

# The effect of articulated sports sponsorship on recall and visual attention to the brand

The effect of articulated sports sponsorship

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The objective is to examine the influence of articulation on the effectiveness of sports sponsorship.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This research uses an experimental design with the following factors: articulation (articulated vs unarticulated), congruence (congruent and incongruent) and sporting discipline (tennis, F1 and sailing).

**Findings** – Even though the academic literature argues that articulation improves the indicators of performance, the authors have been unable to demonstrate that articulated sports posters have an influence on visual attention, congruence or recall. The results show that articulation diverts visual attention from the brand to the text, diminishing recall.

**Originality/value** – This is the first manuscript to use neurophysiological measures of the articulation effect. This is also the first manuscript that examines the differences in attention between articulated sponsorships based on their congruence.

**Keywords** Articulation, Sports poster, Visual attention, Eye tracking, Sponsor, Neurophysiology

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

The ability of companies to influence and persuade consumers is becoming more and more important (Marin *et al.*, 2018). However, this is not a simple matter, since individuals seem to be motivated to resist it (Ringold, 2002), using strategies based on the distortion of information or dismissing the relevance of a message (Fransen *et al.*, 2015). So now companies need to consider more effective strategies of advertisement such as sponsoring of products in media or financing of events (Grzyb *et al.*, 2018).

Sponsorship is a technique of non-conventional or below-the-line communication that has generated a great deal of attention amongst academics (Degaris *et al.*, 2017; Meenaghan, 2013) due to the growing investment that companies have been making at a global level over the last decade (IEG, 2017). The objectives that organizations usually pursue when sponsoring a sporting event are generating brand awareness, increasing sales, creating links with the consumer (Meenaghan *et al.*, 2013). The effectiveness of sponsorship as a communication technique has been widely demonstrated in the literature (Cornwell, 1995; Novais and Arcodia, 2013). The current academic trend in the area studies how to maximize the investment in sponsorship through communications and marketing activities related to the



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sponsorship, but that are collateral to the main investment (leverage) (Dreisbach *et al.*, 2018; Human *et al.*, 2018; King and Madrigal, 2018; Madrigal and King, 2018).

Activation refers to the activities that encourage the interaction of the audience with the sponsor, increasing its implication. The aim of activation is to increase the potential of interaction with the audiences in order to involve the fans with the sponsor (Næss, 2020). “Articulation is a form of non-commercial activation where the relationship between a sponsor and property is deliberately explained to create an association between the two entities in consumers’ minds” (Cornwell *et al.*, 2006, p. 312). According to the academic trend, articulation improves the attitude toward the brand for both brand- and company-level measures (Cornwell *et al.*, 2006), for the perceived congruence (Madrigal and King, 2018; Na and Kim, 2013), for the affective evaluation of the sponsor and for recall (Degaris *et al.*, 2017).

However, our results do not concur with those documented in the academic literature. Our experiment, employing neurophysiological techniques in the medium of the sports poster, does not show significant differences between the subjects in terms of commercial performance, on the contrary, the effectiveness of the sponsorship in terms of visual attention is diminished, negatively influencing recall. This research makes several significant contributions: (1) Our method includes neurophysiological means that allow us to isolate the social and cultural influences on individual attention processes, providing new evidence of the effectiveness of sponsorship of sporting events (Alonso-Dos-Santos, 2018). The application of these methods has the following advantages (Solnais *et al.*, 2013): (a) they make it possible to identify the underlying processes responsible for the studied behaviors, as similar behaviors can result from different psychological processes; (b) they provide objective physiological data, as the subjects have very little or no influence on the results; (c) they eliminate bias due to the tendency to provide socially acceptable responses. (2) Our experiment employs a medium of real mass communication habitually used by small and medium sporting events (the majority) which is the sports poster. (3) The experimental design has greater validity because it employs three sporting disciplines on real subjects.

The research question is: does the articulated sports poster improve visual attention, perceived congruence and memory of sponsor brands in comparison with the non-articulated sports poster? Additionally, the objective is to examine if articulation influences visual attention, perceived congruence and recall in the medium of sports posters and to check the capacity of articulation to moderate the influence of congruence on attention and recall and test if the mediating effect of visual attention is moderated by articulation in the influence of the perceived congruence on recall. In what follows we will explain the hypotheses, experiment carried out, followed by the results and the conclusions.

## Hypotheses

### *Articulation, congruence and recall*

Congruence is the concept that measures the “fit” of the relationship between the sponsor and the sponsored party based on the consumer’s perception (Rifon *et al.*, 2004; Weeks *et al.*, 2008). It is important to improve the congruence of sponsorship because the greater part of the academic literature agrees that congruent sponsorships improve image transfer (Gwinner and Eaton, 1999), improve the attitude toward the sponsor (Speed and Thompson, 2000) and increase recall (Rifon *et al.*, 2004). However, a small current in the literature argues that an incongruent, but not significant, message can have greater effectiveness on consumer response than a congruent one (Alonso Dos Santos and Calabuig Moreno, 2018; Olson and Thjøme, 2009). The cause is that incongruent (non-significant) messages receive more visual attention and greater cognitive load, resulting in greater effort to process the message. As a result, incongruent messages have higher rates of purchase intent. This stream of research considers physiological measures, which could be an advantage over previous research as it incorporates objective responses.

Regarding the influence of articulation on congruence, the results are inconclusive because authors such as [Simmons and Becker-Olsen \(2006\)](#) or [Na and Kim \(2013\)](#) show that the perception of congruence improved significantly after the showing of an articulated communication (especially in situations of low sponsor-sponsored fit). However, [Coppetti et al. \(2009\)](#) found that congruent sponsors can have a natural advantage over the incongruent ones, diluting the effectiveness of the articulation and participation. That is to say that the articulation might not substantially improve perceived congruence. The results of [Olson and Thjømmøe \(2011\)](#) showed that, opposed to previous studies, articulating the message could have negative effects in comparison with not articulating it. Therefore, according to the general current in the literature, articulated commercial communications generate a greater perception of congruence between sponsor and sponsored than those that are not articulated. The following hypothesis is therefore proposed:

*H1.* Articulation in sports posters has a positive and significant effect on the perceived congruence between sponsor and sponsored.

Recall, or the recognition of the sponsor, has been widely used as a dependent variable in studying the effectiveness of sponsorship ([Maricic et al., 2019](#)). Specifically, [Cornwell et al. \(2006\)](#) demonstrated that articulation improves memory especially in incongruent sponsorship but is superfluous when there already exists a perceived relationship between the sponsor and the sponsored. If articulation improved the perceived fit between the sponsor and sponsored ([Simmons and Becker-Olsen, 2006](#)), and congruence improves recall ([Rifon et al., 2004](#)), then articulation could have a direct and significant effect on recall. Consequently, the hypothesis is:

*H2.* Articulation in sports posters has a positive and significant effect on recall of the sponsor.

### *Articulation and visual attention*

Attention is a cognitive process linked to a selection mechanism for the processing of information. Due to the fact that mental capacity is limited, attention is defined based on the preferences and limitations of the subject ([Hsieh and Chen, 2011](#)). A fundamental limitation refers to the difficulty of the task ([Navon and Miller, 2002](#)), on increasing the quantity of information, the resources assigned to focus increase, diminishing the rest of the tasks that are being carried out simultaneously. Attention to printed publicity depends on the stimulus itself (bottom-up factors) as well as the stimuli inherent in the subject (top-down factors) ([Pieters and Wedel, 2004](#)). The process of ascending attention (bottom-up) refers to the process by which the subject captures attentional information based on the characteristics of the advertisement, for example due to its color, position, size or shape ([Ares et al., 2013](#)), the ascending factors refer to the work space of the designer. The descending attention (top-down) is subject to the interests and objectives of the subject when the stimulus is evaluated ([Pieters and Wedel, 2007](#)). If the subjects do not need the information referring to the sponsors, it is probable that they will not pay attention, unless their attention is captured automatically (bottom-up process) ([Ares et al., 2013](#)).

Articulation is the characteristic of the advertisement that has to attract the attention toward the sponsor and create a link with the sporting event, with the specific aim of increasing the perception of congruence of the sponsorship ([Coppetti et al., 2009](#)). In order for the image transfer to be effective, the subject must pay visual attention to the sponsor and eye movement is indispensable for visual attention to occur ([Hervet et al., 2011](#)). Visual attention is, therefore, a good indicator of attention toward an object. The objective in sponsorship communication is the sponsor and the longer the subject visualizes the brand of the sponsor, the greater the effectiveness of the sponsorship ([Olson and Thjømmøe, 2012](#)). But it is not possible for the communication to be effective if the subject is not aware of the sponsor, thus attention is a

necessary requirement for effective communication (Rumpf and Breuer, 2014). Therefore, if articulation has been developed with the aim of serving as a bottom-up factor, it will attract the attention toward the brand of the sponsor. The following hypothesis is therefore proposed:

*H3.* Articulation in sports posters has a positive and significant effect on visual attention toward the sponsor's brand.

The effect of congruence on recall is widely accepted (Devlin and Billings, 2018), both in the sporting world and in sponsorship (Cornwell *et al.*, 2006) as in publicity (Misra and Beatty, 1990).

Visual attention has a direct and significant effect on recall, the greater the attention the greater the probability of recalling the sponsor (Breuer and Rumpf, 2012). Therefore, the greater probability of recall of the sponsors could be due to a greater attention toward the congruent sponsors. However, Alonso Dos Santos *et al.* (2019) argued that attention does not depend on the congruence of the sponsorship. But if the articulation improves the perceived fit between the sponsor and the sponsored, it might have a mediating effect between congruence and attention, moderating the mediation of attention in the relationship between congruence and recall. Therefore, by articulating the sponsorship, the subjects process the message in a more congruent way, improving recall. Consequently, the fourth scenario is:

*H4.* The perception of congruence between the sponsor and the sponsored will positively influence recall when the poster is articulated.

It is habitually accepted in the academic literature that congruent sponsors are more recalled than incongruent ones (Gwinner and Eaton, 1999) and that there exists a positive relationship between visual attention and recall (Muñoz-Leiva *et al.*, 2019), but the handicap of the advertisers is that visual attention is not a sufficient condition, albeit necessary, for recall. However, some studies have found incongruent sponsors do not receive greater attention toward the brand than congruent sponsors (Alonso Dos Santos *et al.*, 2019). For this reason, it is logical to consider that articulation (as a bottom-up factor) could moderate the attention that sponsors receive based on their congruence. Therefore, Figure 1 visually shows Hypotheses 4 and 5, with hypothesis 5 as follows:

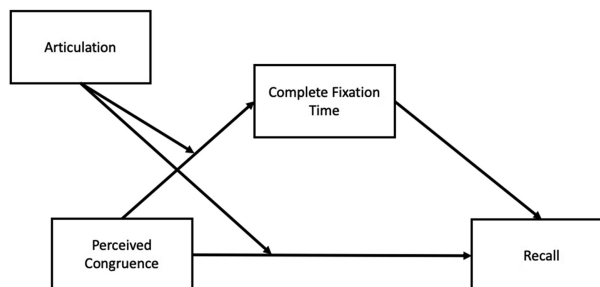
*H5.* The effect of perceived congruence on recall will be mediated by visual attention, but only when the poster is articulated.

## Method

### Design

We carried out an experiment with a  $2 \times 2 \times 3$  mixed design through Latin squares combining the factors of inter-subject articulation (articulated vs unarticulated), congruence (congruent and incongruent) and intra-subject sporting discipline (tennis, Formula 1 (F1) and

**Figure 1.** The conceptual model in which the effect of perceived congruence on recall is moderated by articulation. Visual attention is the proposed mediator of the conditional effect of perceived congruence on recall



sailing). The articulation was implemented in the sports poster through the phrase “xxx (brand) helps to promote the values and benefits of sport through this sponsorship” in the area of sponsors of the sports poster (lower area). The congruence variable is constructed from the results of a prior process divided into three phases. In the first phase, a group of 100 university students was asked about the most congruent and incongruent sponsorships in the three sporting disciplines: tennis, sailing and Formula 1 (*F1*). These disciplines were chosen for two reasons: (1) because of the availability of posters online and (2) because these sports usually use posters to communicate sports events. In the second phase a second Likert-type test was carried out with another 100 different students with the most congruent and incongruent sponsorships obtained from the first phase. This gave between four and five sponsors for each discipline. In the third phase, a focus group was held where the prototypes of the posters were analyzed. The focus group concluded that the selected posters were legible, congruent (incongruent), did not contain errors and seemed totally real.

The sports posters were adapted from real posters and do not contain real or famous people that could interfere in the formation of attitudes toward the participating brands. The text of the articulation was translated into the local language to ensure that it was understood in all its nuances. The rest of the poster is completely original as it was disseminated internationally. The posters can be downloaded through the links shown in [Table 1](#).

### Procedure

The experiment was made up of 12 groups of 10 subjects each, grouped in four types of combination of factors ( $N = 120$ ). The participants were recruited in the city center of a Chilean city of 220,000 inhabitants, using as an incentive the prize draw of a Tablet. The recruited subjects were informed about the experiment and their consent was collected. The experiment was approved by the Ethics Committee of the university. Then each subject was led to a room set up for commercial experimenting according to the indications of the International Telecommunication Union (2002, cited by [Hernández-Méndez and Muñoz-Leiva, 2015](#)). The assignation of the subjects to the experimental groups was random but balanced in terms of gender and age. The experiment begins with calm phase, then a pre-calibration for each individual and then displays the three sport posters for ten seconds each one (total 300 s), a time recommended in previous research under similar conditions and validated in a pre-test ([Alonso Dos Santos et al., 2019](#)). A black image is displayed between each poster for two seconds ([Gülçay and Cangöz, 2016](#)). The subjects are shown three posters of the three sporting disciplines alternately for each group with the aim of eliminating the presentation effect: Three groups make up the same experimental factor. Therefore, the first subject visualizes a tennis

Order of sports discipline	Articulate	Congruence	Link for first poster group
Tennis – Sailing – <i>F1</i>	Yes	Congruent	<a href="https://goo.gl/6Ds2hi">https://goo.gl/6Ds2hi</a>
<i>F1</i> – Sailing – <i>F1</i>			<a href="https://goo.gl/J2CCp8">https://goo.gl/J2CCp8</a>
Sailing – <i>F1</i> – Tennis	No	Incongruent	<a href="https://bit.ly/2EHLUh7">https://bit.ly/2EHLUh7</a>
Tennis – Sailing – <i>F1</i>			<a href="https://goo.gl/DWw1XX">https://goo.gl/DWw1XX</a>
<i>F1</i> – Sailing – <i>F1</i>			<a href="https://goo.gl/rZqT2e">https://goo.gl/rZqT2e</a>
Sailing – <i>F1</i> – Tennis			<a href="https://bit.ly/2H4wMOF">https://bit.ly/2H4wMOF</a>
Tennis – Sailing – <i>F1</i>	No	Congruent	<a href="https://goo.gl/99dejP">https://goo.gl/99dejP</a>
<i>F1</i> – Sailing – <i>F1</i>			<a href="https://goo.gl/SBgyYQ">https://goo.gl/SBgyYQ</a>
Sailing – <i>F1</i> – Tennis			<a href="https://n9.cl/OUsrZ">https://n9.cl/OUsrZ</a>
Tennis – Sailing – <i>F1</i>			<a href="https://goo.gl/JWmTbF">https://goo.gl/JWmTbF</a>
<i>F1</i> – Sailing – <i>F1</i>			<a href="https://goo.gl/AdiWN7">https://goo.gl/AdiWN7</a>
Sailing – <i>F1</i> – Tennis			<a href="https://n9.cl/QYal">https://n9.cl/QYal</a>

**Table 1.**  
Experimental design  
and poster link

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poster, then a sailing one and finally one of *F1*, all of them congruent and articulated. Subject 11 was exposed to the same posters but alternating the order.

At the end of the viewing of the posters, the subjects answer the questions of the questionnaire anonymously but connected with their fixation data. The questionnaire included the variable of implication with the sport, which was adapted from [Ko et al. \(2010\)](#) to employ it as a manipulation check, the recall of the brand (0 = does not remember any brand, 1 = remembers one brand, 2 = remembers two brands and 3 = remembers the three brands) and the variable of perceived congruence adapted from [Alonso-Dos-Santos et al. \(2016\)](#) and previously validated by [Speed and Thompson \(2000\)](#).

Eye tracking technology is the basis of the designed experiment. This technology allows us to study the underlying process in consumer behavior by providing objective physiological data and eliminating possible behavioral biases. The eye tracker is a 60 Hz EyeTribe with an accuracy of 0.5 degrees visual angle and a special resolution of 0.1°. Its characteristics make it suitable for scientific research ([Ooms et al., 2015](#); [Popelka et al., 2016](#)). Calibration was performed on 16 points, and the experimental system used was the free software Ogama ([Vofskühler et al., 2008](#)). This technology allows for the fixing of an area of interest (AOI) and provides information about the time the subject was looking at the sponsor's brand (complete fixation time – CFT in milliseconds).

#### *Control variables*

The age and gender control variables need to be examined because they have been reported in the literature as possible moderators of sponsorship effectiveness ([Alonso Dos Santos et al., 2020](#); [Bennett et al., 2009](#); [Miloch and Lambrecht, 2006](#)). The age of the subjects was not significantly different between the groups depending on the congruent factor  $F(2,190) = 0.644$ ,  $p = 0.526$  and also not in terms of articulation factor  $F(1,514) = 3.474$ ,  $p = 0.063$ . Visual attention  $F(1,230) = 1.358$ ,  $p = 0.245$  and perceived congruence  $F(1,268) = 0.521$ ,  $p = 0.472$  did not differ significantly by gender.

#### *Manipulation check*

Two controls were carried out to verify the validity of the experiment. First, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was carried out of the repeated measurements to check that the subjects showed the same attention to the brand in the posters of the three sporting disciplines. The results showed that there were not significant differences between the posters of the three sporting disciplines for the congruent and incongruent posters  $F(2,238) = 2.983$ ,  $p = 0.053$ ; the articulated and non-articulated posters  $F(2,238) = 1.889$ ,  $p = 0.154$ ; nor for the effect of the combined effect of both factors  $F(2,238) = 0.639$ ,  $p = 0.529$ . That is to say, the sporting discipline does not influence attention to the brand. This grants greater capacity of extrapolation to the results.

Second, the ANOVA determined that there were no differences between the subjects with respect to the implication with the sport between the articulated and non-articulated posters. Therefore, the group of subjects that saw the articulated posters ( $M = 2.806$ ,  $SD = 1.209$ ) have the same level of implication  $F(1,118) = 0.025$ ,  $p = 0.876$  as the group that saw the non-articulated posters ( $M = 2.839$ ,  $SD = 1.116$ ). These prior controls show the internal validity of the experiment and the adequate and random assignation of the experimental subjects to the groups.

## **Results**

The results are divided into two stages. Firstly, we carry out three analyses of the variance (ANOVA) to examine the influence of the articulation on visual attention, on perceived congruence and on recall. In the second stage, an analysis of the moderated mediation or

analysis of the conditional processes was done with the aim of examining if the mediating effect of visual attention is moderated by articulation in the influence of the perceived congruence on recall, according to Figure 1. For the carrying out of the ANOVA the suppositions of independence, normality and homoscedasticity were kept in all of the cases.

The first result of the ANOVA (H1: Articulation in sports posters has a positive and significant effect on the perceived congruence between sponsor and sponsored) suggests that the measurement of perceived congruence ( $M = 2.678$ ,  $SD = 0.851$ ) in the articulated poster was not significantly different to the mean of the non-articulated posters ( $M = 2.774$ ,  $SD = 0.944$ ). Therefore, the hypothesis is not supported. The subjects did not perceive that the sponsoring brands had a greater congruence when the poster was articulated  $F(1,116) = 0.337$ ,  $p = 0.563$ ,  $\eta^2 p = 0.003$ . Articulating the poster does not mean the subjects perceive a greater congruence in any of the combinations of factors (congruent and incongruent, articulated and non-articulated)  $F(1,114) = 1.989$ ,  $p = 0.161$ ,  $\eta^2 p = 0.017$ .

Regarding hypothesis 2 (H2: Articulation in sports posters has a positive and significant effect on recall of the sponsor), memory of the brand of the sponsors of the articulated posters ( $M = 0.6$ ,  $SD = 0.867$ ) is not significantly different to the recall of the brand of the sponsors of the non-articulated posters ( $M = 0.524$ ,  $SD = 0.737$ )  $F(1,121) = 0.276$ ,  $p = 0.599$ ,  $\eta^2 p = 0.002$ . This hypothesis is not supported either.

The visual attention to the brand in the articulated posters ( $M = 102.9$ ,  $SD = 123$ ) was significantly different to the visual attention to the non-articulated posters ( $M = 210.8$ ,  $SD = 315.3$ ) (H3: Articulation in sports posters has a positive and significant effect on visual attention toward the sponsor's brand). The third hypothesis is not supported. Specifically, the subjects looked more at the brand when the poster was not articulated  $F(1,121) = 6.128$ ,  $p = 0.015$ ,  $\eta^2 p = 0.048$ . This indicates that articulating the relationship of sponsorship in the sports poster brings with it a diminishing in the visual attention on the brand.

Finally, an analysis of moderated mediation or analysis of conditional processes was carried out with the aim of: (1) examining if articulation exercises a moderating effect on the influence of perceived congruence on recall (H4) and (2) examining if the mediating effect of visual attention is moderated by articulation in the influence of the perceived congruence on recall (H5). The model was contrasted with the macro PROCESS (model 8) for SPSS elaborated by Hayes (2013). The results indicate that articulation does not exercise a moderating effect on the direct influence of congruence on recall ( $\beta = -0.236$ ;  $p = 0.097$ ). Hypothesis 4 is not supported. However, the articulated posters did exercise a moderating effect on the indirect influence of congruence on recall through attention ( $\beta = -0.1362$ ;  $SE = 0.059$ ; 95%CI:  $-0.286$  to  $-0.041$ ): when the posters were not articulated, congruence exercises an indirect significant effect through attention. That is to say, the non-articulated poster attracts greater attention for the brand which finally influences recall. In the same way, visual attention exercises a mediating effect between the perceived congruence and recall ( $\beta = -0.075$ ;  $p = 0.036$ ). Subjects develop a stronger recall toward the brand when the congruence is low ( $\beta = -0.145$ ;  $p = 0.044$ ). Hypothesis 5 is supported.

## Discussion

Articulation is a marketing tactic that consists of deliberately explaining the relationship of sponsorship. Articulation should have served as a connection link of this relationship. The academic literature has found that articulating sponsorship messages positively influences the attitude toward the brand (Cornwell *et al.*, 2006), recall (Degaris *et al.*, 2017) and the perceived congruence (Madrigal and King, 2018; Na and Kim, 2013). Our objective was to examine if articulation influences visual attention, perceived congruence and recall in the medium of sports posters and check the capacity of articulation to moderate the influence of congruence on attention and recall and test if the mediating effect of visual attention is moderated by articulation in the influence of the perceived congruence on recall.

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The ANOVA results do not allow us to conclude that articulation influences perceived congruence (H1), articulating the message does not influence recall (H2) and the articulated posters attract less attention than the non-articulated posters (H3). These results could be due to three situations, although, from our point of view, the third is the most consistent because is the only one that can be explained since it is the only one that can be explained by objective methods (visual fixation).

In the first situation, articulation substantially improved the congruence of the incongruent sponsors to the point of equaling the congruent sponsors, making the difference between them insignificant. This situation, according to Coppetti *et al.* (2009) could occur as congruent sponsors have a natural advantage over the incongruent ones, which reduces the effect of articulation in congruent sponsors.

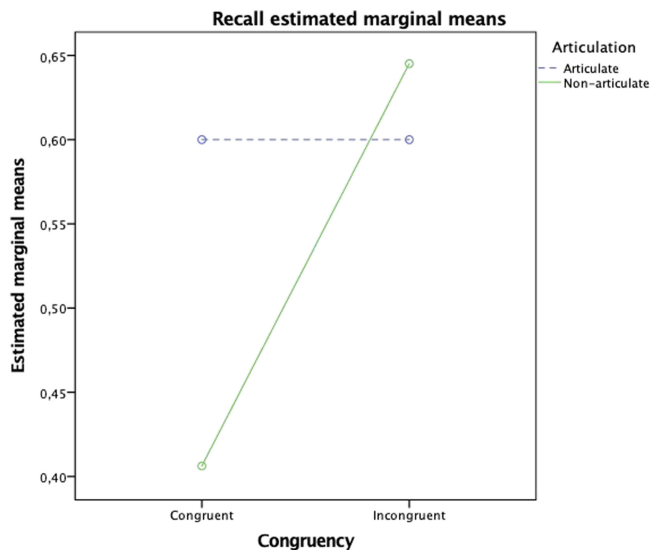
The second circumstance might be a consequence of articulation having a neutral or negative effect on congruence, diminishing the effect on congruent sponsors. According to Olson and Thjømøe (2011) this situation could be determined by the type of articulated message. The articulation in this research had a social orientation that could be perceived as insincere; articulations based on social or economic benefits (Dreisbach *et al.*, 2018) could have a significant effect on congruent sponsors.

The third situation would point out that articulation could diminish the effect of visual attention on the brand, blinding the relationship that the articulation is trying to establish. That is to say, the articulation has the opposite effect to that intended. The subjects have to employ more time in reading the message of the articulation when the message is articulated, which limits the time dedicated to cognitively processing the brand and the rest of the poster. If the brand of the poster is not processed, the subject cannot establish the congruence of the message. Therefore, the possible blinding to the sponsorship (Alonso Dos Santos *et al.*, 2018) would mitigate the effect of the congruence and its consequent effect on recall. The subjects that employ the time in reading the articulation do not see the brand, and if they do not see the brand then the rate of recall is reduced.

Previous studies have established the relationship between visual attention and recall (Muñoz-Leiva *et al.*, 2019), thus the sponsor's brands in unarticulated posters that receive more attention should have higher rates of recall. But it is necessary to consider the factor of congruence. Figure 2 shows the estimated marginal means of an ANCOVA analysis based on the congruence and the articulation, with the CFT as the covariable  $F(1,119) = 0.676$ ,  $p = 0.413$ ,  $\eta^2 p = 0.007$ . Congruence does not influence recall in the articulated messages, but the unarticulated messages are recalled better when they are incongruent. Attention exercises a significant effect on recall  $F(1,118) = 10.954$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ,  $\eta^2 p = 0.083$ . It does seem that the congruent messages have a certain advantage over the incongruent ones, but only when they are articulated. The congruent sponsors would need less time to be processed, but this is not an advantage as it means they are looked at for less time. The greatest rate of recall is of incongruent sponsors that are not articulated. In this case, the subjects dedicate more time the fit the relationship between the sponsor and the sponsored, increasing visual attention and, finally, recall.

The results of the moderated mediation (H4 and H5) indicate that articulation does not exercise a moderating effect between congruence and recall but does moderate the indirect influence of congruence on recall through attention. The non-articulation may help the subject to increase the perceived congruence of the incongruent poster by increasing recall because the subject employs more time to process the relationship. This is, therefore, in line with the suggestion that some degree of incongruence increases the performance of sponsors (Alonso Dos Santos and Calabuig Moreno, 2018; Olson and Thjømøe, 2009). In situations of publicity overload, articulation reduces the time dedicated to examining the brand, reducing recall and perceived congruence, especially in incongruent messages (Figure 3  $F(1,113) = 6.716$ ,  $p = 0.011$ ). That suggests that, at least in this medium of the sports

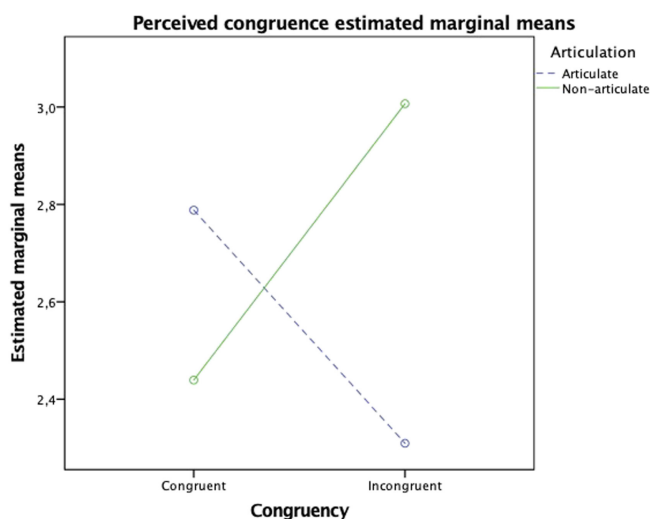




**Figure 2.** Estimated marginal means recall according to the congruence and articulation

poster and articulation messages based in social cues, articulating the relationship is not convenient because it reduces the performance indicators of recall and attention. These conclusions would only be applicable to the sports poster. Media such as radio or website could have different results.

With respect to possible managerial contributions, two main implications can be derived with respect to the outcome of contrasting the hypotheses and situations analyzed. First, the congruence of sponsorship is not significantly improved by articulation in the sports poster. Therefore, managers should not invest resources in this action. Second, if the poster is still articulated, managers should analyze the credibility of the articulation. This research uses a social articulation. But another type of articulation could moderate the effect on the fan



**Figure 3.** Estimated marginal means perceived congruence according to the congruence and articulation

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response. Third, articulating the sports poster is not recommended, but rather centering the effort in the design and confection of the poster to increase visual attention to the sponsor (Alonso Dos Santos *et al.*, 2018). Alternatively, according to the mere-exposure theory (Kim, 2006), repeated exposure to a stimulus could increase the preference for that stimulus, in an applied way: putting together a portfolio of activation tactics (O'Reilly and Lafrance Horning, 2013), such as activating sponsorship through social networks, could improve the attitude toward the sponsoring brand. But financially it could be discouraged by most small and medium sized business sponsors.

This research considers articulation as a bottom-up factor. Although there is no poster design manual, in the most commonly used design the upper area is dedicated to event information, the central part conceptualizes the event and the lower area shows the sponsors. The design of the poster could influence the attention: different sizes, colors (Breuer and Rumpf, 2015), shapes or designs could increase the attention toward the brand even if the poster is articulated. Of course, the designs must be adapted to different cultures, for example, the orientation of the Hebrew or Arabic writing. The sport discipline could also have a moderating effect. In this research the sport discipline factor did not influence the results (manipulation check), but other less popular disciplines or those with weaker inherent attributes could have a significant effect. In conclusion, practitioners should make a varied series of designs of sponsorship communications in the media and test the design that maximizes the effectiveness based on the pursued aims and on a multitude of factors such as: congruence, type of articulation, the saturation of the poster, colors and animation, amongst others.

### Summary

The results showed that the articulation does not influence the perceived congruence on recall of the sponsor, nor on visual attention toward the sponsor's brand. The articulation does not exert a moderating effect on the influence of perceived congruence on recall, but the articulation does exert a moderating effect on the mediation of visual attention on influence of the perceived congruence on recall. As a consequence, we propose (1) not to use articulation in sponsorship in the sports poster environment and (2) to create several poster designs and examine which one attracts more visual attention to the brand.

### Limitations and future research

Therefore, these results are not aligned with the prior research (Cornwell *et al.*, 2006; Madrigal and King, 2018; Weeks *et al.*, 2008). However, they need to be taken with caution as this research deals with a specific medium like the sports poster in a determined geographical context. The study's location limits it to the Chilean population. Therefore, the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample and the respondents' answers and familiarity with the brands cannot be considered representative of the behavior and attitudes of the entire world population. Future studies can improve on this limitation by increasing the sample size and carrying out research in different cultures. In addition, it is necessary to examine how fan involvement and the degree of familiarity with the sport and brand can moderate their response and behavior. The most part of the prior studies mentioned were tested through experiments where the subjects were exposed to news or were carried out through questionnaires. For this reason, the inclusion of visual attention could be a determining factor in contrasting the effect of articulation. The sports poster is a medium that requires a greater cognitive demand over a shorter period of time, and this could have an influence on processing. Regarding analysis, future research could apply cognitive analysis such as electroencephalogram or functional magnetic resonance. These techniques would

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allow us to get the cognitive attention in combination with the eye-tracking (visual attention) and get a deeper look into a consumer's behavior.

The research considered three sports disciplines chosen for convenience without the intention of representing sports events with a greater number of practitioners or fans. Future research could replicate this methodology in different countries and with different sports disciplines by modifying the bottom-up factors of the poster. The type of articulation could also be a moderating factor. It would be necessary in future studies to compare the results with different types of articulation, for example analogical (Madrigal and King, 2018) or symbolic, financial or social (Dreisbach *et al.*, 2018).

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