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## THE IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT PROCESSING OF SPONSORSHIP MESSAGES

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Synopsis:

The study compares the impact of explicit versus implicit information processing on brand attitude in a sport sponsorship situation. In a lab experiment, a fictitious sponsor brand is embedded in real sport footage and presented to a sample of 65 participants. Implicit and explicit associations with the sponsor brand are tested.

Abstract:

### 1. AIM OF ABSTRACT/PAPER - RESEARCH QUESTION

The sponsorship market has evolved enormously over the last two decades and means a major income stream to most professional sport entities.

Considering that companies invest in sponsorship for the purpose of linking favorable meanings to their brand (e.g. Gwinner, Larson & Swanson, 2009), sponsorship messages (e.g. signage on billboards) are omnipresent in most sport events. It is known from neuropsychology that visual objects within information-overloaded environments are not only processed explicitly (i.e., consciously), but also on an implicit (i.e., preconscious) level (e.g., LeDoux, 1995). Against this backdrop, the major aim of this research is to compare the impact of explicit versus implicit information processing on brand attitude in a sport sponsorship situation.

### 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OR LITERATURE REVIEW

This research is based on the taxonomy by Dehaene et al. (2006) which suggests that an object-related factor (i.e., stimulus strength) and a subject-related factor (i.e., top-down-attention) are crucial for human information processing. If stimulus strength is on a low level and attention is missing, information-processing regions in the viewer's brain are barely activated. In case the viewer puts his or her attention on a weak stimulus, activation reaches the semantic level. However, information processing remains subliminal. If a

strong stimulus is not attended by the viewer, the degree of brain activation is high, but still the information does not reach the conscious state due to a lack of mental capacity. Only if a strong stimulus obtains the viewer's attention, the information reaches the viewer's consciousness.

### 3. METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS

To test the taxonomy by Dehaene et al. (2006) in a sponsorship setting, an experimental research design is created. We control for the bias of previous brand associations by using a fictitious sponsor brand which is embedded in real sport footage by the help of a so-called planar-tracking software. This technology allows us to virtually superimpose sponsor signage within a 10 minutes football clip. 50 participants are randomly assigned to two different test groups which get the task either (1) to concentrate on the names of visible brands or (2) to concentrate on the names of visible players. This manipulation of attention is controlled by eye-tracking during the experiment. After the stimulus presentation participants are asked to take part in an implicit association test (IAT, Greenwald et al., 1998) and an explicit image test regarding the fictitious sponsor brand.

### 4. RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS/CONCLUSIONS

Most sponsorship research to date still relies on measuring explicit effects. This study attempts to systematically assess the implicit effects of sponsorship communication which may significantly exceed our understanding on how sport sponsorship works in terms of the viewer's information processing. Beyond the theoretical contribution, this research bears the potential to provide methodological progress as innovative methods are employed such as the planar-tracking technique and the IAT to assess sponsorship effectiveness. Please note that the data collection and analysis is on-going at the time of abstract submission. The authors guarantee that the results will be ready to be presented at the EASM 2015 conference.

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