

Mega versus local event sponsorships

Sponsorship
and goodwill

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Abstract

Purpose – The present study aims to examine whether event size has a significant impact on consumers' perceptions of goodwill. In the relationship between event size and perceived goodwill, sponsorship duration and sponsor-event congruence are tested as moderating variables.

Design/methodology/approach – This study conducts an experiment with a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ between-subjects factorial design.

Findings – The results show the main effects of event size on perceived goodwill, and the moderating effects of sponsorship duration and sponsor-event congruence in the relationship between event size and perceived goodwill. Also, regression analyses test the relationships among the dependent variables including perceived goodwill, attitudes toward the sponsor, and purchase intentions.

Originality/value – Marketing practitioners may discover the merits of a corporation sponsoring local events at lower costs, and the importance of duration and congruency.

Keywords Sponsorship-linked marketing, Perceived goodwill, Local sponsorship, Sponsor-event congruence, Sponsorship duration

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Though sponsorship is typically a part of an organization's overall marketing communication strategy, it has been considered less commercial than other forms of marketing (e.g. advertising, promotions) because it generates consumers' feelings of goodwill (Meenaghan, 2001). In sponsorship, goodwill is defined as consumers' perceived positive attitude toward a sponsor supporting and facilitating an event, team, or cause in which they are passionate (Dees *et al.*, 2008). However, the common use of mega event sponsorships by large corporations may be more likely to expose their commercial intentions to consumers (Meenaghan and Shipley, 1999). Thus, it may be more difficult for companies to generate consumers' perceptions of goodwill when they sponsor a mega event (Chadwick, 2007). Given the millions of dollars that companies spend on mass sport sponsorships, consumers do consider these highly commercialized compared to other sponsorship categories such as social causes, environmental programs, and elite arts (Meenaghan and Shipley, 1999).

When consumers realize a company sponsors an event, they tend to feel goodwill toward the sponsor because (1) they have good feelings about the event that spill over to the sponsor, and (2) they realize the event would be less likely to occur without the support of the sponsors (Madrigal, 2004; McDonald, 1991). Some corporations choose to support local grassroots sport events to highlight their sincerity. For example, the Dick's Sporting Goods, Inc. established the Dick's Sporting Goods Foundation in 2011 to support its charitable and philanthropic activities such as a five-year, US\$500,000 commitment to Little League® Baseball and Softball in support of its local districts and leagues across the country (The Dick's Sporting Goods Foundation, 2021). As such, understanding the key factors of the big



corporations' willingness to sponsor such small local sport events in this type of sponsorship activity appear to be particularly important.

Despite the merits of local event sponsorship, most sponsorship research has focused on the effectiveness of mega event sponsorship. Further, even though goodwill is a defining characteristic of sponsorship, few studies have examined its antecedents in a sponsorship context. Previous studies have examined the outcomes of goodwill, such as purchase intentions and attitude toward the sponsor (Dees *et al.*, 2008; Rifon *et al.*, 2004); however, studies have rarely examined the factors that lead to perceptions of goodwill.

The current study attempts to address gaps in the sponsorship literature by examining differences in consumer perceptions of mega versus local event sponsorships. As can be seen in Figure 1, the present study investigates whether event size affects consumers' perceptions of goodwill. In addition, it is anticipated that sponsorship duration and sponsor-event congruence will moderate the relationship between event size and the outcome variable of goodwill. Finally, it is expected that goodwill ultimately influences attitudes toward the sponsor, subsequently affecting purchase intentions.

Literature review

Attribution theory

Attribution theory deals with the information people use in making causal inferences, and with what they do with the information to answer causal questions (Kelley, 1973). Prior research (e.g. Folkes, 1988; Kelly, 1973) has found the crucial concepts underlying Heider's (1958) attribution theory. This theory presumed that each individual acted as a naïve psychologist or an amateur scientist, and attempted to figure out the reason why a certain situation had occurred based on commonsense explanations. Attribution theory has been popularly applied to understand consumers' perceptions of cause-and-effect relationships in the domain of consumer behavior. Indeed, previous consumer psychology studies have employed attribution theory in a variety of contexts, including celebrity endorsements (Folkes, 1988) and cause-related marketing in sponsorship (Dean, 2002; Deitz *et al.*, 2012; Rifon *et al.*, 2004).

Dean (2002) suggested that consumers try to understand why a sponsor financially supported an event. The research particularly attempted to find consumers' commonsense

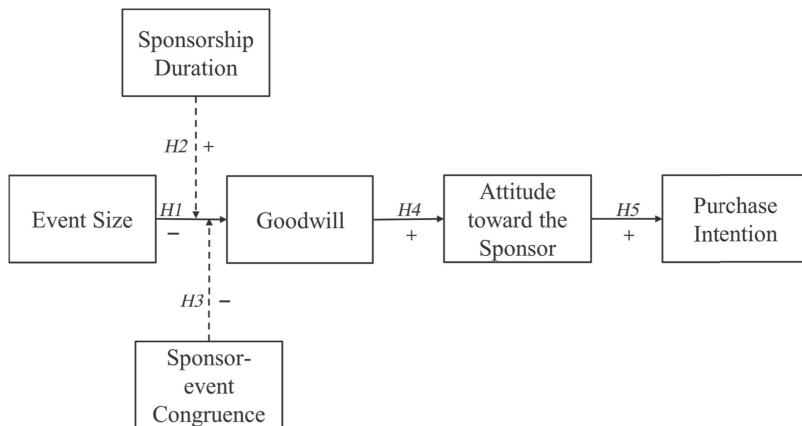


Figure 1.
Conceptual framework

Note(s): Dashed lines are moderation effects

explanation of why sponsorships occurred in a sponsor's philanthropic motivation to support an event. [Dean \(2002\)](#) identified that positive attributions (e.g. altruism) significantly affected consumers' perceived corporate community relations. [Rifon et al. \(2004\)](#) identified that sponsor-cause congruence generated strong consumer attributions of a sponsor's altruistic motives. [Deitz et al. \(2012\)](#) found that consumers' social identification with the sponsored event is positively related to the favorability of their perceived attributions of sponsor motives. They also found that consumers' perceived attributions of sponsor motives had a positive effect on their perceived sponsor-event fit. [Plewa et al. \(2016\)](#) identified that altruistic motive attributions positively affected a sponsor's CSR image. Likewise, consumers' attributions of sponsors' altruistic motives play an important role in improving sponsorship outcomes.

Sponsor image and reputation

It is broadly known that sponsorship is effective in establishing positive brand and/or corporate image in the long term ([Pope and Voges, 2000](#); [Rajaretnam, 1994](#)). Previous studies identified that sponsor image was positively affected by team attachment ([Tsiotsou and Alexandris, 2009](#)), event attachment ([Filo et al., 2010](#)), charity motives ([Filo et al., 2010](#)), sports involvement ([Ko et al., 2008](#)), and sponsorship awareness ([Ko et al., 2008](#); [Pope and Voges, 2000](#)). Meanwhile, sponsor image had positive impacts on purchase intentions ([Filo et al., 2010](#); [Ko et al., 2008](#); [Pope and Voges, 2000](#); [Tsiotsou and Alexandris, 2009](#)), event participation intentions ([Filo et al., 2010](#)), and word of mouth communication ([Tsiotsou and Alexandris, 2009](#)).

Corporations benefit from sponsoring mega sport events in that the sponsoring corporation can reach a large audience at the events, and the events' fame, popularity, or other positive attributes can transfer to the brand image ([Gwinner and Eaton, 1999](#); [Smith, 2004](#)). However, the wide use of mega sport event sponsorships by companies can also expose their commercial intentions to consumers so that the sponsor's brand reputation may be damaged. According to [Desmarais et al. \(2021\)](#), the worst scenario of sponsorship is that the sponsorship activity damages the sponsor's reputation by generating ill-will instead of goodwill with the public. Hence, it may be less likely these companies will obtain consumers' perceptions of goodwill when they sponsor a mega sport event.

Sponsorship and goodwill

[McCroskey and Teven \(1999\)](#) consider goodwill as one of the dimensions of source credibility in which expertness and trustworthiness are included. Goodwill can be conceptualized in the "caring" construct ([McCroskey, 1992](#)). [McCroskey](#) suggests the three elements which may cause a person to be seen as more caring: understanding, empathy, and responsiveness. Understanding, empathy, and responsiveness are defined as knowing another person's ideas, feelings, and needs, a person's identification with another person's feelings, and a person acknowledging another person's communicative attempts, respectively ([McCroskey, 1992](#)). [McCroskey and Teven \(1999\)](#) assert that goodwill should be carefully considered in a communication process since it is a meaningful predictor of believability and likeableness.

In sponsorship, the goodwill factor is driven by consumers' belief that "commercial sponsorship directly benefits sports, the arts, and many other activities" ([Meenaghan, 2001](#), p. 197). That is, consumers believe that a sponsor's investment benefits a sponsee by reducing a sport organization's expenses ([Speed and Thompson, 2000](#)). Prior research has compared sponsorship to advertising when discussing its attributes. Consumers may recognize that advertising is more commercial than sponsorship since sponsorship entails a paid fee for potential marketing communication values in the future, while advertising provides a more

knowable and controlled communication (Cornwell *et al.*, 2005). The benefit of goodwill from sponsoring events can decrease when consumers are aware that sponsorship is commercial (Messner and Reinhard, 2012). Likewise, goodwill is one of the significant attitudinal constructs a brand benefits from by sponsoring activities.

According to Dees *et al.* (2008), goodwill had the greatest impact on consumers' intentions to support the corporate sponsors via purchasing behaviors among the predictors: attitude toward the sponsor, goodwill, and fan involvement. Eddy and Cork (2019) identified that perceived goodwill toward the sponsor had positive impacts on consumers' sponsor behavioral intentions directly and indirectly through sponsor image. These results may be caused by consumers' perceptions that sponsorship is less commercial than traditional advertising, and their goodwill is diminished when they perceive the sponsorship activities as insincere (Olson, 2010; Speed and Thompson, 2000).

The effectiveness of event size on goodwill

Consumers try to understand why a corporation sponsors a sport event (Dean, 2002). Kelley's (1973) discounting principle suggests that an attribution for an action is minimized when the action is explained by an alternative attribution. Consumers may evaluate a sponsor more positively when they perceive the sponsor's intention to support a sport event without external attributions (i.e. commercial intentions) than when they find the cause through the external attribution. The former is more likely to happen in local event sponsorships than in mega event sponsorships since consumers may recognize it is hard for local sport events to secure operating funds through other sources (e.g. ticket sales and broadcasting rights) (Gwinner, 1997).

The present study regards an event as a mega event when it satisfies the following criteria: large scale, international significance, mass popular appeal, considerable economic impacts on the host community, and considerable media coverage (Horne, 2007; Roche, 2000). Meanwhile, a local event is defined as an event that is relatively small in scale, rooted in one place, appeals mostly to residents of a specific community, and is designed specifically for local consumption (Getz, 2008; Hall, 1989).

Several previous studies have conceptually suggested that a company benefits from sponsoring a local event compared to a mega event sponsorship. Consumers tend to recognize that the smaller or more local the sponsored event, the more sincere the sponsoring company appears in its sponsorship activities (McDonald, 1991). Smith (2004) pointed out that consumers recognized altruism in local sponsorship and considered it more sincere. Plewa *et al.* (2016) identified that sponsoring a grassroots sporting club generated greater altruistic attributions for the sponsor than did sponsoring a national club. However, large corporations sponsoring mega events might be a dangerous marketing communication strategy as consumers' perceived sincerity of the sponsor might be at risk if leveraging or publicity highlights the commercial objectives of the sponsor (Speed and Thompson, 2000). The sincerity and altruism are obtained through the local event sponsorship since sponsorship is more than only desirable and is necessary for survival for local events (McDonald, 1991).

Similarly, sponsorship activities have been perceived as "good thing to do" (McDonald, 1991) and it has been argued that firm sponsoring a small event generates goodwill. Gwinner (1997) argued that consumers viewed a brand sponsoring a small event as providing services to attendees rather than as promoting the brand since they thought small events often suffered from a lack of financial supports. Also, Cornwell *et al.* (2005) noted that community-based sponsorships seek to develop goodwill. Thus,

- H1. A corporate sponsor will generate greater perceptions of goodwill when it sponsors a local event than when it sponsors a mega event.

Interaction effects between event size and sponsorship duration

Previous research has identified the effectiveness of sponsorship duration on consumer responses such as sponsoring brand awareness (d'Astous and Bitz, 1995), the perceived brand equity (Cornwell *et al.*, 2001), the overall fit between a sponsor and a sponsee (Woisetschläger *et al.*, 2017), and sponsorship motives (Woisetschläger *et al.*, 2017). However, Quester and Farrelly (1998) found the duration effect was not significant in terms of brand loyalty in consumers' minds. Quester and Farrelly specifically found consumers showed insignificantly different sponsor-event association scores among two, three, and four years repeated sponsorships in the Grand Prix. The lack of consensus in the effectiveness of sponsorship duration might occur because the previous studies focused on mega events in general, not paying attention to local or small event sponsorship in particular.

A local event requires sponsors' financial or in-kind support to operate the event. It is hard for the event managers to find independent monetary sources, such as ticket sales and broadcasting rights, which become revenues of a mega sport event. Thus, consumers may perceive that a local event needs more support from corporate sponsors than does a mega event. For this reason, a corporation's local event sponsorship over multiple years may be considered sincere since its continuous support helps operate the event. In addition, consumers perceive a brand in longer duration of a sponsorship relationship as producing greater commitment and investment to the sponsored event (Ruth and Strizhakova, 2012). The longer sponsorship relationship thus enhances perception of the sponsor's authenticity (Cornwell, 2019). Yet, few consumers may consider a corporate sponsor of a mega event supporting the event only with the pure intention of creating a successful event operation even though the corporation makes a long-term sponsorship contract. Instead, they may perceive more commercial intent by the sponsoring corporation. Consumers may perceive it as more sincere when a corporation sponsors a local event for multiple years than when they view a mega sponsorship with a multiple-year contract, a local sponsorship with a one-time contract, and a mega sport sponsorship with a one-time contract. This inference allows us to expect the likelihood of an interaction effect between event size and consumer responses. This idea is supported by Smith's (2004) suggestion that the interaction between event status and sponsorship duration influences consumers' perceived sincerity and quality of a sponsor. Thus,

- H2. Sponsorship duration will moderate the effectiveness of event size on consumers' perceptions of goodwill. In specific, the effectiveness of event size on consumers' perceptions of goodwill in H1 will be more pronounced in the long duration than in the short duration condition.

Interaction effects between event size and sponsor-event fit

More attributional process is generated when people view unexpected or incongruent behaviors than when they view expected or congruent actions (Hastie, 1984). Accordingly, the incongruence between a sponsor and its cause elicits an attributional process including cognitive evaluation and elaboration (Rifon *et al.*, 2004). This elaboration process generates resistance to a positive message (Petty and Cacioppo, 1981) since greater elaboration and resistance draw consumers' judgments regarding the central information in a sponsorship message (Rifon *et al.*, 2004). Therefore, an elaboration process stimulated by incongruence between a sponsor and its cause may encourage consumers to resist a sponsorship message. Rifon *et al.* (2004) claimed that a high congruence sponsorship did not yield as many elaborations as a low congruence sponsorship. Hence, sponsor-event congruence may strengthen consumers' beliefs in sponsor motives to support an event, whereas sponsor-event incongruence may generate skepticism in sponsor motives.

Accordingly, sponsor-event congruence conditions may not confuse consumers' thinking process in causal inferences regarding the relationship between a sponsor and an event. However, sponsor-event incongruence conditions may make it impossible for consumers to infer the sponsor-event relationship through commonsense explanations. When a sport brand sponsors a local sport event, consumers are more likely to consider the brand intends to support the event operation than when a sport brand sponsors a mega sport event. In these two conditions, consumers' attributional processes may not be interrupted by sponsor-event incongruence situations. However, sponsor-event congruence conditions may mute the effectiveness of event size. Thus, the interaction between event size and sponsor-event congruence is expected.

Prior research found some evidence relevant to interaction effects between event size and sponsor-event fit. [d'Astous and Bitz \(1995\)](#) identified interaction effects between the nature of the sponsorship (commercial vs philanthropic) and sponsor-event fit on the sponsorship's and the sponsor's images. Low sponsor event fit can produce positive effects when consumers see the sponsorship as philanthropic ([d'Astous and Bitz, 1995](#)). Local sport event sponsorships may elicit more philanthropic perception than do mega sport event sponsorships. In this context, interaction effects between sport event size and sponsor-event congruence are expected. Similarly, [Speed and Thompson \(2000\)](#) found significant interaction effects between perceived event status and sponsor-event fit on sponsorship responses including favorability, interest, and intention to use the sponsor's product with negative directions. Speed and Thompson also identified that the interaction term was negatively correlated with perceived sincerity. This particular result suggests that the stronger a sponsor-event fit is, the weaker the effect of event status on perceived sincerity becomes. They suggest that high-status events include major sporting events such as the Olympics, the FIFA World Cups, and the Grand Prix. In addition, a suitable cause should be supported to show an organization's goodwill ([Chang and Liu, 2012](#)). Thus,

- H3.* Sponsor-event congruence will moderate the effectiveness of event size on consumers' perceptions of goodwill. In specific, the effectiveness of event size on consumers' perceptions of goodwill in *H1* will be more pronounced in the low congruence than in the high congruence condition.

Relationships among dependent variables

According to [Meenaghan \(2001\)](#), consumers have an intense emotional response to sponsorship activities since earnings from sponsors enable a sponsee to operate an event. In turn, a sponsoring company's goodwill toward a sponsee influences consumers' attitudes and behaviors toward the brand ([Mason, 2005](#)). Also, unlike advertising which is perceived as direct with obvious intent to persuade, sponsorship is an indirect and disguised persuasion process ([Mason, 2005](#)). These factors, combined with the goodwill from sponsorship, decrease a consumer's defense mechanisms toward a sponsoring brand ([Mason, 2005](#)). In addition, [Dees et al. \(2008\)](#) found a significant and positive correlation between goodwill and sponsor attitudes. [Chang \(2012\)](#) suggested sponsorship generates perceived goodwill, which in turn enhances sponsor attitudes. Thus,

- H4.* Consumers' perceptions of goodwill will positively influence their attitudes toward the sponsor typically.

Sponsorship studies have illustrated the effectiveness of sponsorship in the perspective of the sequential path from the attitude toward the sponsoring brand to purchase intention ([Gwinner and Bennett, 2008](#); [Wang et al., 2012](#)). [Speed and Thompson \(2000\)](#) additionally found that attitude toward the sponsor was positively associated with consumers' intentions to use the product of the sponsoring brand. Thus,

H5. Attitude toward the sponsor will positively affect purchase intentions.

Method

Participants and study design

Two hundred and eighty adults (50.7% female) living in the Houston Metropolitan area in the United States participated in an online survey after being recruited by a research firm. This particular area was chosen since a local sporting event held in Houston was used in the stimulus materials of the current experiment. The participants' average age was 42.56. The participants were randomly assigned to one of the eight conditions created by a 2 (event size) \times 2 (sponsorship duration) \times 2 (sponsor-event congruence) between-subjects factorial design.

Pretest

A pretest was conducted to select the most appropriate and inappropriate brands with sport events in terms of sponsor-event congruence. Before conducting the pretest, we selected one mega and one local sport events. The US Open is considered as a mega sport event since its physical size is large in terms of the number of averaged TV audiences (i.e. 2.85 million viewers in 2018) (Lewis, 2018) and the projected total revenue (i.e. \$350 million in 2018) (Badenhausen, 2018). The Houston Fall Festival Open is considered as a local sport event because it is a non-profit tennis tournament annually held in Houston with limitations to reach of audience within the local community.

To minimize any expected confounding effect between high- and low-congruence sponsoring brands, only retail companies including Dick's Sporting Goods, Walmart, Kroger, CVS Pharmacy, Best Buy, and The Home Depot were considered as candidate brands. The combination of six brands and two events created twelve pairs. The pretest participants ($n = 24$) were recruited from a university located in the Southwest region of the United States. Information concerning the US Open and the Houston Fall Festival Open Tennis was provided to the participants before they answer questions. Thereafter, they rated each pair of the twelve conditions on the scale items of sponsor-event congruence (Speed and Thompson, 2000) and brand awareness (Yoo and Donthu, 2001).

The respondents rated Dick's Sporting Goods and The Home Depot as the highest- and lowest-fit sponsors of both sport events, respectively (see Table 1). In addition, the t -test result identified the awareness of the two corporations was statistically not significant ($M_{\text{Dick's}} = 6.42$, $M_{\text{Home Depot}} = 6.54$, t -value = 0.54, $p > 0.05$). Thus, they were selected as congruent and incongruent sponsors.

Sponsor	Congruence with the US Open		Congruence with the Houston Fall Festival Open	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Dick's Sporting Goods	6.06	1.35	5.83	1.20
Walmart	4.65	1.60	4.81	1.28
CVS Pharmacy	4.28	1.66	4.26	1.73
Kroger	4.19	1.58	4.51	1.65
Best Buy	3.89	1.59	4.43	1.49
The Home Depot	3.43	1.81	3.82	1.55

Note(s): *M* = average of three 7-point scale items. *SD* = standard deviation

Table 1.
Pretest results

Stimuli and procedures

Eight full-page color print advertisements were created to embody each of the eight conditions in which Dick's Sporting Goods or The Home Depot sponsors the US Open or the Houston Fall Festival Open in 2019 or from 2019 to 2023. The advertisements were carefully designed to control any confounding variables. First, the size and quality of the layouts were identical. Second, we used the same background picture appearing on the left-hand side of the page in which a tennis player was serving on a tennis court. The athlete's face and brands of the racquet, shoes, and sportswear were not exposed. Third, the two logos of an event and a sponsoring brand were located in the middle of the page. Fourth, each advertisement contained an identical copy, except for the names of a sponsor and an event (e.g. Dick's Sporting Goods is a proud sponsor of the US Open 2019), appearing above their logos. Fifth, a short description of the corresponding event (i.e. The US Open Tennis is one of the Grand Slam tennis tournaments annually held in the United States/The Houston Fall Festival Open Tennis is a local tennis tournament annually held in Houston, Texas) was represented in the lower center of the page. The participants randomly received one of the eight fictitious print-ads. After being allowed to view each assigned advertisement for thirty seconds, they answered experiment questions.

Measures

Dependent variables. To measure dependent variables, Dees *et al.*'s (2008) goodwill, Mackenzie and Lutz's (1989) sponsor attitudes, and Yi's (1990) purchase intention scale items were employed.

Independent variables. Sponsor-event congruence was tested by using Speed and Thompson's (2000) scale items. Perceived event size and sponsorship duration were measured by three-item, seven-point semantic differential scales. For the manipulation check for sponsorship duration, participants additionally answered the question, "What was the duration of the sponsorship?" with the multiple choices of "(1) 2019–2023" and "(2) 2019." Participants who provided the incorrect duration were deleted from analyses.

Control variables. Shank and Beasley's (1998), Zaichkowsky's (1994), and Yoo and Donthu's (2001) scale items were employed to measure tennis involvement, product involvement, and brand awareness, respectively. Scale items and reliabilities are represented in Table 2.

Results*Manipulation checks*

ANCOVA results after controlling for the covariates indicated that the average ratings of perceived event size for mega and local events were 5.24 and 4.21, respectively. This difference was statistically significant [$F(1, 274) = 31.78, p < 0.001$]. In addition, the operationalized sponsor-event congruence conditions differed significantly from each other [$F(1, 274) = 42.94, p < 0.001$]. The average ratings for high and low sponsor-event congruence were 5.26 and 4.43, respectively. Another ANCOVA results show the average rating for long sponsorship duration (i.e. 5 times) ($M = 5.24$) was significantly different from the average rating for short sponsorship duration (i.e. 1 time) [$M = 4.20; F(1, 274) = 37.08, p < 0.001$].

Preliminary analyses

All bivariate correlations are statistically significant at $p = 0.05$ level (see Table 3). Variance inflation factor (VIF) values of all regressions ranged from 1.21 to 2.29, thereby indicating no issues concerning multicollinearity (Hair *et al.*, 1998).

Variables	Scale items	Cronbach's α	
<i>Dependent variable</i>			
Goodwill	[event] sponsors are involved with their community Corporate sponsors try to improve [event] [event] benefits from [sponsor] [sponsor] care about the attendees of [event]	0.865	
Attitude toward the sponsor	Bad/good Unfavorable/favorable Negative/positive	0.927	679
Purchase intention	Very unlikely/very likely Improbable/probable Impossible/possible	0.915	
<i>Independent variable</i>			
Event size	Local/global Small/big	0.850	
Sponsor-event congruence	Internationally insignificant/internationally significant There is a logical connection between the event and the sponsor The company and the event stand for similar things It makes sense to me that this company sponsors this event	0.883	
Sponsorship duration	Short-term/long-term Temporary/enduring Intermittent/continuous	0.921	
<i>Control variable</i>			
Tennis involvement	Boring/exciting Uninteresting/interesting Worthless/valuable Unappealing/appealing Useless/useful Not needed/needed Irrelevant/relevant Unimportant/important	0.955	
Product involvement	Unimportant/important Boring/interesting Irrelevant/relevant Unexciting/exciting Means nothing/means a lot to me Unappealing/appealing Mundane/fascinating Worthless/valuable Uninvolving/involving Not needed/needed	0.959	
Event awareness	I am aware of [event] I can recognize [event]	0.904	
Sponsoring brand awareness	I am aware of [brand] I can recognize [brand]	0.875	

Table 2.
Scale items and reliabilities

Tests of hypotheses

We conducted a three-way ANCOVA with perceived goodwill as a dependent variable, event size, sponsor-event congruence, and sponsorship duration as independent variables, and tennis involvement, product involvement, event awareness, and sponsoring brand awareness as covariates. Homogeneity test results were satisfied since Levene's test was not statistically

significant ($p > 0.05$). Each interaction between each independent variable and each covariate was not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), satisfying the homogeneity of regression slopes assumption (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2001).

The effect of event size on goodwill was statistically significant [$F(1, 268) = 9.56, p < 0.01$]. Participants exposed to advertisements in which corporations sponsor a local event showed greater perceptions of goodwill ($M = 5.23$) than did those who were exposed to advertisements in which corporations sponsor a mega event ($M = 4.94$). This result supports H1. Table 4 shows detailed results.

The interaction effect between event size and sponsorship duration on goodwill was statistically significant [$F(1, 268) = 4.16, p < 0.05$], thereby supporting H2. Under the longer sponsorship duration, the mean rating of goodwill for the local event ($M = 5.45$) was greater than that for the mega event ($M = 4.80$) and the difference was significant [$F(1, 131) = 16.21, p < 0.05$]. In the short duration group, however, the difference of the average ratings of goodwill between the local ($M = 5.04$) and mega events ($M = 5.07$) was not significant [$F(1, 137) = 0.61, p > 0.05$]. The interaction plot is presented in Figure 2.

The interaction effect of event size and sponsor-event congruence on goodwill was significant [$F(1, 268) = 4.13, p < 0.05$]. This result supports H3. In the high sponsor-event congruence condition, the average rating of goodwill for the local event ($M = 5.11$) does not significantly differ from that for the mega event [$M = 5.07; F(1, 140) = 0.29, p > 0.05$]. On the other hand, event size had a significant impact on goodwill [$F(1, 128) = 14.45, p < 0.001$] when

Table 3.
Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Tennis involvement	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
2. Product involvement	0.52**	–	–	–	–	–	–
3. Event awareness	0.46**	0.31**	–	–	–	–	–
4. Sponsor awareness	0.19**	0.43**	0.33**	–	–	–	–
5. Goodwill	0.15*	0.26**	0.29**	0.30**	–	–	–
6. Attitude toward the sponsor	0.32**	0.48**	0.20**	0.32**	0.35**	–	–
7. Purchase intention	0.31**	0.56**	0.20**	0.31**	0.34**	0.70**	–
<i>M</i>	4.56	5.21	4.55	5.89	5.09	5.69	5.26
<i>SD</i>	1.58	1.37	1.75	1.28	1.23	1.35	1.51

Note(s): * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$

Table 4.
Analysis of covariance: tests of between-subjects effects

Factor	SS	<i>df</i>	MS	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Tennis involvement	1.26	1	1.26	1.00	0.319
Product involvement	5.16	1	5.16	4.08	0.044
Event awareness	17.20	1	17.20	13.62	0.000
Sponsor awareness	8.76	1	8.76	6.94	0.009
Event size	12.08	1	12.08	9.56	0.002
Fit	0.12	1	0.12	0.10	0.754
Duration	0.02	1	0.02	0.01	0.914
Event size × Fit	5.21	1	5.21	4.13	0.043
Event size × Duration	5.25	1	5.25	4.16	0.042
Fit × Duration	0.98	1	0.98	0.77	0.380
Event size × Fit × Duration	0.02	1	0.02	0.02	0.898
Error	338.48	268	1.26		

Note(s): The corrected model is significant ($p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.20$). Dependent variable = goodwill. SS = sum of squares. *df* = degrees of freedom. MS = mean square

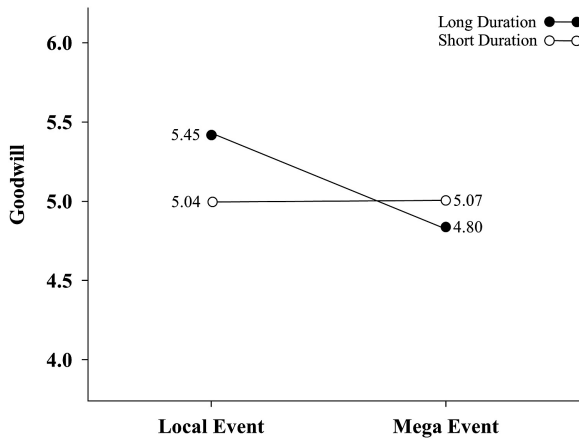


Figure 2.
Interaction plot for
event size by
sponsorship duration
interaction for goodwill

sponsor-event congruence is low. The average ratings for the local and mega events were 5.36 and 4.79, respectively. Figure 3 displays the interaction plot.

To test H4, a hierarchical regression model with goodwill regressed on attitude toward the sponsor was analyzed after controlling for tennis involvement, product involvement, event awareness, and sponsor awareness. The controls explained 25.3% of the variance. Goodwill accounted for additional 4.6% of variance, and positively and significantly affected attitude toward the sponsor ($\beta = 0.23, p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.287$). Thus, H4 was supported (see Table 5, Panel A).

To test H5, another hierarchical regression model with attitude toward the sponsor regressed on purchase intention was analyzed after controlling for tennis involvement, product involvement, event awareness, sponsor awareness, and goodwill. The controls accounted for 35.5% of the variance. Attitude toward the sponsor explained additional 20.8% of variance, and positively and significantly affected purchase intention ($\beta = 0.55, p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.563$). These results support H5 (see Table 5, Panel B).

Further analyses were conducted to test the mediating effect of attitude toward the sponsor between goodwill and purchase intention. The current study tested the mediation by

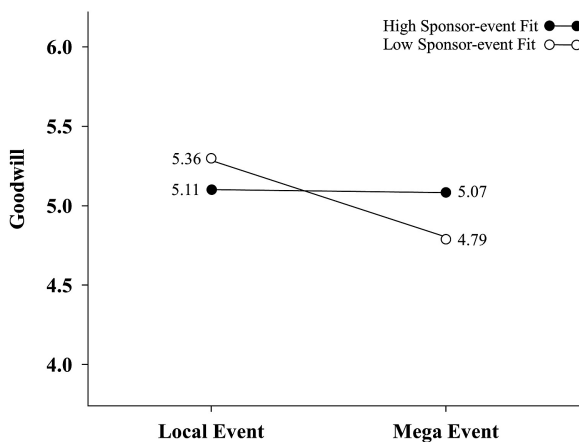


Figure 3.
Interaction plot for
event size by sponsor-
event fit interaction for
goodwill

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>T</i>	<i>p</i>
A: Goodwill regressed on attitude toward the sponsor					
<i>Step 1</i>					
Tennis involvement	0.10	0.06	0.12	1.76	0.080
Product involvement	0.36	0.07	0.36	5.46	0.000
Event awareness	-0.01	0.05	-0.01	-0.16	0.871
Sponsor awareness	0.15	0.06	0.14	2.36	0.019
$R^2 = 0.253, F(4, 275) = 23.32, p < 0.001$					
<i>Step 2</i>					
Tennis involvement	0.11	0.06	0.13	2.02	0.045
Product involvement	0.32	0.06	0.33	5.03	0.000
Event awareness	-0.05	0.05	-0.06	-0.96	0.337
Sponsor awareness	0.10	0.06	0.10	1.69	0.093
Goodwill	0.26	0.06	0.23	4.25	0.000
$R^2 = 0.299, F(5, 274) = 23.43, p < 0.001$					
$\Delta R^2 = 0.046, F(1, 274) = 18.07, p < 0.001$					
B: Attitude toward the sponsor regressed on purchase intention					
<i>Step 1</i>					
Tennis involvement	0.04	0.06	0.04	0.67	0.503
Product involvement	0.52	0.07	0.47	7.61	0.000
Event awareness	-0.03	0.05	-0.04	-0.67	0.506
Sponsor awareness	0.06	0.07	0.05	0.91	0.363
Goodwill	0.25	0.07	0.21	3.91	0.000
$R^2 = 0.355, F(5, 274) = 30.14, p < 0.001$					
<i>Step 2</i>					
Tennis involvement	-0.03	0.05	-0.03	-0.57	0.567
Product involvement	0.33	0.06	0.30	5.51	0.000
Event awareness	-0.01	0.04	-0.01	-0.14	0.886
Sponsor awareness	0.00	0.06	0.00	-0.06	0.956
Goodwill	0.10	0.06	0.08	1.76	0.080
Attitude toward the sponsor	0.61	0.05	0.55	11.41	0.000
$R^2 = 0.563, F(6, 273) = 58.66, p < 0.001$					
$\Delta R^2 = 0.208, F(1, 273) = 130.17, p < 0.001$					
Note(s): Control variables = tennis involvement, product involvement, event awareness, sponsor awareness and goodwill (Panel B only)					

Table 5. Parameter estimates for the hierarchical regression models with goodwill regressed on attitude toward the sponsor and attitude toward the sponsor regressed on purchase intention

using Model 4 in the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2012). Attitude toward the sponsor mediates the relationship between goodwill and purchase intention since the bootstrap results (re-sample = 10,000) show that the indirect effect is significant ($\beta = 0.16$) with a 95% CI excluding zero (0.064–0.273). This effect is an indirect-only mediation (Zhao *et al.*, 2010) since the direct effect is not significant ($\beta = 0.10, p > 0.05$).

Discussion

The research findings provide several important academic and managerial implications. First, the research findings filled the gaps in the literature by adding empirical evidence of the effectiveness of event size on consumer responses. The current study identified that a sponsor obtained more positive goodwill in consumers' minds when it supported a small event than when it supported a mega event. This effect is in line with Kelley's (1973) discounting principle. The participants might minimize an attribution for mega sport

sponsorship activities since they were more likely to find a corporation's motivation to sponsor a mega sport event through promoting the sponsoring brand than through supporting the event. Thus, they might evaluate corporations sponsoring local events more positively than those supporting mega events.

Second, the current study identified how to enhance consumers' perceptions of goodwill by testing the possible moderators, which would influence the relationship between event size and goodwill. The significant interaction effect between event size and sponsorship duration is in line with [Smith's \(2004\)](#) suggestion that the interaction between event status and sponsorship duration may have an impact on a sponsor's sincerity. Specifically, a sponsor of a local event with long contract duration generated the highest perceived goodwill. This result supports the current study's conceptual argument that consumers may recognize that multiple-year-sponsorships are more needed for local events than for mega events.

Furthermore, the significant interaction effect between event size and sponsor-event congruence is consistent with [d'Astous and Bitz \(1995\)](#) and [Speed and Thompson \(2000\)](#). This particular result is also in line with [Heider's \(1958\)](#) attribution theory. The sponsor-event incongruence condition might generate a more attributional process than did the congruence condition. This might elicit skepticism in sponsor motives under the incongruence condition but would cause little doubt on sponsor motives in consumers' minds under the congruence condition. Also, it is notable that the difference in goodwill between local events with a congruent sponsor and with an incongruent sponsor is small. On the other hand, difference in goodwill between mega events with a congruent sponsor and with an incongruent sponsor is relatively large. The incongruity between a sponsor and a small event may be acceptable because people realize that the sponsor allows the event to be held. However, people may not accept the incongruity between a sponsor and a mega event since they perceive that the sponsor has commercial intent.

Third, the result of the mediation test indicated how goodwill operated as a predictor of attitudinal and behavioral outcomes in the sponsorship context. As predicted, perceived goodwill positively and significantly affected the attitude toward the sponsor, consistent with [Chang \(2012\)](#) and [Dees et al. \(2008\)](#). Despite the importance of goodwill, only a few previous studies have focused on how goodwill influences sponsorship outcomes. The current study result contributed to adding empirical support to the goodwill-related sponsorship research area. Also expected was that the attitude toward the sponsor positively and significantly influenced the intention to purchase the sponsor's product. This result is in line with [Gwinner and Bennett \(2008\)](#), [Speed and Thompson \(2000\)](#), and [Wang et al. \(2012\)](#). Notably, goodwill influences purchase intention not directly, but indirectly through attitude toward the sponsor. This finding is consistent with [Dees et al. \(2010\)](#) which indicates the significant path from goodwill to brand attitudes, subsequently influencing purchase intentions.

Lastly, the effectiveness of event size on perceived goodwill may be supported by the notion of the distinction between spectator- and participant-based sport sponsorships. The primary goals of spectator-based sponsorships are to enhance brand awareness and to establish, strengthen or change brand image ([Gwinner, 1997](#)), whereas participant-based sponsorships aim to associate a sponsoring brand or product with the lifestyle, beliefs, institutions, and culture of a target audience ([Miloch and Lambrecht, 2006](#)). While target audiences of most mega sport events may be sport spectators, those of most local grassroots sport events may be participants of a particular event. People may perceive more goodwill of a sponsor in the latter than in the former because they may realize that local grassroots sport sponsors help them participate in the event but mega sport sponsors aim to sell their products to the spectators. To utilize this merit of the local sport sponsorships, mega sport sponsors are recently serving up fan experiences. For instance, American Express operated pop-up tennis courts on Manhattan's Pier 76 during the US Open 2021 ([Shea, 2021](#)).

The current study findings are full of suggestions to marketing managers. First, corporation managers need to pay attention to the efficiency of sponsoring local grassroots sport events. A corporation spends an astronomical amount of money to be a sponsor of mega sport events. For example, Coca-Cola spent \$31 million to become a FIFA partner for 2014 (Bowman, 2014). On the other hand, a corporation can be a sponsor of local or small sport events at low costs. The present study indicated that a corporation had a greater perception of goodwill through local event sponsorships than through mega event sponsorships. As such, in addition to the merit of low costs, the current study results suggest another advantage, perceived goodwill, a corporation may have by sponsoring local sport events.

Some marketers may assert that local sport events are too small to have large enough audiences; that is, it may be worth spending a large amount of money on mega event sponsorships if a corporate sponsor's goal is to increase its brand awareness among a great number of people. However, the proliferation of commercialism in mega sport sponsorships may result in negative perceptions of a corporate sponsor in consumers' minds (Chadwick, 2007). Consumers' skepticism may increase when they meet a company's sponsorship activity such as greenwashing and brandwashing. For example, the activist group Red Rebel Brigade demonstrated against the oil company BP's sponsorship of an exhibition in the British Museum in London in 2020 (Grindon, 2020). Since George Floyd's killing by police, many companies have raised their voice with the protesters by using "#Black Lives Matter." As of 2020, however, there were only four among the five hundred largest companies in the United States which had black chief executives (Duarte, 2020). As goodwill is the main factor differentiating sponsorship from traditional advertising (Meenaghan, 2001), marketing practitioners are required to maximize this merit of sponsorship. It seems that there is a trade-off between brand exposure and goodwill. Sponsoring a mega event would be attractive in terms of exposure and awareness that a sponsor could gain. However, local event sponsorships would be interesting in terms of goodwill and motives that could be perceived by consumers. Therefore, marketing managers would be interested in the best strategies to achieve both goals, the increase of brand exposure, and perceived goodwill.

According to the results of the current study, perceived goodwill is improved by a corporation's efforts to support local sport events. The shortcoming of local sport sponsorships, a smaller number of people reached, may be overcome by public relations strategies. For example, a corporate sponsor may give wider publicity to the fact that it is supporting local events after releasing related articles in newspapers. From a different perspective, the drawback is also an advantage since a small number of audiences may enable marketing managers to set targets easily. For instance, seventy percent of the spectators of the Little League World Series in Pennsylvania are married (Spanberg, 2013). This event is relatively small but may be considered as an optimal opportunity for marketers whose target is married couples. Also, companies could choose to engage in numerous local events throughout the nation/world to tap into their various target markets. If a corporation invests its resources that were supposed to be allocated to a mega event sponsorship into multiple local event sponsorships, it will be able to reach a variety of diverse, yet extremely targeted, populations. Through this strategy, a corporation may reach a similar number of target markets with less expense.

Second, the present study identified the importance of sponsorship duration and sponsor-event congruence in enhancing the effectiveness/of event size on goodwill. These findings could contribute to marketers' establishing more detailed sponsorship strategies. The current study findings identified that both size-by-duration and size-by-congruence interactions had significant effects on perceived goodwill. In specific, a local sponsorship produced significantly higher perceptions of goodwill toward the sponsor than did a mega event sponsorship in the long duration condition; but not significantly in the short duration condition. Consumers may perceive more commercial intent and less goodwill of a sponsor when they view a mega event sponsorship with long sponsorship duration. Marketing

managers, therefore, need to give wider publicity to the fact that they are sponsoring local events for a long time if they have a long-term sponsorship contract with the events.

Concerning the size-by-congruence interaction, a local event sponsorship generated significantly greater perceptions of goodwill than did a mega event sponsorship in the low congruence condition; but not in the high congruence condition. Consumers may feel less goodwill and perceive more commercial intentions when they view a mega sport event sponsorship supported by a non-sport brand. Marketing practitioners may need to consider sponsoring local or small sport events rather than mega sport events when the product of the sponsor is not associated with sports.

Third, there are some suggestions for marketing managers in terms of the mediation role of attitude toward the sponsor between perceived goodwill and purchase intentions. Since sponsorships are considered a part of corporate advertising (Meenaghan, 1991), marketing managers need to take different approaches from product advertising into account. Unlike product advertising, corporate advertising generally intends to improve the company's brand image as one of the long-term marketing communication strategies. The current study identified that perceived goodwill significantly influenced purchase intention, but only indirectly through attitude toward the sponsor. Accordingly, marketing managers may apply this finding to their promotional strategy by effectively promoting goodwill via attitude toward the sponsor to maximize consumers' purchasing efforts from a long-term perspective. Because purchase intention is considered an indicator of actual sales in academic research (Gwinner and Bennett, 2008), this finding implies that marketing practitioners need to take perceived goodwill into account while making sponsorship selection decisions. Marketing managers who consider a goodwill-related sponsorship strategy need to establish their marketing plan from a longer-term perspective.

Lastly, local or small event managers may use the current study findings to secure new corporate sponsors. By showing the advantages of corporations sponsoring local events, event managers may appeal to the corporations who wish to eliminate their image of commercialism and to improve the image of corporate social responsibility. It would be consequently functional if many corporations sponsor local events to contribute to building healthy communities.

Conclusion

The current study made a significant contribution to the sponsorship research area by adding empirical evidence regarding event size and goodwill, concepts which have been scarcely examined empirically by previous research. In addition to the theoretical contributions, the current study provides practical implications for managers of both sponsor and event sides. By showing the merits of a corporation sponsoring local events, the current research suggests solutions for a corporate sponsor whose concern is that consumers perceive sponsorships to be too commercial, and for a local or small event manager whose concern is that it is hard to secure operating funds, respectively. Corporations can benefit from sponsoring local events by acquiring a positive corporate image at lower costs. Additionally, local events can use this research to help raise operating funds given the results show that consumers respond well to sponsors that connect with local events.

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