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## Implicit and explicit attitudes to sponsors and ambushers

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There is increasing evidence that unconscious processing of sponsorship messages predominates over conscious processing. Ambushers may profit from this because sport spectators are often not aware that brands associate themselves with events without purchasing sponsorship rights. This research aims to assess differences in implicit and explicit measures of the success of a sponsorship strategy compared with ambushing. Study 1 uses the Implicit Association Test to show that the implicit brand-event linkage, measured via behavioral reaction times that cannot be cognitively controlled, is closer for sponsors (versus ambushers) of global sporting events. Study 2 shows that sponsors (versus ambushers) generate higher long-term brand awareness. Spectators' attitude to the protection of sponsorship rights is determined by both attitude to commercialization in sports and attitude to event organizers; however, it does not negatively affect explicit brand attitudes to ambushers. The study derives theoretical and practical implications for both sponsorship and ambush marketing strategies.

**Keywords:** attitudes; Implicit Association Test; ambush marketing; sponsorship

### 1. Introduction

Corporate expenditure on sponsorship – particularly in the field of sports – has greatly increased over the past decades (Cornwell, 2008). In 2011, worldwide expenditure was estimated to reach \$48.7 billion (IEG, 2011). Recent trends in the sponsorship of global sporting events include long-term sponsorship engagements and tight control of the contractual rights of the sponsors against ambushers. While sponsors associate their brand with an event by purchasing sponsorship rights, ambush marketing is 'the practice whereby another company, often a competitor, intrudes upon public attention surrounding the event, thereby deflecting attention toward themselves and away from the sponsor,' without purchasing sponsorship rights (Meenaghan, 1994, p. 79).

To date, it is unclear to what degree spectators – explicitly or implicitly – learn about what brands are 'truly' connected to an event via legitimate sponsorship (i.e., sponsors) and what brands are not (i.e., ambushers). Individuals consciously retrieve memories that are explicitly learned; however, some past experiences that are introspectively unidentified are implicitly processed and, therefore, not consciously retrievable. These implicit processes may be highly relevant for sponsors and ambushers, because sport spectators' visual contacts with the brands during the

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action of sports games are mostly incidental and last often no longer than fractions of a second (d'Ydewalle, Abeele, Rensbergen, & Couke, 1988). Also, consumers frequently rely on their implicit memory, where attitude formation takes place introspectively, based on past emotional experiences that may have been made as long ago as in childhood (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995) – such as getting one's first football, the experience of a father–son stadium visit, or the celebration of the championship of the family's favorite team. Implicit attitudes have been found to determine the behavior of individuals (Fazio, Powell, & Williams, 1989), and there is evidence that implicit attitudes are affected by sport sponsorship as well (Trendel & Warlop, 2005). Shaping implicit attitudes of sport spectators in a favorable way is therefore a central goal of brands to ensure sponsorship success (against ambushers).

Another strategy to secure the success of the sponsors' communication to spectators is to influence their explicit attitudes to both the brands and the practice of ambush marketing (Mazodier & Quester, 2010; Mazodier, Quester, & Chandon, 2012). However, it is unclear what factors contribute to individuals' agreement with the so-called right protection practices, and what the consequences are for brands that sponsor or ambush global sporting events.

Therefore, the goal of this research article is to consider both implicit and explicit brand attitudes in the context of sport sponsorship and ambushing. Specifically, we aim to find out whether consumers form more positive implicit attitudes toward sponsors (versus ambushers). Also, the article aims to analyze the determinants and consequences of the perceived level of protection of the rights of the official sponsors for explicit brand attitudes.

This research provides meaningful insights into how both sponsoring and ambushing work in the mind of sport spectators and how sponsorship-linked marketing might be effective for sponsors (versus ambushers). It considers both implicit and explicit pathways of attitude formation and focuses on the effects of sponsorship and ambushing on consumers' brand associations after the short-term effects of the communications at the sporting events have dissipated, leaving traces in consumers' memories. Thus, the article partially fills the gap in the area of theory-building research, as identified by Cornwell (2008).

## **2. Implicit attitudes to sponsors and ambushers**

### ***2.1. The rise of ambush marketing***

Ambush marketing is the successful communication to consumers of the association of a brand with a sporting event without the purchase of legitimate sponsorship rights. In the context of global sporting events, it has been used by local companies such as bakeries offering goods related to the event, as well as by global companies whose respective competitors engaged in official sponsorships of global sporting events, such as Fuji and Kodak, Coca-Cola and Pepsi, or Puma and Nike (cf. Crimmins & Horn, 1996; Crow & Hoek, 2003; McAuley & Sutton, 1999; Séguin, Lyberger, O'Reilly, & McCarthy, 2005).

The popularity of ambush marketing has increased over recent years as competitors of official sponsors have reacted to the policy of event organizers to limit the number of sponsors and to guarantee exclusivity in a product category, as well as to the high cost of sponsorship rights. There were 14 official sponsors of the

FIFA World Cup in 2010 (besides national supporters) in comparison to 45 official sponsors of the FIFA World Cup in 1998, for example. Competitors of sponsors therefore endeavor to find other ways to associate their brand with sporting events without purchasing sponsorship rights and are increasingly employing ambush marketing (Chadwick & Burton, 2011). FIFA (2009a) states that ‘after its [ambush marketing’s] sporadic beginnings in 1994 with 258 cases across 39 countries, the problem first became a major concern when the 1998 FIFA World Cup was held in France and 773 infringements of registered marks were discovered in 47 countries. Eight years on, 3300 rights infringements were uncovered in 84 countries in relation to the 2006 FIFA World Cup™.’ These figures highlight the increasing relevance of ambush marketing for major global sporting events such as the FIFA World Cup.

In his seminal work on defining and conceptualizing ambush marketing, Meenaghan (1994), p. 79) points out that ‘the term is now often used more generically to also describe a whole variety of wholly legitimate and morally correct methods of intruding upon public consciousness surrounding an event.’ This statement shows that ambush marketing must not be classified as illegal per se and is not limited to a specific set of marketing instruments. McAuley and Sutton (1999) compare ambush marketing to a virus that constantly alters its tactics and mutates while growing. Thus it includes a multitude of strategies and facets (cf. Chadwick & Burton, 2011; Preuss, Gemeinder, & Séguin, 2008) that are considered a threat to official sponsors of sporting events (Séguin & O’Reilly, 2008). To reduce this threat, several sponsorship protection tools have been proposed that shape today’s environment in which communication messages of sponsors and ambushers are sent to sport spectators (Ellis, Scassa, & Séguin, 2011; Mazodier et al., 2012; Mazodier & Quester, 2010; McKelvey & Grady, 2004a, 2004b, 2008).

## ***2.2. Attitudes and implicit associations***

Both sponsorship and ambushing activities aim at influencing consumers’ brand attitudes. Attitudes are defined as ‘a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor’ (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, p. 1). This (dis-)favor is based on both emotions and cognitions, and is accompanied by both conscious and unconscious processes (LeDoux, 1996). Explicit attitudes are attitudes that consumers are consciously aware of, whereas implicit attitudes are outside of an individual’s awareness (Eagly & Chaiken, 2007).

Spectators of sporting events are typically interested in the sport and not in advertising. Sponsorship and ambush marketing are nevertheless effective because individuals process communication messages unconsciously, for example when seeing advertising on the sports field while following the action of the game (d’Ydewalle et al., 1988). Such information is stored in an individual’s implicit memory – that is, the memories from previous experiences that aid in performing a task without the individual’s conscious awareness (Schacter, 1987). An individual’s implicit memory of advertising brands in the surroundings of a sporting event may create joint connections in the brain and lead to the formation of implicit attitudes to sponsors and ambushers (Cornwell, Weeks, & Roy, 2005; Trendel & Warlop, 2005, 2007). The resulting implicit attitudes may be defined as ‘introspectively unidentified (or inaccurately identified) traces of past experience that mediate favorable or unfavorable feeling, thought, or action toward social objects’ (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995,

p. 8). Theoretical arguments on the mere exposure effect (cf. Zajonc, 1968), the concept of classical conditioning (cf. Kroeber-Riel, 1984), low-involvement processing (cf. Petty & Cacioppo, 1984), and somatic markers (cf. Bechara & Damasio, 2005) provide support that sponsorships or ambushing activities may positively affect the implicit attitudes of consumers.

We assume that sponsors (versus ambushers) are more influential on consumers' implicit brand-event associations because the surroundings of the brand advertising are more favorable. Implicit associations result from traces in a consumer's memory that build on previous experiences at sporting events. Such experiences are often highly emotional and may be considered 'somatic markers' if individuals associate these experiences with rewards or punishments and automatically use them in future behavioral decisions (Bechara & Damasio, 2005).<sup>1</sup> Since high-intensity emotions triggered by the sponsored event are often directly related to rewards (e.g., pride when a team wins a championship) or punishments (e.g., Schadenfreude when a team loses against a rival; Bal, Quester, & Plewa, 2010), the experiences may be associated more strongly with official sponsors who can advertise on the site or in close association with the event (e.g., in the stadium or on television as a program sponsor before and after the broadcast) compared to ambushers (McKelvey & Grady, 2008). Hypothesis 1 is therefore stated as follows:

*H1: Implicit associations between brands and global sporting events are stronger for official sponsors than for ambushers.*

### **3. Study 1**

#### ***3.1. Participants***

One hundred university students (mean age 24.5 ( $\pm 6.0$ ) years) participated in the study. The prerequisite for participation was that the students had followed all the games of their favorite national team of the four most recent largest football events in the world prior to the study and that the students had high involvement levels. Football events were chosen as research context because football is the most popular sport in the country where the research was conducted (Germany). All participants stated that they had watched all games of their favorite team during the four most recent events – the two FIFA World Cups and UEFA Euros – either on TV or in-person. Participants were highly involved both in football in general ( $M = 4.45$  ( $\pm 0.69$ )) and in the major global football events of the FIFA and UEFA under consideration ( $M = 4.58$  ( $\pm 0.50$ )) out of a 5-point rating scale; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*; see *Survey Measures* (3.3.) for the scales that were used). There were more men (96) than women (4) in the sample, because football is more popular in men (versus women) and men are more enthusiastic about football (Sportfive, 2007).

#### ***3.2. Design and procedure***

Participants were recruited on a university campus. The study took place in a laboratory room, where participants were treated individually every 20 minutes. Participants took a seat in front of a PC screen and responded to items about their

fan behavior during the football events under consideration and their involvement with the events. Next, they were asked to perform a PC task.

The PC-based Implicit Association Test (IAT) programmed for the purpose of the study was used to test Hypothesis 1. The IAT uses reaction times that cannot be cognitively controlled and thus represent an implicit measure of associations and attitudes (Fazio & Olson, 2003). Participants were informed that stimuli that are typical characteristics of the two biggest football events in the world, namely the FIFA World Cup and the UEFA EURO would appear on the screen. They were instructed to correctly classify and reclassify the stimuli that appeared in the middle of the screen into distinct categories by pressing one of two keys on the left or right side of a PC keyboard. The categories were shown on the left and right top of the screen, in accordance with the relevant left and right keys on the keyboard. The interviewer started the self-administered IAT on the PC and left the room. All instructions appeared on the PC screen. After having performed the IAT, the interviewer reentered the room and participants filled out a written questionnaire including items about socio-demographics and a funneled debriefing.

The IAT was programmed to display the goal categories 'official sponsor' versus 'no sponsor' on the PC screen. The term 'ambushers' was not used here, in order to avoid priming the participants with this concept. To select goal category-specific brands that sponsor or ambush the events under consideration, a pretest with 15 sponsorship experts was conducted. Experts were asked to state brands that have most consistently sponsored or ambushed the FIFA World Cup and the UEFA EURO. Three brands most frequently mentioned were selected based on their history of sponsoring (ambushing), the fit of categories between sponsors and ambushers, and the presumed product involvement of young European adults. The official sponsors were Adidas, Coca-Cola, and McDonald's. The brands sponsored the World Cup in 2006 and 2010 as well as the EURO in 2004 and 2008. They will continue their sponsorship in 2014 in Brazil as part of the FIFA Sponsorship Program that covers the period from 2007 to 2014. They also sponsored the UEFA EURO 2012 in Poland and Ukraine and will sponsor the EURO 2016 in France. The selected ambushers were Nike, Burger King and Pepsi – brand pairs from the same industries with a generally high awareness (e.g., Interbrand, 2009, ranks all six brands among the top 100 worldwide). The three latter brands implemented ambushing campaigns during the events (e.g., 'Joga Bonito' by Nike, 'Burger King Kahn' by Burger King and 'How You Football' by Pepsi in 2006)<sup>2</sup> and used different channels of communication such as television, Internet, and point-of-sale promotions. They have never sponsored the events under consideration. The logos of the six brands were used as goal categories in the IAT.

Besides goal categories, the IAT requires attributes to be defined. The relevant attributes for the purpose of the study related either to the events ('football championship') or had no meaning in the specific context of the events ('neutral'). A pretest was done to select words of the first and the second category, respectively. The words were selected based on an association task and a stack-sorting task. In the association task, 24 students reported on what comes to their minds when asked to describe their personal experiences when they followed the games of the football World or European Cup. The words with the highest frequencies among all participants were selected and the stack-sorting task verified that only consistently piled words were used in the main study; all inconsistently piled words were excluded.

The pretests revealed that following words fulfilled all criteria to be used as attributes in the IAT: 'dynamic,' 'powerful,' 'thrilling,' 'exciting,' 'fans,' 'fascinating,' 'stadium,' and 'emotions,' representing football championship attributes; 'empty,' 'dull,' 'lifeless,' 'silent,' 'sleep,' 'calm,' 'chilly,' and 'uniform,' representing neutral attributes.

The IAT was performed and the data were treated as suggested by Greenwald, McGhee, and Schwartz (1998). Participants completed seven blocks of trials. Table 1 shows the sequence of the trial blocks in the IAT. Five blocks were practice blocks and two blocks were critical blocks for the analyses (blocks 4 and 7). In the fourth block, the category labels were 'official sponsor/football championship' versus 'no sponsor/neutral' (congruent condition); in the seventh block, the labels were 'no sponsor/football championship' and 'official sponsor/neutral' (incongruent condition).

The speed with which participants completed the tasks is the key measure of the IAT. An implicit belief that official sponsors are more closely associated with sporting event-related words (and ambushers less so) would be reflected in faster responses when stimuli were to be categorized under conditions in which the classification task was congruent with the implicit attitude (i.e., when participants paired official sponsors with words related to the football championship) than in the incongruent condition (i.e., when participants paired ambushers with words related to the football championship).

To prepare and analyze the data, Greenwald, Nosek, and Banaji's (2003) logarithm was applied. No response latencies >10,000 ms were observed. Two participants whose response times were <300 ms on more than 10% of the critical trials were excluded from the sample. Thus the final sample size was 98. Errors were replaced with the block mean of correct responses plus a constant of 600 ms. Out of all the stimuli classifications, 9.82% were classified as incorrect.

The difference score in the reaction times between the two critical blocks of trials – the *D* effect score – was calculated as follows: [congruent condition: official sponsors + words related to sports and ambushers + neutral words] – [incongruent condition: ambushers + words related to sports and official sponsors + neutral words] divided by the pooled standard deviation of the response latencies. The *D* score can

Table 1. Sequence of the trial blocks in the IAT.

Block	Number of trials	Function	Items assigned to left-key response	Items assigned to right-key response
1	20	Practice	Official sponsor images	No sponsor images
2	20	Practice	Soccer EC/WC words	Neutral words
3	20	Practice	Official sponsor images + soccer EC/WC words	No sponsor images + neutral words
4	40	Test	Official sponsor images + soccer EC/WC words	No sponsor images + neutral words
5	20	Practice	No sponsor images	Official sponsor images
6	20	Practice	No sponsor images + soccer EC/WC words	Official sponsor images + neutral words
7	40	Test	No sponsor images + soccer EC/WC words	Official sponsor images + neutral words

EC/WC, European Championship/World Cup.

be interpreted as follows: a positive (negative) score means that the subjects responded faster (slower) when asked to group official sponsors with the above-mentioned positive words relating to sporting events than ambushers.

### 3.3. Survey measures

Involvement in football in general was measured via four items ('I am very interested in football,' 'Football is the most fascinating sport to me,' 'Football matters a lot to me,' 'Football is the most interesting sport to me' out of a 5-point rating scale; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*;  $\alpha = 0.83$ ; attributes adopted from Zaichkowsky, 1985). Involvement in the major global football events of the FIFA and UEFA under consideration was measured similarly, with the items being adapted to the context of the two events (e.g., 'I am very interested in the football World Cup and EURO events;'  $\alpha = 0.78$ ).

### 3.4. Results

Hypothesis 1 proposes that official sponsors are more closely associated with the sporting event than ambushers. The IAT measures this implicit belief about the connection between the brands and sporting events under consideration via reaction times. The results of the analysis of the reaction times reveal that the 98 participants have a stronger implicit association between official sponsors and words related to sporting events (congruent condition) compared to ambushers (incongruent condition;  $D = 0.882 (\pm 0.310)$ ,  $t(97) = 28.15$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $r = 0.94$ ). This is reflected by the different response latencies when categorizing the stimuli shown on the screen: The latencies were significantly lower when the stimuli were presented in the congruent conditions than in the incongruent conditions. The mean response time when participants were asked to pair sponsors with words related to the sporting events and ambushers with neutral words (congruent condition) was 712 ( $\pm 167$ ) ms, compared with 1166 ( $\pm 302$ ) ms when participants were asked to pair ambushers with words related to the sporting events and sponsors with neutral words (incongruent condition). The results thus support Hypothesis 1.

### 3.5. Discussion

Study 1 used IAT reaction times to indirectly measure implicit sponsorship success in terms of brand-event associations. Using the IAT rules out demand effects and social desirability biases because participants are unable to cognitively control their responses. The results of this test support Hypothesis 1 by showing that sponsors of the FIFA World Cup and the UEFA EURO generate stronger implicit associations between their brands and the event than ambushers. Thus, sponsors (versus ambushers) profit more from attaching their brand to the sporting events by leaving traces in the implicit memory of sport spectators. This effect is likely to be attributed to the setting in which sponsorship messages are communicated to consumers: Sporting event-induced emotions – in terms of both valence and intensity – influence the processing of sponsorship messages positively (Bal et al., 2010), whereas ambushers' communication is typically constrained by the sponsorship rights protection strategies that are implemented at global sporting events (e.g.,



as part of onsite policing; McKelvey & Grady, 2008). Thus, the likelihood that the emotional experiences of the sporting event shape implicit attitudes is smaller for ambushers than for sponsors.

The results of Study 1 provide further empirical support for unconscious processing of sponsorship messages. While Trendel and Warlop's (2005) IAT study reveals that implicit attitude transfers take place in sponsorship in general, in particular in experimental conditions of mental load (to simulate distractions during the processing of brand messages), Study 1 extends their results in two ways. First, the results of Study 1 indicate that the potential of associating a brand with a sponsored event based in the nature of the relationship between the two entities (official versus nonofficial) matters. This may explain why brand-event congruence was found to be irrelevant for implicit brand-event association transfers (Trendel & Warlop, 2005). Second, the attributes used in the IAT are not limited to one specific dimension (e.g., strong vs. weak), but refer to the general meaning covering a range of attributes that are linked to the sporting event, that is, in our case major global football events. This allows us to capture the implicit associations as an indicator of implicit attitudes.

Study 1 also extends the literature on the effectiveness of sponsorship, compared with ambushing. Previous studies considered explicit measures only (cf. McDaniel & Kinney, 1996, 1998; Michaelis, Woisetschläger, & Hartleb, 2008). For example, there is recent evidence that the disclosure of ambush practices adversely impacts the explicit attitudes to ambushers – in particular when individuals have a positive attitude toward the sponsorship and are highly involved in the event (Mazodier et al., 2012). Michaelis et al.'s (2008) longitudinal study that was conducted in the context of the FIFA World Cup reveals that the attitude change is more positive for official sponsors than for ambushers. Although not applying a within-subjects design over time (pre vs. post an event sponsorship), our results indicate that implicit attitudes can be influenced, too.

Other empirical studies assessing explicit attitudes found no differences between sponsors and ambushers or inconsistent results (cf. McDaniel & Kinney, 1996, 1998 with respect to brands of the categories fast food and automobiles). Thus, uncertainty remains with regard to explicit attitude measures – in particular about their antecedents and consequences – in response to sponsorship (versus ambushing). Increasing long-term awareness and positive explicit attitude formation outside the context of sporting mega-events are relevant goals to brands engaging in such communication. Below, we will derive hypotheses about the relevance of these measures in sponsorship (versus ambushing) communication.

#### **4. Awareness of and explicit attitudes to sponsors and ambushers**

##### ***4.1. Recall and recognition***

Recall and recognition measures have been used frequently in studies analyzing the effects of sponsorships and ambushing on the explicit memories of consumers (cf. Cornwell, Humphreys, Maguire, Weeks, & Tellegen, 2006; Johar & Pham, 1999; Johar, Pham, & Wakefield, 2006; Lardinois & Derbaix, 2001). Johar and Pham (1999) and Cornwell et al. (2006) show that the presence of competitors – who may be considered ambushers because they reach the public via the same platform of

communication as the sponsors – impairs consumers' awareness of the actual event sponsors. These studies used laboratory experimental settings, where participants were surveyed in situations of forced exposure and rather unusual press releases reported sponsorship and ambushing messages. Thus, the external validity of their results is limited.

In real life, official sponsors, as a contractual right, have access to a broad range of media for communication, such as board signage or interview backdrops, which are denied to ambushers (cf. Crow & Hoek, 2003; Payne, 1998; see also FIFA, 2009a). Sandler and Shani (1989, 1993) and McDaniel and Kinney (1996), in the context of the Olympic Games, and Portlock and Rose (2009), in the context of the FIFA World Cup, find that official sponsors achieve higher levels of awareness than ambushers. In their studies, awareness was measured in temporal closeness to the events (i.e., 2 weeks after the event in Sandler and Shani's (1993) field studies, immediately after the event in Portlock and Rose's (2009) study, and immediately after the television stimuli in McDaniel and Kinney's (1996) experimental study). In this study, it is argued that this awareness effect may hold true in periods when an event does not take place and neither sponsors nor ambushers implement advertising campaigns relating to the event.

Assessing long-term awareness is of great relevance for brands for two reasons. First, 'the first opportunity to choose and buy a brand will occur [...] after exposure to most mass media advertisements. Hence, experiments that measure the impact of advertising immediately after exposure are studying a quite different phenomenon than occurs in the world' (McQuarrie, 1998, p. 16). Second, sponsors seek to avoid confusion in the minds of consumers. Continuity in their sponsorships may be one way to increase the effectiveness of such sponsorships (versus ambush marketing) on a long-term basis.<sup>3</sup>

In Hypothesis 2, we propose that recall and recognition will be higher for sponsors of global sporting events than for ambushers, even during times when the events do not take place, because the association between a sponsor (versus ambusher) and an event will be explicitly memorized better (McDaniel & Kinney, 1996; Portlock & Rose, 2009; Sandler & Shani, 1989, 1993). Formally:

H2: Recall and recognition are higher for sponsors than for ambushers of global sporting events – even during times when the events do not take place.

#### ***4.2. Explicit attitudes and the protection of sponsorship rights***

On one hand, sponsorship program protection strategies seem necessary to enable sponsors to fully exploit the sponsorship and profit from their financial investments (McKelvey & Grady, 2008). On the other hand, Graham (1997) notes that the organizers of sporting events tend to overstate the importance of the protection of rights in sponsorship deals while bolstering their own financial position. The FIFA implemented their so-called 'rights protection program' in preparation for the World Cup 1998 in France in order to protect their sponsors from ambushers by collaborating with the police, customs authorities, patent offices, and public prosecutors (FIFA, 2009a). This program received great attention in the media before and during the FIFA World Cup 2006 in Germany (cf. Pfeil, 2005) and FIFA feels that it is necessary to justify their behavior to the public (e.g., on their

homepage, compare FIFA, 2009a). In 2008, the media reported excessive restrictions on spectators of the UEFA EURO in Austria and Switzerland – both in the stadium and in fan zones and public viewing areas (cf. SF, 2008). Spectators were not allowed to wear clothes that showed overt advertising messages in the stadium or drink any unlicensed beverages in official fan zones – both examples of protective regulations that were tightly controlled by UEFA (2007).

The degree to which consumers think the execution of the protection rights to inhibit ambushing is justified might be determined by two factors (Lee, Sandler, & Shani, 1997; Michaelis et al., 2008): the attitude held by the consumers to the commercialization of sporting events and the attitude to the organizers of the events.

The attitude to commercialization in sports represents the general view held by consumers of the marketing activities surrounding sporting events. Lee et al. (1997) point out that consumers may have negative attitudes to commercialization in sports due to the perception of over-commercialization and the impression that sport is losing its values and its amateur nature. It is unclear, however, to what degree this variable is relevant for the processing of sponsorship messages today, given that commercialization in sports also has positive effects. Kenyon and Palmer (2008), for example, argue that money from sponsors helps hosts of mega-events finance many facets of the sports environment, making spectators and sportspeople experience the events more favorably and intense. We propose that the attitude to commercialization in sports impacts the attitudes of consumers to the protection of sponsorship rights. Sport spectators who agree with, or tolerate, the predominance of consumption and commercialization in sports may acknowledge the business practices in the sponsorship market to a higher extent than consumers who are rather critical about such practices.

Furthermore, we expect the attitude to the event organizers to be another factor relevant to consumers' attitudes to the protection of the sponsorship rights. Several authors refer to spectators' attitudes to sporting events in general and examine the consequences for the brands that sponsor or ambush these events (cf. Grohs, Wagner, & Vsetecka, 2004; Michaelis et al., 2008; Speed & Thompson, 2000, the latter referring to the 'status of events'). This article focuses on the event organizers because consumers may think positively about a specific event (e.g., the FIFA World Cup, where national pride and involvement in the sport are highly relevant for fan identification; cf. Kim & Chalip, 2004) yet dislike the entity that governs the event (e.g., the FIFA; Jennings, 2011). Attitude to the event organizers addresses spectators' view on the organizers and how successful they are at delivering a fascinating and perfectly run event.

Our arguments are formally stated in Hypothesis 3a and 3b:

H3: The more positive consumers' attitudes are (a) to commercialization in sports and (b) to the event organizers, the more positively they evaluate the protection of the rights of official sponsors.

It is further proposed that there is a positive relationship between the attitude to commercialization in sports and the evaluation of the event organizers. Consumers who think that sport profits from commercialization may also acknowledge and appreciate the organizers and thus hold more positive attitudes to them. Today, the organizing institutions of mega-events can be considered businesses that generate

turnover comparable to global companies and make profit, while (and despite) pursuing their nonprofit goals to promote football and the associated values of fairness and solidarity worldwide (FIFA, 2007; UEFA, 2009). This may lead consumers who hold negative attitudes to the predominance of consumption and commercialization in sport to be more critical toward the organizers. For example, these consumers may question whether the organizers really use their income to make the sport and its events fascinating and accessible for everyone (Jennings, 2011). Steenberg and Tamboer (1998) provide evidence that sport as a practice is vulnerable to the acquisitiveness of the institutions. In addition, they argue that the institutions are at least partially driven by power, status, and money motives and may alter or even corrupt the sport and harm its ideals. Hypothesis 4 is therefore formulated as follows:

H4: The more positive consumers' attitudes are to commercialization in sports, the more positively they evaluate the event organizers.

Michaelis et al.'s (2008) study indicate that the general attitude of consumers to the protection of sponsorship rights may have a positive effect on the attitude to sponsors, whereas it may have a negative effect on the attitude to ambushers. (Un)fairness perception and justice theory (Folger, 1994) provides a theoretical rationale for this. Perceived unfairness has been shown to be a cause for individuals' defections – not only when individuals experience unfairness by themselves (cf. Keaveney, 1995 for consumers), but also when others are treated unfairly (cf. Kray & Lind, 2002 for co-workers). In the case of global sporting events, this would mean that consumers who are inclined to agree with the need for protection of sponsorship rights hold positive (negative) attitudes to sponsors (ambushers) because the respective brand's behavior in the marketplace is considered (in)appropriate. Hypothesis 5 is formally expressed as follows:

H5: The more positively consumers evaluate the protection of the rights of official sponsors, (a) the more positive their attitude to official sponsors and (b) the more negative their attitude to ambushers.

## **5. Study 2**

### **5.1. Participants**

A total of 1168 individuals [90.4% males, mean age 27.4 ( $\pm$ 9.6) years] participated in an online survey. Participants were highly involved both in football in general [ $M=4.68$  ( $\pm$ 0.71)] and in football mega-events – the FIFA World Cup and the UEFA EURO – in particular [ $M=4.35$  ( $\pm$ 0.81); see *Survey Measures* (5.3.) for the scales that were used]. All participants stated that they had followed the four most recent events prior to the survey through the media or in-person.

### **5.2. Design and procedure**

The online survey was posted on football-related web pages in January and February of 2009. The time frame ensured that long-term sponsoring and ambushing effects could be analyzed. The last FIFA World Cup prior to the study had taken place in

June and July 2006, the last UEFA EURO had taken place in June 2008, and the forthcoming event – the FIFA World Cup 2010 in South Africa – started in June 2010.

Participants were informed that the study is about sport spectators' opinion about global sporting events in football. Participants were not told about the purpose of the study in order to not prime them with the concept of sponsorship or ambush marketing. Items about the participants' fan behavior, their involvement with the events, and socio-demographics were asked first. Recall and recognition of brands that associate themselves with the FIFA World Cup and the UEFA Euro were assessed. Next, the latent variables were administered via standardized items. At the end of the study, participants were fully debriefed and thanked for their participation.

### **5.3. Measures and scale testing**

Participants were asked to think of and state brands that advertise in the context of the FIFA World Cup and the UEFA EURO, without prompting, to assess brand recall. As regards recognition, consumers were asked to indicate whether they were aware of the following brands in the context of the events: Adidas\*, Apple, Bitburger, Budweiser\*, Burger King, Castrol\*, Coca-Cola\*, Continental\*, Emirates\*, Good-year, Hyundai Kia Motors\*, Lufthansa, Nutella, MasterCard\*, McDonald's\*, Microsoft, Nike, Pepsi, Reebok, Siemens, Subway, and Visa (\* = official sponsors).

The construct measures for attitudes to commercialization in sports, to the event organizers, and to the protection of sponsorship rights were taken from the literature on sponsoring and ambushing and adjusted to fit the study (IOC, 1997; Lyberger & McCarthy, 2001; Michaelis et al., 2008; Shani & Sandler, 1998). Multiple item scales were used (see Appendix 1; 5-point rating scales; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Attitudes to the brands under consideration were measured via six items covering the aspects of liking, attractiveness, quality, meeting expectations, trust, and intention to recommend (see Appendix 1; 5-point rating scales; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*; cf. Vogel, Evanschitzky, & Ramaseshan, 2008). The explicit attitude measures relate to the six brands Adidas, Coca-Cola, and McDonald's (sponsors) and Nike, Pepsi, and Burger King (ambushers; see Study 1 for pretests on brand selection). Principal component factoring reveals loadings above or close to 0.60 for all items. Factor means were calculated for these latent variables. Two formative single-item indicators were calculated to represent consumers' attitudes to the sponsors and ambushers under examination.

Hypotheses 3–6 were tested applying the partial least squares (PLS) method of structural equation modeling. The software smartPLS was used. Appendix 1 shows the factor loadings of the measurement items. Appendix 2 presents the composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , and square root of the AVE, as well as the correlations between the constructs for the measurement model. The composite reliability values of all of the constructs were above the recommended level of 0.70, indicating adequate internal consistency (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Convergent validity is demonstrated as the AVE values for all constructs were higher than the suggested threshold value of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Comparing the square root of the AVE (bolded figures along the diagonal in Appendix 2) with the correlations between the constructs indicates that each

construct is more closely related to its own measures than to those of other constructs; discriminant validity is therefore supported (Chin, 1998).

The reliabilities of the reflective item scales (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) were above 0.70 as recommended by Nunally (1978). Involvement in football ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ) and involvement in the events under consideration ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ) were measured as in Study 1.

#### 5.4. Results

To test Hypothesis 2, the percentages of participants who recalled and recognized the sponsors and ambushers under consideration were compared within brand pairs. The results reveal that 28.3%, 46.6%, and 32.4% of the respondents were aware of Adidas, Coca-Cola, and McDonald's, respectively. 6.5%, 0.3%, and 0.3% of the participants remembered the ambushers Nike, Pepsi, and Burger King, respectively. The differences in recall between the pairs of brands are statistically significant ( $\chi^2(1) = 192.0$ ,  $p < 0.001$  for Adidas versus Nike;  $\chi^2(1) = 696.1$ ,  $p < 0.001$  for Coca-Cola versus Pepsi;  $\chi^2(1) = 435.4$ ,  $p < 0.001$  for McDonald's versus Burger King). Also, the sponsors were recognized more often than the ambushers: The percentages of participants who recognized the respective brands amount to 66.1% for Adidas versus 29.8% for Nike ( $\chi^2(1) = 306.9$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), 81.2% for Coca-Cola versus 7.4% for Pepsi ( $\chi^2(1) = 1286.3$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and 68.8% for McDonald's versus 5.7% for Burger King ( $\chi^2(1) = 992.6$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Thus our results fully support Hypothesis 2: the official sponsors of the FIFA World Cup and the UEFA EURO were recalled and recognized more often than the ambushers, with no events taking place at the time of assessment.

Table 2 shows the results for the path coefficients between the latent variables that are central to Hypotheses 3–6. 15.2% of the variance of the attitude to sponsors and 9.1% of the variance of the attitude to ambushers can be explained by the determining variables. The explanatory power of the model can be considered adequate, because latent variables are used as dependent variables and brand attitudes may be affected by factors other than sponsorship and ambushing communication (e.g., the quality of the products, traditional marketing instruments).

The results of testing the measurement model provide support for Hypothesis 3a and 3b: Consumers' attitude to the protection of sponsorship rights is positively

Table 2. Path coefficient results of the structural equation model.

H	Path coefficients	$\beta$	$p$	H Supported?
H3a	Attitude to commercialization in sports → Attitude to protection of sponsorship rights	0.342	***	✓
H3b	Attitude to event organizers → Attitude to protection of sponsorship rights	0.360	***	✓
H4	Attitude to commercialization in sports → Attitude to event organizers	0.428	***	✓
H5a	Attitude to protection of sponsorship rights → Attitude to official sponsors	0.390	***	✓
H5b	Attitude to protection of sponsorship rights → Attitude to ambushers	0.302	***	✗

Notes: ✓ hypothesis supported, ✗ hypothesis rejected, \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

influenced by both their attitude to commercialization in sports ( $\beta = 0.342$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and their attitude to the event organizers ( $\beta = 0.360$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Also, attitude to commercialization in sports has a significant impact on attitude to the protection of sponsorship rights ( $\beta = 0.428$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting Hypothesis 4.

Hypothesis 5a postulates a positive relationship between the attitude to the protection of sponsorship rights and the attitudes to sponsors. The results support this assumption ( $\beta = 0.390$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). As regards Hypothesis 5b, a negative relationship between attitude to the protection of sponsorship rights and attitudes to ambushers was proposed. However, as Table 2 shows, a positive relationship can be observed ( $\beta = 0.302$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, consumers who are inclined to agree with the need for protection of sponsorship rights do not ‘punish’ ambushers but rather hold more positive attitudes to these brands. Thus, Hypothesis 5b is rejected.

## **5.5. Discussion**

Study 2 provides support for Hypothesis 2 – recall and recognition being higher for sponsors (versus ambushers) – and for Hypotheses 3–5a. The latter confirm the interrelationships that were proposed between attitudes to commercialization in sports, the event organizers, and the protection of sponsorship rights, as well as attitude to brands that sponsor the events under consideration. The finding that participants’ opinions about ambushing as a valid marketing instrument do not negatively affect their explicit attitude judgment of ambushing brands, as proposed in Hypothesis 5b, was unexpected. Study 2 even found a positive effect of attitude to the protection of sponsorship rights on ambusher’s attitudes.

Wirtz and Kimes’ (2007) findings on consumers’ perceptions of unfairness in price contexts may provide some insights into this process: they suggest that industry norms may be relevant for consumers’ perceptions of unfair behaviors of brands. Applied to the sponsorship market, this would mean that the familiarity of consumers with ambush marketing might have eliminated their sense of unfair behavior (cf. Crimmins & Horn, 1996 who provide some examples of ambush marketing campaigns beginning with the 1984 Olympics). Indifference of consumers to the use of ambush marketing has been noted in previous studies (Shani & Sandler, 1998, who considered the 1996 Olympic Games held in Atlanta; Portlock & Rose, 2009, who examined sponsorship effects of the 2006 FIFA World Cup in the UK). Also, Humphreys et al. (2010) note that counter-ambushing communications by sponsors can even strengthen an ambusher-event relationship in memory. These factors may have contributed to this finding of Study 2. Thus, not only awareness, but also stigmatizing public disclosure may be needed to impact the attitude to ambushers negatively (Mazodier & Quester, 2010; Mazodier et al., 2012). Without such additional information, sport spectators’ attitudes may not be affected by their general sense that a brand’s ambush behavior is inappropriate or unfair.

## **6. General discussion**

### **6.1. Findings and management implications**

The combined results of the two studies show that, during times when no event takes place, sponsors of mega-events generate higher brand awareness and more positive

implicit attitudes to their brands than ambushers. Explicit attitudes to both sponsors and ambushers are positively affected by sport spectators' attitude to the protection of sponsorship rights. Attitude to commercialization in sport and the evaluation of event organizers determines the attitude to the protection of sponsorship rights.

The results of this research are meaningful to both managers of global brands and event organizers. On the one hand, sponsorship-linked marketing (versus ambushing) is an effective strategy to increase brand awareness and implicit associations to global sporting events that are generally liked. Thus, one can recommend to stakeholders to commit themselves to long-term sponsorship engagements of events that produce emotional, formative experiences to its spectators.<sup>4</sup> To increase the likelihood of somatic markers entering consumers' implicit memory, sponsors should ensure that they profit most from the positive and unique emotional experiences triggered by the sponsored events. Framing messages exclusively with actions of the event that are linked to rewards by sport spectators would be one means to use contents or tools that competitors cannot legally use in their ambush campaigns. Such rewards can also be related to memories of past events, event history, dreams, and even childhood experiences of sport spectators; the stimuli triggering them are highly arousing and often trigger innate stimulus-response mechanisms (Königstorfer, 2009).

Also, sponsors should guarantee their prominence in the marketplace (cf. Johar & Pham, 1999; Pham & Johar, 2001; Wakefield, Becker-Olsen, & Cornwell, 2007) and maintain the brands' exposure levels to sport spectators as highly as possible (cf. Bennett, 1999; McDaniel & Kinney, 1998; Shani & Sandler, 1998; Turley & Shannon, 2000; Wakefield et al., 2007) – strategies that can also be used by ambushers. Burmann and Nitschke (2007) recommend that sponsors invest three times the investment on the sponsorship rights on marketing communications in the mass media in order to reinforce their association with the event. Johar et al. (2006) provide empirical evidence that this is particularly important for sponsors who are not plausibly related to the event.

Ambush strategies are still a threat to official sponsors because ethical and fairness concerns about the practice of ambush marketing appear not to harm evaluations of the ambushers' brands. Ambushers may therefore use any possibility to create opportunities that implicitly or explicitly connect their brand to the emotions and rewards triggered by the event, such as sponsorship of single athletes that participate in the event and likely make consumers feel emotionally attached. Despite the growing popularity of ambush marketing and the increasing concerns of organizers, consumers appear not to be reactant to its use, most likely because they do not perceive any constraint on their freedom of opinion and choice (i.e., reaction does not play a major role; Brehm, 1966).<sup>5</sup> This finding ties in with Shani and Sandler's (1998), Lyberger and McCarthy's (2001), Séguin et al.'s (2005), and Portlock and Rose's (2009) findings concerning consumers' apathy toward the practice of ambushing at the Olympic Games, the NFL Super Bowl, and the FIFA World Cup, respectively.

Therefore a 'must-have' strategy from the perspective of sponsors is a guarantee of the protection of sponsorship rights legally, as part of the contract between the sponsors and the organizers, and that the organizer is responsible for ensuring the rights before and during the event. Shani and Sandler (1998) suggest certain steps that event organizers can take in order to help protect their official sponsors from



ambushers. However, both sponsors and organizers should note that consumers might potentially feel that their freedom of choice is threatened by heavy insistence on regulations concerning sponsorship rights (cf. SF, 2008). In this case, public relations managers need to exercise caution about consumer perspectives and the way they are influenced by media reports.

## **6.2. Limitations and outlook**

As any piece of empirical research, the two studies are not free of limitations. One limitation of both studies is that effects other than sponsorship may have influenced participants' awareness of and attitudes to brands. This includes all marketing mix instruments, in particular any form of a brand's advertising related to sports and sponsorship of other events, such as the Olympic Games or national football events. If consumers implicitly memorized such associations, rather than those triggered by the events under consideration, the results may be biased. Future research may use more controlled settings and fictitious brands to address this limitation.

Another limitation is that the samples are quite homogenous with regard to their involvement with the sponsored event. One advantage of this is to minimize the variances that are inherent to the sport spectator segments; at the same time, however, the data do not allow for comparisons to other segments based on this psychographic measure or generalizations. Also, younger and male student respondents are overrepresented in our sample compared to the general population. Future studies may use samples from a nonstudent population to increase the external validity of the findings.

Although the studies used global football events as study contexts, the findings of our studies can be transferred to other major global sporting events, because ambush marketing is a concern not only for event organizers such as FIFA and UEFA and their sponsors but also for events such as the Olympic Games, the NFL Super Bowl, and others. Our theoretical arguments regarding unconscious processing may be used to explain advertising and sponsorship effects in general, independent of the context.

Future research may address the question of how unconscious processes contribute to the awareness of sponsors (versus ambushers) and how these affect consumers' attitudes, while controlling for their exposure to media. There is recent evidence from social psychology showing that implicit and explicit measures of evaluations guide different types of behaviors (Asendorpf, Banse, & Mücke, 2002). Implicit and explicit attitudes may therefore have different effects on the behaviors related to the brands (e.g., when consumers purchase a sponsor's products or wear sponsored merchandise). Such research would extend the findings of previous studies that show a positive relationship between explicit attitude to sponsors and the behavioral intentions of consumers to buy the products of the sponsors (cf. Madrigal, 2001; Speed & Thompson, 2000). Future research may also be devoted to find out whether consumers feel constrained by over-protective governing body or event owners. The perception of lack of freedom of choice may induce avoidance behavior of both brands and events.

Despite the many questions with regard to the relevance of unconscious and conscious processing in sponsorship and ambushing, the two studies contribute to this lively field of research. We hope to motivate both researchers and marketers to

make use of and extend these findings, use and critically reflect on the tools that were proposed – in particular the IAT method to measure the implicit effects of sponsorship and ambushing.

## Notes

1. An example for a somatic marker that may have influenced older German consumers' implicit memory is the role of Adidas in the FIFA World Cup 1954, where Germany unexpectedly won the final against Hungary with the help of Adolf Dassler's (the company's founder) football shoes. This reward is stored in the internal memory, related to the brand, and may still today – Adidas is a partner sponsor of this event – explain consumers' buying behavior and their reaction to sponsorship messages.
2. Joga Bonito means 'play beautifully' in Portuguese. It was implemented as a social network service and created by Nike and Google. Burger King engaged the German goalkeeper Oliver Kahn and offered a special King Kahn menu, showed commercials on TV, and launched various online advertising campaigns during the events in 2004 and 2006. How You Football is the name of Pepsi's ambush marketing campaign with various famous players as celebrity endorsers (David Beckham, Ronaldinho, Thierry Henry, Frank Lampard, Cesc Fabregas, and Lionel Messi).
3. Shani and Sandler (1998) and Johar et al. (2006) provide evidence that ambushers' campaigns trigger some confusion for consumers about the sponsorship. Long-term engagements in sponsorships may prevent this. FIFA, for example, classifies their sponsors into three categories: FIFA partners, FIFA World Cup sponsors, and national supporters. FIFA aims to develop long-term relationships with brands – especially with their partners who own rights to a wide range of activities and exclusivity in marketing communication tools (FIFA, 2009b). An examination of the brands that sponsored the FIFA World Cups in 2002, 2006, and 2010 reveals that 15 brands sponsored either two or all three events; only 7 brands sponsored only one event (this mainly includes brands that have historical roots in the host countries such as NTT, Deutsche Telekom, or MTN). These figures indicate that the brands seek continuity in their sponsorship engagement.
4. It should be noted that the goal of the studies was not to compare long-term sponsorships with short-term sponsorships. However, empirical evidence would be needed to substantiate the claim that implicit attitudes are more favorable for long-term (versus short-term) sponsorships. Previous research shows that explicit evaluations of brands differ between highly and lowly committed sponsors (Menon & Kahn, 2003).
5. The means of the three variables under consideration are  $M = 2.27 (\pm 1.13)$  for the item 'It is exaggerated how well the official sponsors are protected in the context of the World and European Championships' (reversely coded),  $M = 2.95 (\pm 1.12)$  for the item 'Protection of the official sponsors of the World and European Championships is highly necessary to finance the events' and  $M = 3.02 (\pm 1.10)$  for the item 'I think it is right that the sponsorship rights of official sponsors are well protected' (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*). This suggests that reactance to the use of ambush marketing is low to moderate in consumers.

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**Appendix 1. Constructs, measurement items, item loadings, and scale reliabilities used in study 2**

Constructs	Measurement Items	Item Loadings	$\alpha$
Attitude to [B]	I strongly trust in [B]	0.88	0.93 $\leq \alpha \leq$ 0.96
	[B] is a likable brand	0.88	
	Products of [B] always meet my expectations	0.88	
	[B] is an attractive brand	0.73	
	Products of [B] are of high quality	0.73	
	I would recommend products of [B] to good friends	0.69	
Attitude to the event organizers	FIFA and UEFA organize the World and European Soccer Championships perfectly	0.85	0.90
	I strongly trust in the organizational capabilities of FIFA and UEFA	0.84	
	FIFA and UEFA do very well in organizing the World and European Soccer Championships	0.80	
Attitude to the protection of sponsorship rights	Protection of the official sponsors of the World and European Championships is highly necessary to finance the events	0.79	0.80
	I think it is right that the sponsorship rights of official sponsors are well protected	0.79	
	It is exaggerated how well the official sponsors are protected in the context of the World and European Championships (reversely coded)	0.77	
Attitude to commercialization in sports	Commercialization in sport negatively affects the sport (reversely coded)	0.83	0.82
	Because of commercialization, the sport is not as attractive as it used to be (reversely coded)	0.81	
	Commercialization in sport helps sport to develop positively	0.76	
	The quality of mega events such as the World or European Championship is enhanced by commercialization of the sport	0.69	

[B], Brand: Adidas, Nike, McDonald's, Burger King, Coca-Cola, and Pepsi, respectively.

**Appendix 2. Correlations between the latent variables in study 2**

	Composite reliability	AVE	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4	5
1 Attitude to commercialization in sports	0.960	0.859	0.826	<b>0.927</b>				
2 Attitude to the protection of sponsorship rights	0.960	0.888	0.804	0.496	<b>0.942</b>			
3 Attitude to the event organizers	0.979	0.939	0.898	0.428	0.506	<b>0.969</b>		
4 Attitude to sponsors (single formative item measure)	–	–	–	0.276	0.390	0.420	–	
5 Attitude to ambushers (single formative item measure)	–	–	–	0.186	0.302	0.299	0.651	–

AVE, average variance extracted;  $\alpha$ , Cronbach's alpha.

Note: The bold numbers along the diagonal are the square root of the variance shared between the latent variables and their measures. Numbers not along the diagonal are the correlations between latent variables. For discriminant validity, the numbers along the diagonal should be higher than those not along the diagonal (Chin, 1998).