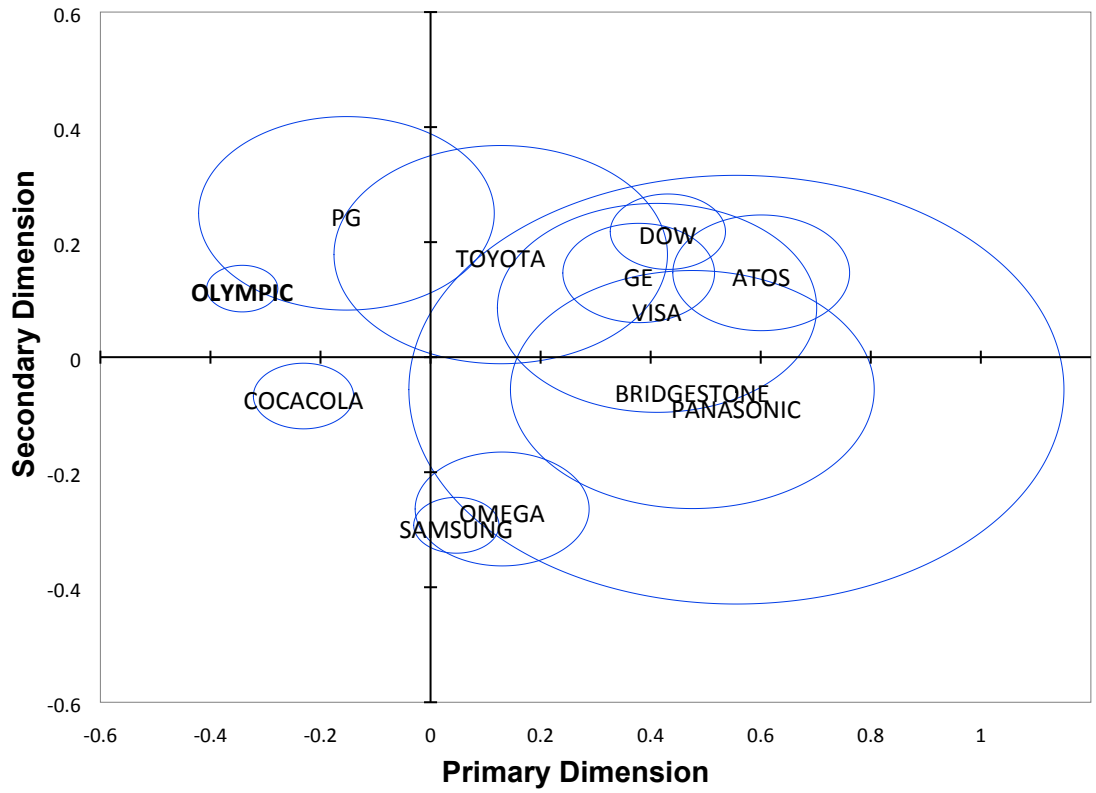
Figure 2[b]: Trait dimensions of the event and sponsors

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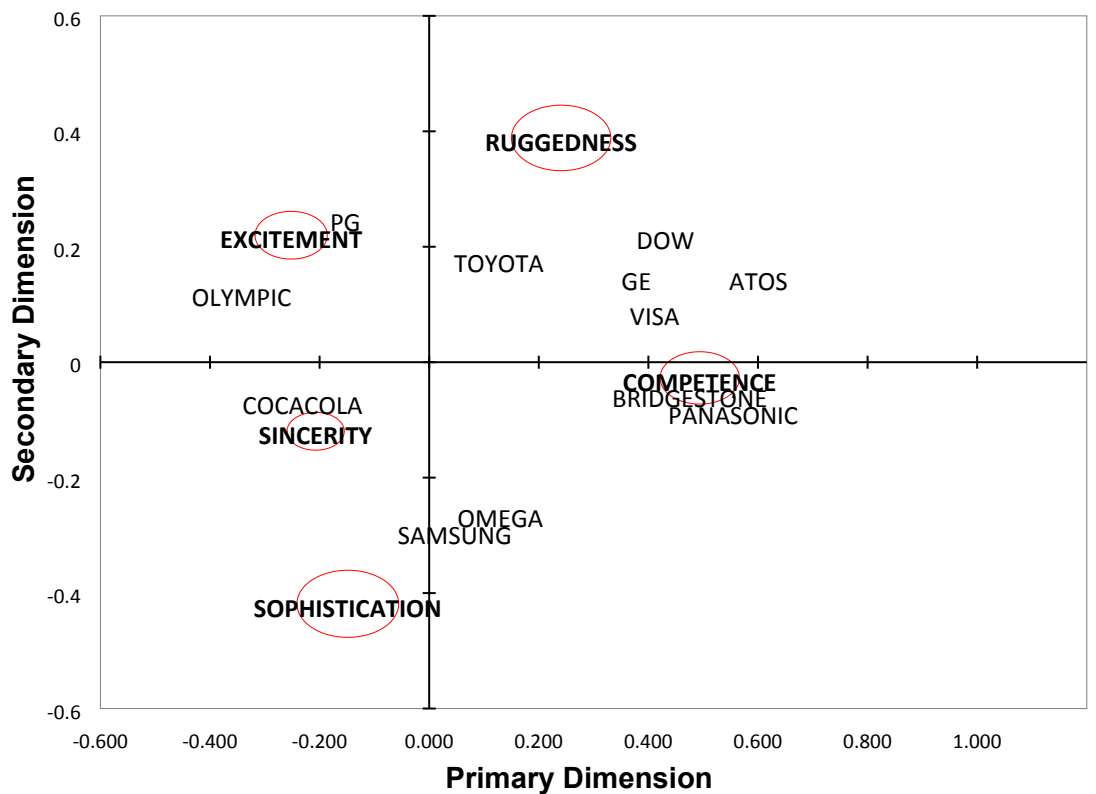
5. Analysis and Findings

The first part of this section analyses the MCA and relationships between the dimensions and positions of the sponsors' brands. The second section tests the congruence between sponsor and event brand personality dimensional strength, the third tests the statistical relationship between event and sponsor congruence over time. The fourth section explores within sponsor brand personality congruence and the final section content analyses the words used to form dimensions that the brands communicate strongly.

5.1 Brand Personality Positions

Figures 2[a] and 2[b] show the result of reducing the five-dimensional brand personality model into two dimensions, which need to be interpreted separately. Figure 2[a] plots the positions of the mega-event and its associated sponsors, represented by the label, and the two-dimensional 95% confidence ellipses surrounding these positions. Figure 2[b] plots the positions of the five dimensions along the identical two-dimensional axis. The positions of the event and sponsors are added for ease of interpretation.

Figure 2[b] shows that the dimension of Competence is situated to the right of the plot. Inversely, the dimension of Sincerity is positioned to the left, with Sophistication and Ruggedness in-between. Therefore, we can interpret the x-axis in Figure 2[a] as if it distinguished more Competent from more Sincere sponsors. Similarly, we can interpret the y-axis in Figure 2[a] as if it distinguished more Rugged from more Sophisticated sponsors.

The trait dimensions plot shows two fundamental tensions arising from Aaker's (1997) brand personality dimensions: (1) a distinction between Sincerity and Competence, and (2) between Sophistication and Ruggedness. The first of these distinctions is more significant as indicated by the large variance (i.e. above 75%) of brand personality word usage explained. The final brand personality dimension, Excitement, ends up centrally located and does not help in distinguishing between sponsors. In spite of this, there is no suggestion of juxtaposition of these traits.

The boot-strapped confidence intervals reveal sponsor and event brand identities which emphasise different aspects of Aaker's (1997) brand personality. The event, *Olympic Games*, and the sponsor *P&G* communicate Excitement strongly and uniquely from the other sponsor brands. *Coca-Cola* uniquely communicates Sincerity strongly and is positioned between Excitement and Sophistication. Both, *Bridgestone* and *Panasonic* are communicating Competence strongly. In addition, *Omega* and *Samsung* also communicate Competence, but along with the Sophistication trait. Finally, *Dow, GE, VISA, Atos* and to a lesser extent, *Toyota,* are communicating Competence and Ruggedness brand personality dimensions. While sponsor and event projected identities are complex, the dominant traits help to project unique identities.

Visually, these findings indicate Olympic sponsors are communicating varied brand personalities. Sponsors converge on the dimension of Excitement (5 on the y-axis, 2 on the x-axis.) The next section uses statistical analysis to explore the relationships between event and brand personalities. To further interpret these relationships, the brands are explored in relation to the brand personality words used.

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5.2 Brand Personality Event and Sponsor Congruence

There are statistically significant differences between the sponsor and event brand personality dimensions, as determined by one way ANOVA for Sincerity $[F(11,889) =12.826, p = .00]$, Excitement $[F(11,889) =10.326, p = .00]$, Competence $[F(11,889) =20.107, p = .00]$, Sophistication $[F(11,889) = 24.978, p = .00]$ and Ruggedness $[F(11,889)=10.423, p = .00]$.

Table 6: Differences between sponsor and event brand personality

Sponsor	Sincerity	Excitement	Competence	Sophistication	Ruggedness	Congruence
Atos	7.42	3.82	-15.83*	6.58*	-2.00	40%
Bridgestone	6.81*	3.25	-19.24*	7.64*	1.55	40%
Coca-Cola	-3.55	-2.32	-6.58*	9.75*	2.69	60%
Dow	11.11*	0.46	-13.74*	5.32*	-3.16*	20%
GE	9.09	-3.84	-13.10	6.96*	0.89	80%
Omega	16.56*	-7.17	-2.04	-5.87	-1.48	80%
P&G	2.46	-2.39	-5.05	4.51	0.47	100%
Panasonic	7.14	-5.54	-10.98	6.21	3.16	100%
Samsung	0.59	-8.39*	-5.5*	9.16*	4.14*	20%
Toyota	14.05*	-21.30	-0.01	6.8*	0.46	60%
Visa	4.47	4.51	-7.80	4.90	-6.09	100%
Congruence	63%	91%	55%	36%	81%	-

* the mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The post hoc test, in Table 6, reveals Excitement (91%) as the most congruent sponsor dimension to the event, followed by Ruggedness (81%), Sincerity (63%), Competence (55%) and Sophistication (36%). 7 out of 11 sponsors are congruent over 3 or more dimensions. Hypothesis 1 is therefore fully supported, whilst Hypothesis 2 is nearly supported, as the dominant dimension of the event's brand personality is nearly congruent across all brands. However, the remaining dimensions exhibits lower levels of congruence, indicating that brands are using the sponsor's association to develop their own brand image or secondary associations.

5.3 Brand Personality Event and Sponsor Congruence by Longevity

Simple linear regression is used to test brand personality event and sponsor congruence over time. When the dominant dimension of the event's brand personality (Excitement) is predicted for the sponsor, it is found that the number of years as a sponsor $(\beta = .386, p < .001)$ is a significant predictor. Brands which have longer relationships with the event communicate the event brand personality more strongly than newer sponsors. The overall model fit is $R^2 = 0.149$. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is supported, indicating that a brand which is more closely matched is more likely to sponsor for longer and/or that image transference occurs during this process.

5.4 Brand Personality Congruence within Sponsors

There are significant differences at the p<.001 level between the sponsors within each of the five dimensions as determined by one-way ANOVA for Sincerity $[F(10,599) =16.175, p = .00]$, Excitement $[F(10,599) =11.871, p = .00]$, Competence $[F(10,599) =13.08, p = .00]$, Sophistication $[F(10,599) = 24.165, p = .00]$ and Ruggedness $[F(10,599) =12.758, p = .00]$. Hypothesis 4 is therefore supported and Hypothesis 5 is not supported. The sponsor brands show a low overall level of congruence for each of the dimensions indicating their differing brands within the TOP category.

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Table 7: Congruency level within sponsor brand personality

Sponsor	Sincerity	Excitement	Competence	Sophistication	Ruggedness	Average
Coca-Cola	50%	100%	70%	60%	70%	70%
Omega	50%	80%	70%	0%	90%	**58%**
GE	100%	100%	100%	90%	100%	**98%**
Panasonic	100%	100%	100%	90%	90%	96%
Visa	100%	80%	100%	90%	60%	86%
Atos	70%	60%	50%	70%	80%	68%
Dow	70%	90%	60%	70%	80%	74%
P&G	80%	80%	70%	80%	100%	82%
Samsung	50%	50%	70%	70%	60%	60%
Bridgestone	70%	70%	50%	90%	90%	74%
Toyota	80%	70%	80%	90%	100%	84%
Average	75%	82%	75%	**73%**	**84%**	-

Bold font highlights extrema.

The first post hoc tests (summarised in Table 7) reveal varying levels of congruence for each sponsor and each dimension. GE is the most congruent with its peers (98%), whilst Omega is the least (58%). Ruggedness is the most congruent dimension (84%), followed closely by Excitement (82%), whilst Sophistication is the least (73%). The post hoc test for Excitement, shown in Table 8, reveals that Coca-Cola, GE and Panasonic are fully congruent (100%) with other sponsors, in support of Hypothesis 5. However, the remaining sponsors are only partially congruent.

Table 8: Difference between sponsors for the dominant event brand personality (Excitement)

Sponsor	Coca-Cola	Omega	GE	Panasonic	Visa	Atos	Dow	P&G	Samsung	Bridgestone	Toyota
Coca-Cola		4.85	1.52	3.22	-6.83	-6.14	-2.78	0.08	6.07	-5.57	18.98
Omega	-4.85		-3.33	-1.63	-11.69	-10.99*	-7.63	-4.78	1.22	-10.42*	14.13
GE	-1.52	3.33		1.70	-8.36	-7.66	-4.30	-1.45	4.55	-7.10	17.45
Panasonic	-3.22	1.63	-1.70		-10.05	-9.36	-6.00	-3.14	2.85	-8.79	15.76
Visa	6.83	11.69	8.36	10.05		0.69	4.05	6.91	12.9*	1.26	25.81*
Atos	6.14	10.99*	7.66	9.36	-0.69		3.36	6.21*	12.21*	0.57	25.12*
Dow	2.78	7.63	4.30	6.00	-4.05	-3.36		2.85	8.85*	-2.79	21.76
P&G	-0.08	4.78	1.45	3.14	-6.91	-6.21*	-2.85		6*	-5.65	18.90
Samsung	-6.07	-1.22	-4.55	-2.85	-12.9*	-12.21*	-8.85*	-6*		-11.64*	12.91
Bridgestone	5.57	10.42*	7.10	8.79	-1.26	-0.57	2.79	5.65	11.64*		24.55*
Toyota	-18.98	-14.13	-17.45	-15.76	-25.81*	-25.12*	-21.76	-18.90	-12.91	-24.55*	
Congruence	100%	80%	100%	100%	80%	60%	90%	80%	50%	70%	70%

* the mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

5.5 Brand Personality Sponsor Congruence by Longevity

Multivariate linear regression is used to test brand personality sponsor congruence over time. When the level of congruence for each dimension of brand personality is predicted, there is no significant difference in congruence over time: F $(9, 1) = 1.44$, p $= .573$; Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.71$, partial $\eta^2 = .929$. Therefore, Hypothesis 6 is not supported. Sponsor brands do not get more congruent with other sponsors over time.

5.6 Summary of hypotheses testing

Brands which sponsor the Olympics largely take on its dominant brand dimension (Excitement), but do not adapt their whole brand personality to that of the Olympics. They benefit by adding Excitement to their brands without losing their individual character. Because the Excitement transfer is more pronounced for long-running sponsors, consistency pays off. Table 9 summarises each hypothesis and finding.

Table 9: Summary of hypotheses testing and subsequent finding

Hypotheses		**Finding**	
Sponsor-Event Brand Personality Congruence			
1	Sponsors ↔ Event	Supported	The sponsor brands do not match the Olympics' brand over all dimensions.
2	EDBP (Sponsor ↔ Event)	Nearly supported	Almost all the sponsor brands match the Olympics' brand on the dominant Excitement dimension.
3	EDBP (Sponsor → time)	Supported	The longer a brand stays a sponsor, the stronger the BP will be on the dominant Excitement dimension.
Between-Sponsor Brand Personality Congruence			
4	Sponsor ↔ Sponsor	Not Supported	The sponsor brands do not resemble each other over all dimensions.
5	EDBP (Sponsor ↔ Sponsor)	Not Supported	The sponsor brands do not resemble each other on the dominant Excitement dimension.
6	Sponsor congruence → time	Not supported	The sponsor brands do not become more alike over time, even on the dominant Excitement dimension.
Note: EDBP is the Event's dominant Brand Personality Dimension			

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5.7 Evidencing brand personalities

Hypotheses 1 and 2 indicate that the majority of sponsors converge into the dominant dimension of the event, Excitement. Hypotheses 4 and 5 show significant differences between sponsors. Therefore, a deeper interpretation into the nuanced differences of the relationships was conducted. Table 10 summarises the brand personality dimensions for each brand sponsor and relationships between the sponsor and Olympic Games brand personality dimensions.

Table 10: Sponsor brand personality and relationship with event brand

Dimension(s)	Sponsor Brand	Summary of Sponsor Brand Personality and Relationship with Event Brand
Excitement	P&G	Emphasising their own position of Excitement through their association with the Excitement of the Olympic Games
Sincerity	Coca-Cola	Olympic Games provide an almost unique opportunity for their customers to see the athletes, officials and spectators drinking their products. Excitement of the Olympic Games provides a basis for Coca-Cola to appear "Sincerely" healthy.
Competence	Bridgestone	Supplied winter tyres to all Olympic vehicles (Carp, 2018).
	Panasonic	Demonstrates its state-of-the-art technologies at the Olympic Games to use Both Bridgestone and Panasonic benefit from the hype of Olympic Excitement to demonstrate Competent technologies
Competence and Sophistication	Samsung	Most successful with its brand strategy (20,635 global mentions (Hobbs, 2016) and voted most trusted Olympic sponsor (Anson, 2016). Highly Competent and Reliable, Samsung's strapline at the Olympic Games is *"Do What You Can't"*, a Sophisticated message about being at the cutting edge. Sophisticated and competent watches and timekeeping. Olympic Games
	Omega	official timekeeper until 2032 -proud to measure and capture each Exciting result and new world record achieved.
Competence and Ruggedness	Dow	Dow demonstrated Competence by delivering a carbon mitigation programme (Carp, 2018) which compensated for IOC carbon emissions. Protects athletes in Rugged winter environments with insulation products.
	GE	GE provides secure and Competent infrastructure products for Rugged and extreme environmental conditions.
	Visa	Competence in providing reliable and safe payment products.
	Atos	Competent and resilient expertise and solutions with vital public service contracts
	Toyota	Competent, safe and responsible mobility products All looking to enhance reputation and innovation through association with the Excitement of the Olympics.

The trait configuration for each brand demonstrates that brand personality is a basis for differentiation among brands, but also a basis for similarity. In particular, there is a clear trend of Excitement as a reference point for sponsors in relation to the Olympic Games and as

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an associative dimension and complimentary to the positioning of the brand itself. The IOC website highlights *"all the TOP Partners have launched [...] marketing campaigns to help build public **excitement**"* around their association with the Olympic Games.

6. Discussion, Managerial Implications and Conclusions

Despite the importance and value of sponsorship partnerships, little research has examined how sponsors align their website brand personalities with a mega-event brand, such as the Olympic Games. This study examines the similarities and differences in brand personality identity exhibited in the website communications of sponsors and how these relate to the event brand itself. Specifically, this study contributes to the branding literature by examining brand personality differences from an actual (awareness) and aspirational (image transfer) brand self, as well as investigating brand personality congruence.

6.1. Brand Personality Strength and Congruence

When examining the sponsor-event brand personality congruence, we find that the sponsor brands do not match the Olympics' brand across all brand personality dimensions. However, all but one (Samsung) are congruent with the Olympics brand on the event's dominant Excitement dimension. This extends previous research, as the overall level of brand fit is low, but there is a high level of fit on a "primary" dimension which is more important to sponsors (Yooa and Donthub, 2001; Brakus et al., 2009; Low, 2000) and confirms that the Olympics is an attractive sponsorship event due to its high levels of Excitement (Waitt, 2003). We find that the longer a brand stays a sponsor, the stronger the brand personality congruence is on the dominant Excitement dimension, consistent with previous studies around consumer associative learning (Smith, 2004; Mao et al., 2013)

When considering the possible interplay between sponsors, we find little evidence for between-sponsor brand personality congruence. The sponsor brands do not resemble each other when measured over all brand personality dimensions, nor do they resemble each other nor become more alike over time on the dominant Excitement dimension. This extends previous research on category sponsorships between brands that are able to sponsor an event yet remain highly independent with minimal isomorphism over time (Wiedmann and Gross, 2013; Carrillat et al., 2010; Carrillat and Harris, 2002; Schnittka et al., 2009).

Together, the results suggest that sponsor brands take on the event's dominant brand dimension (Excitement), but do not adapt their whole brand personality to that of the Olympics. They benefit by adding Excitement to their brands without losing their individual character. This finding is consistent with previous studies (Ruth and Simonin, 2003) that show how category brands will often try to build a unique position with the sponsored event, independent of the other category sponsors. Because the Excitement transfer is more pronounced for long-running sponsors, the study provides evidence that consistency and a long-term approach pays off for brands that seek to boost particular brand associations by sponsoring events.

6.2. Brand Personality and Sponsorship

This study contributes to brand personality studies by examining how companies create brand personality rather than how consumers perceive it. Previous research on two-

dimensional brand personality (e.g. Aaker et al., 2004; Okazaki, 2006; MacInnis, 2012) takes a consumer perspective. This research does not consider consumer evaluations of brands, but rather how companies position and communicate their brands. It is important to study the brand personality construct from this angle, because brand personality is commonly used by practitioners to aid in brand positioning. By showing that companies communicate most of their brand position along two brand personality dimensions, this study demonstrates that companies create brand personality the same way consumers perceive it. This research thereby contributes to theory by integrating the company and consumer perspectives on brand personality creation.

This study deepens our understanding of brand personality identities among sponsor and event brands by explicitly examining the portrayal of brands communicated over the Internet. This provides insight into the decisions brand managers make about the personality dimensions of their brand and associative sponsorship relationships. Although Jensen and Cornwell (2017) explore brand personality in the sponsor-event relationship, they did not consider the construction of the brand personality through the internet communications of the brands. However, there is a need to explore brand personality identity creation as a precursor to the image held by consumers. This research shows that a large proportion of variance is accounted for in the 5 dimensions of Aaker's model (95%), which indicates that the sponsors are publishing written website material which communicates a brand personality and it can help to distinguish between the brand personalities of the key sponsors of an event. This research also contributes by analysing multiple sponsors of an event relative to the event itself. It is an inclusive approach, which enables direct comparisons in the image transfer context.

A brand personality lens and correspondence analysis are helpful to understand the relationship between sponsor and event brand, especially given the importance of congruity for partnership longevity (Jensen and Cornwell, 2017). Srisuwan and Barnes (2008) highlight the importance of linking together online marketing efforts, therefore it is important to identify dimensional congruence. These results show that P&G is the only brand which shares the same Excitement brand personality as the Olympic Games. This augurs well for a long partnership between the two brands. Whilst there is some brand identity congruence among the sponsor brands, these represent risks due to increased communication clutter (Jensen and Cornwell, 2017). For example, Dow, GE, Visa, Atos and Toyota all emphasise the brand personality dimensions of Competence and Ruggedness. While the brands do not compete directly with each other and have category exclusivity, increasing the number of TOP sponsors risks increasing the incidence of shared brand personality dimensions which can impact the sponsor brand's ability to effectively differentiate itself during the event. The IOC should be mindful when adding new sponsor brands to find ones which offer unique brand personality profiles, whilst sponsor brand managers should seek to project a unique combination of brand personality traits to differentiate themselves from other sponsors of the event.

The correspondence analysis map overall portrays brand personality distinctions rather than similarities. Whilst there is overlap in the emphasis portrayed by brands' website communications, the absence of overlap with other brands is notable. This result is reflective that the study includes brands from the TOP Olympic sponsors, which have sufficiently different products due to the exclusivity of sponsorship rights. It is interesting to note the differences in brand personality messaging on websites from the event itself. This may create a potential benefit for sponsors through image transfer (Gwinner, 1997; Gwinner and Eaton,

1999; Kim et al., 2009) and build on the strengths of the original event brand personality (Aaker, 1997).

This study shows that the Olympic Games' communication emphasises the Excitement dimension of brand personality, thus the affiliation with the event creates opportunities to transfer that dimension to those directly communicated by sponsor brands. So, Bridgestone can capture the Excitement dimension associated with the Olympic Brand while focusing their own efforts on building or reinforcing the Competence dimension of brand personality. Similarly, Coca-Cola emphasises Sincerity in its online communication but benefits through association with Olympic Excitement, which may enable them to better compete with Pepsi and its portrayal of Excitement. Coca-Cola also uses the Excitement of the Olympic Games to build their brand and to better connect with Chinese consumers (Ferrand et al., 2012). GE sponsor the Olympic Games to deepen emotion associated with their brand around the Excitement of the Games (Davis and Hilbert, 2013). Our findings support previous anecdotal evidence, which highlights links to Excitement, demonstrating that the brands sponsoring the Olympic Games take different approaches; some reinforce their established brand personality (P&G) while others harness their association with the Olympic Games to subtly alter (Coca-Cola as a Sincerely healthy product) or advance their brand positioning (Samsung as a Competent brand looking to benefit from association with Olympic Excitement.)

Our findings support previous anecdotal evidence that brands use sponsorship to demonstrate product benefits (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2012, p.205), whilst cultivating consumer relationships with the brand. Several brands closely link the Competence and Sophistication of their product with the event to demonstrate innovativeness. Sponsorship provides a good opportunity for brands to become more Exciting based on their Olympic association, which can enable encroachment on competitors' brands without altering core brand strategy. The effects are durable as the association of a TOP sponsor with the Olympic Games helps to reinforce brand traits for the entire duration of the contracted period.

6.3. Brand Personality Conceptualisation

The data reveal a distinction between Sincerity and Competence, and between Sophistication and Ruggedness. The first of these distinctions is more significant than the second (75% vs. 20% of brand personality word usage explained). The variance between brands on Sophistication and Ruggedness is most likely attributable to the types of products sold. The brands that differ in Sophistication and Ruggedness are all Competent brands. Of them, the two brands that are Sophisticated (Omega and Samsung) produce luxury and/or lifestyle products that provide mostly experiential and symbolic value. The brands that are Rugged (Dow, Visa, Atos, GE and Toyota) produce reliable consumer or B2B products that predominantly provide functional value. It is reasonable to assume that this difference would shape how companies present their brands to the public. The reason for the more important distinction; that between Sincerity and Competence, is not immediately obvious. However, when scrutinised more closely, it becomes apparent that it closely mirrors the Warm vs. Competent brand personality framework (Kervyn et al., 2012). The Aaker (1997) Competence dimension is equivalent to Kervyn and Fiske's Competent dimension and the Aaker Sincerity dimension is related to Kervyn and Fiske's Warmth dimension. In the Aaker Big Five brand personality framework, the Sincerity dimension encompasses traits like Honest, Real and Friendly. They speak to the brand's intentions towards its customer; which is the definition of brand warmth (Kervyn et al., 2012). This research thus contributes to theory by validating the growing two-dimensional view of brand personality. It also

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reconciles the competing multi-dimensional view with the emerging two-dimensional view, offering an integration of the two perspectives.

6.4 Managerial Implications, Limitations and Future Research

This research extends the current understanding of brands and brand personality associative sponsorships. Previous studies have focused on consumer perception, whilst this study focuses on brand creation through communication. Several findings were made. First, sponsorship does give brands the opportunity to capture or borrow the dominant dimension alongside building or reinforcing their own dominant brand personality trait. Second, it is possible to begin to subtly alter brand position. Third, transference is more pronounced for long-running sponsors. Therefore, brand managers should consider the current dimensional fit between their brand personalities for a prospective event in relation to possible transference for future position. As consistency over time led to the highest levels of transference, a longitudinal aspect should be considered alongside the strength required.

There are some research limitations which should be acknowledged. This study only considers the English language websites, so the results may not be generalisable beyond this context. The study was undertaken as a snapshot; therefore, it does not account for changes in brand personality over time. A future study could draw longitudinal comparisons between the sponsors and an event and compare with brands which did not continue their associative sponsorships. The focus of this study is on how sponsor brands use their marketing communications to position themselves. Further research would be useful to validate the perceptions of these communications – are they being perceived within the same dimensions as they are being communicated by the brand? The study is within an online context; however, only websites were used and other platforms (e.g. YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram, blogs) could also be included. Finally, interviews should be conducted with managers of these sponsor and event brands to ascertain how communication media are being developed in association with each other.

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