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# **SKATING ON THIN ICE: HOW NEGATIVE SPORT INCIDENTS AFFECT SPONSOR IMAGE**

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## **Abstract**

Understanding the publicity risks of investing in sport is important, as many circumstances in sport remain outside the scope of an advertiser's control. This study uses five real-life cases of negative sport sponsorship publicity to investigate whether and how negative incidents concerning sport teams impact the image of their sponsors. Based on Associative Network Theory, the authors propose and empirically test a model of negative brand image transfer, and subsequently test for how several factors affect negative brand image transfer (NBIT). Results show that the associations stemming from a negative incident spill over to the sports object's image and are subsequently transferred to the sponsor's brand image. As such, the occurrence of NBIT is demonstrated. The present study also shows that NBIT is stronger at higher levels of perceived fit between the sports object and the sponsoring brand. When consumers perceive the object and the brand as a good fit, the spill over of negative associations increases.