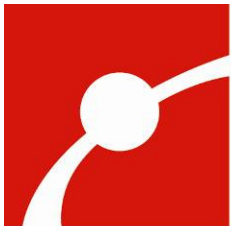


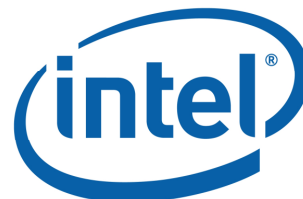
***Visitor responses to  
sponsorships in a science  
museum***  
**Research Study**

Report Written by Clara Cahill, Marta Beyer, and Christine Reich  
January 2012  
Report #[2012-02]  
Funded by Intel



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study was commissioned by Intel Corporation to explore the ways in which corporate sponsorships of museum exhibitions influence visitor perceptions of both the corporation and of the museum exhibition<sup>1</sup>. Our research approaches sponsorship from the perspective of museum visitors, and reflects visitors' ideas in regards to the involvement of companies with Museum of Science (MOS) exhibits. The two overarching questions guiding this research were:

1. What is the relationship, if any, between the visitor's reaction to the exhibit and their perception of the sponsor and its products?
2. Does a perceived link between sponsor and content influence a visitor's reaction to the sponsor and/or the content, and, if so, how?

This study employed open-ended qualitative interviews to reveal visitors' reactions to corporate sponsorships in museum settings, in general, and complementary correlational analyses to assess visitor reactions in the specific context of MOS. After initial background research and pilot testing, four dimensions of company image were selected for the correlational analyses: creativity, innovativeness, trustworthiness, and social responsibility.

The overall implication of this study for museums is that carefully chosen and presented sponsorships, for a majority of visitors, have no impact on opinion of exhibits, but, in some cases, can lead to improvements. For companies, such carefully chosen and presented sponsorships lead to improvements in company image for most visitors.

In order to realize these outcomes, four factors should be carefully assessed by both companies and museums when considering or implementing a sponsorship:

- **Sponsor-content fit** (relationship between the sponsor's products and exhibit content)
  - When there is low fit between companies and the content of the exhibit, visitors may not believe that the company had any influence on the exhibit. Thus, in most cases, they may express no changes in opinion of the sponsor. However, when visitors feel that the exhibit is highly creative, they are likely to express improved opinions of the sponsor if there is low content-sponsor fit.
  - A very high degree of fit may cause visitors to question the objectives of the sponsor and the content of the exhibit.
- **Visibility of the sponsorship:** A few visitors suggested that highly-visible sponsorships could reflect poorly on both the sponsoring company and the museum.
- **Reputation of the sponsoring company and its products**
  - Some visitors suggested that partnering with a company with a poor reputation for social responsibility or quality would reflect poorly on the museum.
  - On the other hand, when visitors believed that companies with positive reputations for trustworthiness or creativity helped with the exhibit, they were more likely to report improved opinions of the exhibit.
- **Opinions of characteristics of the exhibit:** When visitors had strongly positive opinions of the creativity, innovativeness, or importance of an exhibit, they were likely to express improved opinions of the sponsor.

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<sup>1</sup> Intel was not one of the sponsoring companies studied during this research, and was not mentioned to visitors during the course of the study.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to explore the ways in which corporate sponsorships of museum exhibitions influence visitor perceptions of both the corporation and of the museum exhibition. Corporate sponsorship may involve varying levels of support, corporate visibility, and correlation with the company's products and services (Danilov, 1988). While the term sponsorship can be defined as “[a] fee paid to a property by a corporate entity in return for access to the property's exploitable commercial potential,” (IEG, 2008, p. 8), people in various contexts may understand sponsorship in different ways. Our research approaches sponsorship from the perspective of museum visitors, and our findings reflect visitors' ideas in regards to the involvement of companies with Museum of Science exhibits.

Previous research on visitor perception of corporate sponsorship of museum programs indicates that only some visitors are aware or notice corporate sponsorship of programs and exhibits (Greif (ODC), 2006). Those who do have awareness of corporate sponsors of cultural and arts events most frequently view the sponsors more positively in response to the corporate support (e.g. Dalaka, 2009; Harvey, 2001; ICR & EXCEL Omnibus, 2001; LaPlaca Cohen, 2011; Opinion Dynamics Corporation, 2006). However, studies of sports, cultural, and charitable cause sponsorship have indicated that there are complex, interrelated factors related to the company, the sponsored program or project, and the participants that influence how participants perceive and react to corporate sponsorships (Carrillat, d' Astous, & Colbert, 2008; Olson, 2010; Pope & Voges, 2000).

Studies of museum professionals identify concerns about how sponsorship may influence the integrity and perceived integrity of exhibits along with the role or perceived role of sponsors in shaping content (Davidsson & Sørensen, 2010; Waite, 2011). As Waite mentions in her 2011 thesis:

Many professionals note that while the benefits of corporate sponsorships are high when handled properly, the threats for the museum in the case of failure are even higher: on the line are the museum's credibility, intellectual autonomy, and integrity. Once these qualities are jeopardized, a museum runs the risk of diluting their brand and damaging their role as a public trust. (Waite, 2011, p. 27)

These concerns on the part of museum professionals have only grown as corporate sponsors have played an increasingly larger role in the museum funding scene since the decline of government funding in the 1980s (Alexander, 1999; Jacobson, 1993; Waite, 2011). However, few published research studies have investigated how factors related to the sponsoring company and sponsored exhibits may impact visitor perceptions of either the sponsoring company or the museum. As the background information described below suggests, there may be a complex relationship between visitor perception of a company and the quality and content nature of the sponsored exhibit. Our study focuses on the relationships among visitor perception of the quality of the experience at the exhibit (i.e. how the experience performed relative to their expectations) and aspects of corporate image.

## BACKGROUND

There are several factors that may influence visitor reaction to sponsors. Previous research, mainly in nonprofit sponsorship, performing arts sponsorship, and sports sponsorship research, suggests that these factors are related to interactions between the sponsor, the sponsored entity, and the visitor. Correlation between a sponsored program and the sponsor's products or services can improve awareness of the sponsor (Becker-Olsen & Simmons, 2002; Cornwell, Humphreys, Maguire, Weeks, & Tellegen, 2006); however, if visitors perceive a sponsor's support of a program as profit-driven rather than altruistic, the visitor's opinions of the supporting corporation may not be positively impacted (Cornwell et al., 2006).

Sponsor-related factors are generally related to any perception the visitor had of the company prior to learning about the sponsorship. These factors may include the public image and reputation of the sponsor, perceived types of goods or services offered by the sponsor, and the perceived quality of these goods or services.

Businesses sometimes make sponsorship decisions in order to change or build public image and reputation around specific factors (Danilov, 1988; Olson & Thjømøe, 2011). There are many facets to how the public might perceive a company. In addition to perceptions about products and services, the public may also have views about a variety of aspects of the image and reputation of the sponsoring company, including whether the company is:

- Innovative
- Dynamic
- Imaginative
- Honest and trustworthy
- Socially responsible
- A quality investment
- Well-managed
- Helpful
- Friendly
- Conservative and formal or laid-back and informal (Dowling, 1986; Pope, Voges, & Brown, 2009)
- Local, national, or global (Mowen, Kyle, & Jackowski, 2007)

For example, United Technologies sponsored arts programs in order to “build a reputation for the corporation as an imaginative, distinctive company” (Danilov, 1988). From this list, the factors of innovativeness, imaginativeness, trustworthiness, social responsibility, and friendliness correlate with the public perception of museums as places to be entertained, have fun, learn, mediate learning for children, and socialize (Falk, 2009; Hood, 1983).

Characteristics of the sponsored event or program can also have an impact on how the public perceives the sponsor. In particular, the fit between the sponsor's products and services and the content of the program seem to be important. A 2005 study by Colbert et al. found that, for "heritage arts" (i.e. historical museums and preservations; cultural programs; science and technology museums), visitors valued a weak link (congruence) between the sponsor and the

sponsored program. For popular and fine arts programs and sports programs, strong links between the sponsor and the program are favored by participants (Carrillat et al., 2008; Colbert, d' Astous, & Parmentier, 2005; Cornwell, Weeks, & Roy, 2005; Olson & Thjøømøe, 2011). Participants in the Colbert et al. (2005) study had a higher opinion of sponsors if the event was "popular art" rather than "high art," suggesting that the nature of the sponsored program or public perception of the sponsored program may also influence the impact of sponsorship on corporate image.

Research conducted on sports sponsorship suggests that the performance or success of a team may be related to public perception of the quality of the sponsor's brands, but not the perception of the corporation itself (Pope et al., 2009). This performance-related effect on perceived brand quality seems to occur regardless of whether the sponsor's products were used by the competing team. We have not identified any research that has investigated the relationship between the quality of a museum exhibition and visitor opinions of the sponsor; and, although sports sponsorships take place in a for-profit context, this research begs the question: How might visitor perception of the quality of the exhibit or experience be related to their views about the sponsor?

Visitor characteristics also play a role in their recognition of and perception of a sponsor. In particular, visitor use of company products may relate to their recognition or positive views of a sponsorship (Pope & Voges, 2000). Research in performing arts sponsorship has found that frequent attendees have more positive views of sponsors than infrequent attendees (Dalaka, 2009), and research on charitable sponsorship for nonprofits suggests that, when consumers strongly identify with the sponsored nonprofit, their intention to purchase products from a sponsoring company increases (Cornwell et al., 2005). A similar relationship was noted in a study of cultural sponsorship of non-profit visual and performing arts organizations, which found that 61% of frequent attendees to cultural events report that "they are more likely to make purchases from corporations that support the arts," and 69% of frequent attendees report that they "think highly of corporations that support the arts" (LaPlaca Cohen, 2011). This suggests that there may be an interaction between museum membership and frequent attendance and reactions to sponsoring companies.

Another indication that the context of sponsorship may be related to public response to the sponsorship is that several studies have found that corporate sponsorship of arts or charitable causes are more highly linked to stated intention to purchase sponsor products than corporate sponsorship of sports. For example, the Performance Research study found that 56% of participants with interest in the arts reported they would "almost always" or "frequently" buy products from an event sponsor, in comparison to 36% of National Football League fans, or 17% of the '96 Olympic audience (Performance Research, 1997). Further, a survey of a sponsored program at the Museum of Science found that most visitors (81%) reported that they would be more likely to consider purchasing products from companies that support MOS exhibits (ODC, 2006).

In an effort to elaborate on visitor perceptions of sponsorship in the context of science museums, this study investigates the impact of corporate sponsorship of museum exhibitions on visitor perception of both the sponsor and the museum exhibit, and examine which factors, if any influence these reactions. To this end, we evaluate the following overarching research questions:

3. What is the relationship, if any, between the visitor's reaction to the exhibit and their perception of the sponsor and its products?
4. Does a perceived link between sponsor and content influence a visitor's reaction to the sponsor and/or the content, and, if so, how?



## II. DESIGN AND METHODS

This study employed complementary quantitative correlational analyses and open-ended qualitative interviews. The correlational analyses were designed in order to identify context-specific relationships between visitors’:

- Opinions about exhibitions and sponsoring companies;
- Beliefs about the role of the sponsoring company in the design of exhibitions; and
- Changes in opinion about either the sponsoring company or the exhibit in response to learning about the sponsorship.

The open-ended interviews were designed to reveal visitors’ ideas and concerns about corporate sponsorships in museum settings, in general.

Of the many dimensions of company image identified in prior studies, four were selected for the correlational analyses: creativity, innovativeness, trustworthiness, and social responsibility. Creativity and innovativeness were chosen for this analysis since background research indicated that companies sometimes choose to sponsor museum exhibitions in order to improve the creative and innovative dimensions of their image (Danilov, 1988; Olson, 2010). The trustworthiness facet of image was chosen for this analysis because prior research revealed that museum professionals have concerns about the impact of sponsorships on public perception of museum credibility (Waite, 2011). Finally, the social responsibility dimension has been identified as a facet of company image that is benefited through sponsorships (Colbert et al., 2005; Pope et al., 2009).

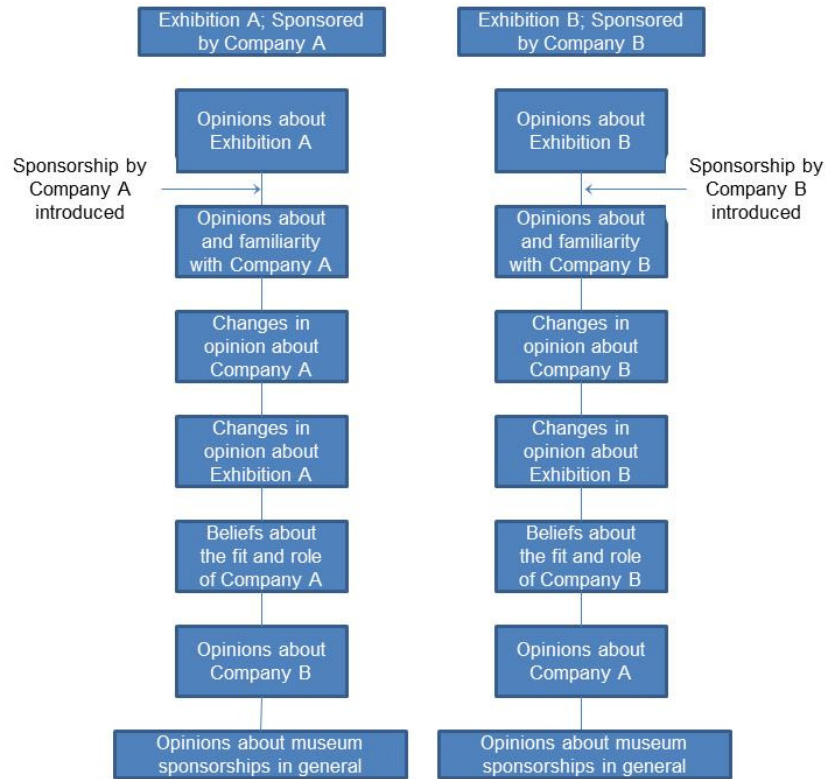
Along these four dimensions – creativity, innovativeness, trustworthiness, and social responsibility – we assessed visitor opinions of:

- The exhibition the visitor had just experienced<sup>2</sup>
- The sponsor of the exhibition
- Changes in opinions about the sponsor after hearing about the sponsorship
- Changes in opinions about the exhibit after hearing about the sponsorship
- Beliefs about the sponsors’ role and fit
- The company which sponsored the other studied exhibition, without prompting the visitor that the company was a sponsor

We also assessed visitor familiarity with the sponsoring companies and intent to purchase sponsors’ products. Finally, we interviewed visitors about their opinions and thoughts about sponsorships of museum exhibits in general. See Figure 1 for a diagram of the instrument design.

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<sup>2</sup> To measure the social responsibility of the exhibit, we asked visitors to rate the statement “This content of this exhibit is important to know.” To measure the trustworthiness of the exhibit, we asked visitors to rate the statement “I trust the content of this exhibit.”



**FIGURE 1. Instrument design**

## EXHIBITS CHOSEN

For the purposes of this paper, an “exhibit” or “exhibition” refers to a cohesive set of related components. Visitors were interviewed after they had interacted with one of two different exhibits: Exhibit A and Exhibit B. These exhibits were specifically chosen for this study because they varied in terms of content and certain exhibit characteristics that we hypothesized could affect how visitors perceive the exhibit and its sponsor. The two exhibits, for instance, cover unrelated topics and use varied exhibit design elements; Exhibit A has a focus on visitor-driven hands-on exploration of scientific concepts while Exhibit B presents advances in the health field through both wall panels and interactive components. Besides being diverse in terms of approach and content, these exhibits have been rated differently by visitors in an evaluation study focused on how up-to-date they seem. In a recent study, four-fifths of those who viewed Exhibit B considered it up-to-date while less than two-fifths of those who viewed Exhibit A rated it as up-to-date. These results were not surprising as Exhibit A is currently being partially renovated (Beyer, Lindgren-Streicher, & Mazar, 2011).

These various differences in content, design, and out-of-date ratings were important factors to take into account when choosing exhibits to include in the study as they may influence how visitors view the exhibit’s sponsor. In particular, Pope’s (2000) study on sports sponsorship suggested that the performance of a sponsored team could impact some aspects of visitor perceptions of the company. In a museum setting, studying the relationship between visitor ratings of different characteristics of an exhibition and views of corporate sponsor, unlike

studying the performance of a sports team, is complicated by the fact that exhibition characteristics are generally consistent from day to day. Choosing exhibits with known differences in visitor ratings, both of which have similarly-regarded sponsors, provides a way to explore how variations in visitor ratings of exhibition characteristics may relate to visitor opinions of sponsors.

In particular, there were differences in visitor responses to the two exhibit experiences, beliefs about sponsor-content fit in each exhibit, and thoughts about whether the sponsor's products were used. These responses are elaborated in the following section, (Context of the study: General opinions about the exhibits).

## **SPONSORS CHOSEN**

The two companies that sponsored<sup>3</sup> each of these exhibits were carefully chosen to fit the design of this study. Sponsor visibility in museums can go beyond the museum walls, and can include recognition through marketing and different media. For example, some sponsorships include recognition through mentions in radio ads, acknowledgment in television commercials, logos on outdoor signage, and other media. However, the visibility of the sponsorship in these two exhibits included only unobtrusive signs at each exhibit. In both cases, the visibility of the sponsor at the exhibit was consistent with the Museum of Science's overall approach to corporate funding of exhibitions and was not overbearing. A single plaque indicates Company A's contribution to Exhibit A; while Company B is referenced in two unobtrusive signs at Exhibit B and also on the corner of several exhibit components in small letters. The two companies were also deemed appropriate for our study since they are both nationally-known and generally well-regarded. For these reasons, it was anticipated that a wide range of visitors would be familiar enough with the sponsors and their products to answer interview questions pertaining to the company.

Moreover, it was important to include sponsors that had varying levels of connection to the exhibit topic because this study aimed to explore if there was a relationship between visitor perception of the degree of fit between the content of the exhibition and the sponsor's products (sponsor-content fit). These exhibit/sponsor pairings were considered a good match for this study because the authors felt that the link between Company A's products and Exhibit A's topic was low while the link between Company B's products and Exhibit B's content was high.

## **CONTEXT OF THE STUDY**

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### ***Visitor demographics***

Adult visitors - including single adults, chaperones, adults with children, and adults in adult-only groups - who interacted with at least one component of either Exhibit A or Exhibit B for at least 60 seconds were invited to participate in the study. Visitors were thus continuously sampled at

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<sup>3</sup> One of the two companies studied through this research was not a true sponsor, but, but rather a corporation that provided financial support for the exhibition. For the purposes of this study, visitors were told that each company was a "sponsor" without any further clarification. This was done because the Museum of Science does not have a long history of corporate sponsorship of exhibitions.

each exhibit for periods of 2 hours at a time. Overall, a total of 82 visitors were surveyed, 41 at Exhibit A and 41 at Exhibit B.

Most of the sampled visitors were not members of the Museum of Science (72%). A higher percentage of the visitors who were interviewed were female (61%), which corresponds with previous visitor studies which indicate that a majority of adult MOS visitors are female (ODC, 2006). While some (34%) had visited within the previous two years, a higher percentage of respondents (41%) were first-time visitors. Since adult visitors were targeted in this study, only 6% of those interviewed were under 18, although two-thirds of those interviewed were attending as part of a group that included children. See Table 1 for a summary of surveyed visitor demographics.

**TABLE 1. Demographics of interviewed visitors (n=82 visitors)<sup>4</sup>**

		Number	Percent <sup>5</sup>
Gender	Male	30	37%
	Female	50	61%
Visitation history	Members	19	23%
	Nonmembers	59	72%
	Visited within the past 2 years	28	34%
	Visited previously, but not within the past 2 years	15	18%
Group type	First time visitor	34	41%
	Adults and children	54	66%
Age	Adults only	27	33%
	Under 18	5	6%
	18-24	18	22%
	25-34	14	17%
	35-44	19	23%
	45-54	15	18%
	55-64	5	6%
65+	6	7%	

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### ***General opinions about the companies***

As part of the interview, visitors to Exhibit A were asked their opinions of the Company B, and visitors to Exhibit B were asked their opinions of Company A, without being informed that the two companies were sponsors of exhibits at the Museum. Most (89%) visitors were familiar with both companies, and 93% of visitors expressed familiarity with both after they were shown

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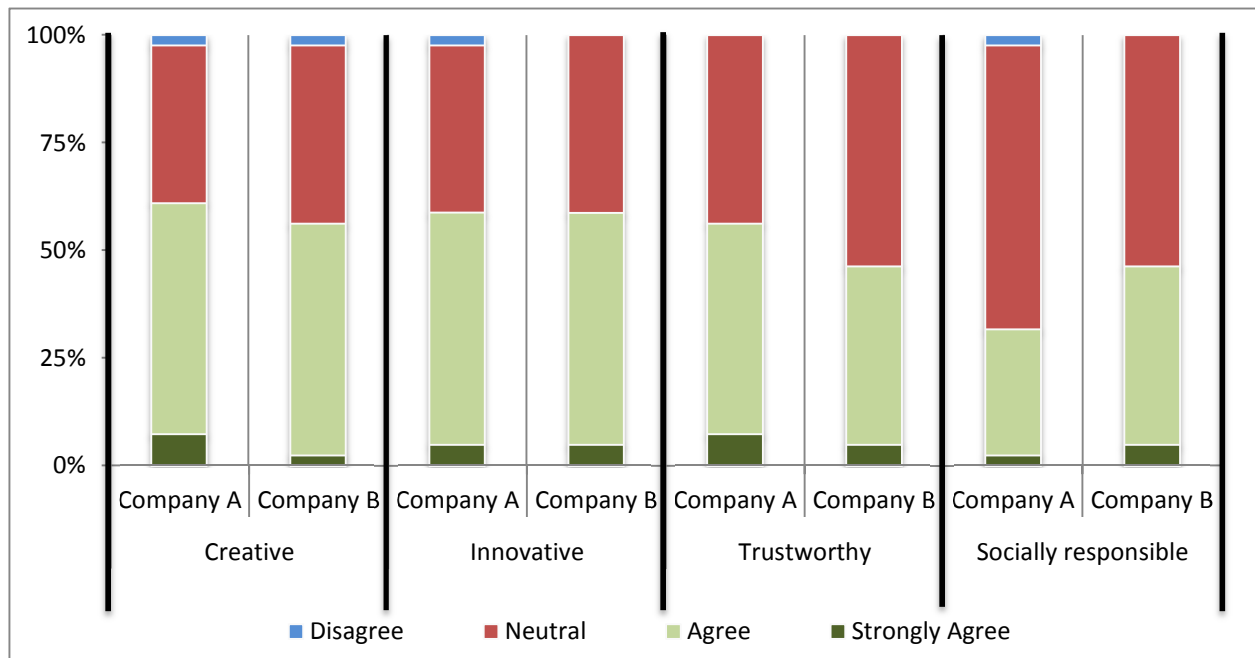
<sup>4</sup> In comparison to a random sample of FY 2011 visitors, the sample attained in this study has a higher percentage of 18-24 year-olds (22% for this study, in comparison to 9% of the FY 2011 audience) and a lower percentage of 35-44 year olds (23% of visitors in this study, in comparison to 37.2% of the FY 2011 audience). In addition, the percentage of first-time visitors interviewed in this study was higher than the MOS general audience in FY 2011. These differences may relate to the timing of most of the data collection for this study, which took place primarily in late summer when a higher percentage of out-of-town and college-aged audiences visit the museum.

<sup>5</sup> Since some visitors elected not to respond to all of the demographic questions, percentages may not add up to 100%.

the company logo and prompted to think about the company. When asked to name three things that came to mind when they thought about the companies, 92.3% of visitors to Exhibit A listed at least one product from Company A and 75% of visitors to Exhibit B listed at least one of Company B's products. Further, when asked about the company that sponsored the exhibit they did not see, 87.2% of visitors to Exhibit A named at least one of Company's B products and 89.7% of visitors to Exhibit B named at least one product of Company A. This suggests that most visitors generally were familiar with both sponsors.

Moreover, there were no significant differences between visitors' opinions of the two companies when they were not aware that the company was a sponsor at the Museum of Science, and fewer than 4% of visitors expressed any negative opinions about either company (See Chart 1). This suggests that, when visitors were not aware of the exhibit sponsorships, the two companies were similarly perceived by visitors and that very few had any negative feelings about either of the companies. As such, findings from the correlational analysis only apply to sponsorships in which companies are well-regarded by visitors.

**CHART 1. Visitors' opinions of the focus companies, without knowledge of the sponsorships.**

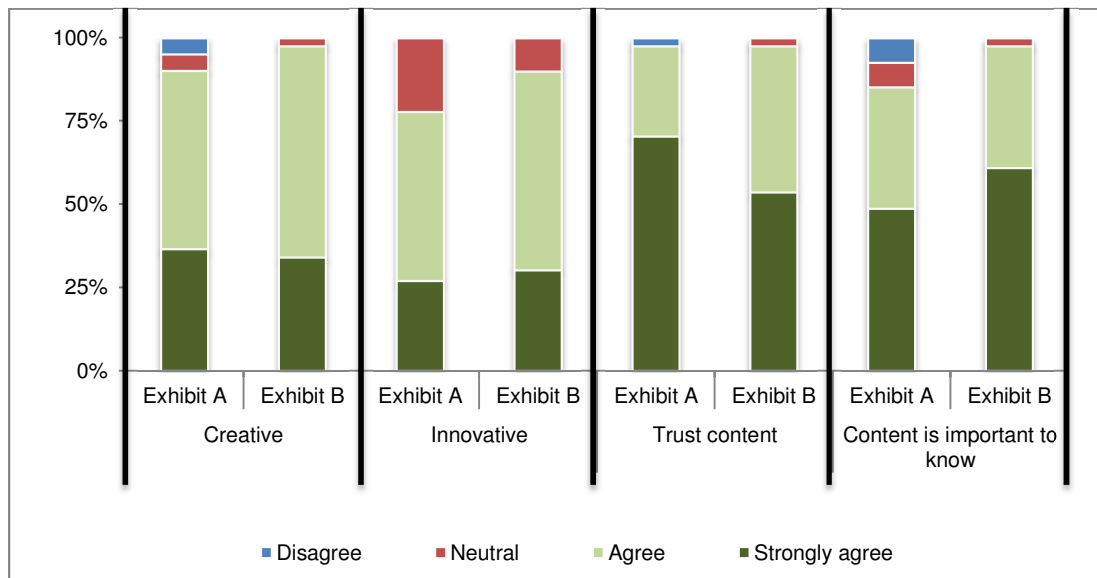


**General opinions about the exhibits**

Visitors generally had positive opinions about the exhibits. Only 6% of visitors gave negative ratings to any of the four studied dimensions of either exhibit, and 99% of visitors had positive opinions about at least one of the four dimensions. When asked to give their overall impression of the exhibit, 28 out of 40 people volunteered positive impressions of Exhibit A, and only one expressed a negative impression. For Exhibit B, 32 out of 41 people volunteered positive remarks with only one visitor saying they were confused. This suggests that the findings from the

correlational analyses are limited to contexts in which the exhibits are relatively well-regarded by visitors.

**CHART 2. Visitor opinions of the exhibits included in this study.**



As noted in the Design and Methods section, exhibits were chosen due to their different characteristics, and visitors’ overall reaction to the exhibits highlighted these distinctions. For instance, one of the main themes to emerge from visitor comments about Exhibit A related to the interactive nature of the exhibit. Seven out of the 40 visitors to Exhibit A placed an emphasis on the interactive hands-on components. As one visitor said, “I like how hands-on [Exhibit A] is, really instead of just walking by and looking.” In contrast, although Exhibit B also has several interactive components, much of the content is relayed on large text panels and visitors’ reactions to Exhibit B reflected the emphasis placed on content. For example, while none of the visitors to this exhibition mentioned interactive components, 13 visitors commented on the informative nature of this exhibit. One visitor described how “The thing I liked was that it contrasted the differences and explained the safety aspect [of the topic].”

Despite these generally positive reactions, three visitors also discussed concerns about broken parts they had encountered in Exhibit A. One person explained, “[Exhibit A] Needs to be fixed up, but [was] fun.” These concerns were not present in visitor responses to Exhibit B. However, these reactions support previous evaluation data that suggest Exhibit A is seen as out-of-date by visitors (Beyer et al., 2011). However, there were no significant differences between visitor opinions about the creativity, innovativeness, credibility, or importance of the content at the two exhibits (See Chart 2)<sup>6</sup>. Overall, this data suggests that, although the visitor experience differed at the two exhibits, most visitors generally had positive reactions to both exhibits.

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### ***Sponsor-content fit***

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<sup>6</sup> Significant differences evaluated using Mann-Whitney test for non-parametric measures;  $p < 0.05$  for each aspect of the exhibit rating scales

Confirming our assumption about the difference in sponsor-content fit between the two exhibit-sponsor pairings, visitors to Exhibit B were significantly more likely to believe that the sponsor's products were used in the exhibit than visitors to Exhibit A<sup>7</sup>. In addition, visitors to Exhibit B expressed significantly higher ratings for the statement that "[Sponsor's] products are related to the content of this exhibit" than visitors to Exhibit A<sup>8</sup>. This suggests that visitors were likely to feel that there was a higher degree of sponsor-content fit at Exhibit B than at Exhibit A.

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*Framing the context of this study*

There are several exhibit and sponsor factors that frame the context of this study. These factors include the fact that:

- Visitors overwhelmingly had neutral or positive opinions of both the exhibitions and the sponsors;
- The visibility of the sponsorships was relatively low, with minimal signage at both exhibits; and
- Most visitors had some awareness of the sponsoring companies prior to visiting the exhibits.

These factors serve to constrain the implications and findings of the correlational analyses of this study to contexts in which the sponsor has a generally positive reputation, the exhibitions are generally well-regarded, and sponsorships have low to moderate visibility.

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<sup>7</sup> Mann-Whitney test for non-parametric measures;  $p < 0.000$

<sup>8</sup> Mann-Whitney test for non-parametric measures;  $p < 0.000$

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 1. CAREFULLY CHOSEN AND PRESENTED SPONSORSHIPS, FOR A MAJORITY OF VISITORS, HAVE NO IMPACT ON VISITOR OPINION OF EXHIBITIONS, BUT, IN SOME CASES, CAN LEAD TO IMPROVEMENTS.

##### *1.1 Most visitors did not report changes in opinion about the exhibit when they became aware of sponsorships.*

In the context of sponsorships in the Museum of Science, three-quarters of visitors did not report any changes in opinion about the exhibit after they became aware of the sponsorship (See Table 2). This suggests that, in a museum setting in which sponsorship visibility is relatively low, and visitors have neutral to positive opinions of both sponsors and exhibits, sponsorship has little impact on most visitors' opinions about exhibits.

**TABLE 2. Changes in visitors' opinions about exhibits after learning about the sponsorship**

	<b>The exhibit is creative. (n=81)</b>	<b>The exhibit is innovative. (n=80)</b>	<b>I trust the content of this exhibit. (n=81)</b>	<b>This exhibit explains ideas that are important to know. (n=80)</b>	<b>Overall: any change in opinion about the exhibit. (n=80)</b>
Less	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%
Same	85%	84%	80%	83%	75%
More	15%	16%	19%	18%	24%

Data from the qualitative responses also reflect the fact that most visitors did not experience changes in opinion about the exhibit after learning about the sponsorship. After visitors were asked to rate how their opinions changed about the creativity, innovativeness, credibility, and importance of the exhibit content, they were asked to describe additional ways their opinion of the exhibit changed. Most visitors (67 out of 80 respondents) reported that no additional changes came to mind. However, a few visitors described that they thought the exhibit had nothing to do with the company. As one visitor said, “the exhibit was the exhibit, the [company] didn’t help that.” This line of thinking may explain why many visitors’ opinions about the exhibits did not change. Two visitors felt they would need more information about the company in order for their opinion of the exhibit to be affected. As one visitor explained, “it’s hard [to respond]” since they do not know a lot about the company. The other visitor who felt she/he needed more information before their opinion of the exhibit would change asked, “Are they an American company still?” These responses suggest some reasons why three-quarters of visitors did not report any changes in opinion about the exhibition after hearing about the sponsorship.

Further, interview responses suggest that many visitors seemed to view museum sponsorships strictly in terms of a financial transaction. The emphasis visitors placed on the financial aspect of sponsorships could help explain why visitors’ opinions about the exhibit did not change when they became aware of the sponsorship.



For example, many visitors talked about the financial implications of sponsorship rather than any content implications when responding to the question, “Should museums have corporate sponsors?” Of the 81 visitors who answered this open-ended question, 48 (59%) felt museums should take advantage of the funding opportunities related to sponsorships. Most of these visitors indicated that they felt sponsorships provide needed funding for museums. For example, one visitor explained that he/she favored sponsorships because museums “Gotta get money from somewhere....” While a different visitor felt “yes, [museums should have corporate sponsors] because [museums] have to have money to do things, can't depend on donors.” Yet another said, “I believe they need it just to keep some money flowing in.” This sentiment was echoed by another visitor who said, “Absolutely, museums are running out of money.”

A few visitors felt that the financial implications of corporate sponsorship could possibly help lower the cost for visitors. As one person explained, “Yes [I believe museums should have corporate sponsors because], corporate sponsorships mean more money going into the museum, allows for cost of admission to go down....” Another visitor who also felt this way said “Yes, museums are expensive, they shouldn't charge as much.” A different visitor who thought corporate sponsorship might allow for admission prices to go down explained, “Yes, too expensive as it is, helps with funding.”

Other visitors who emphasized the financial effect of corporate sponsorships referred to how difficult it can be for museums to get public funding. As several visitors explained, museums might need to look towards corporate sponsors for financial aid, especially in this time of economic troubles. As one person noted, “[Corporate sponsorship is a] necessity in this day and age, the government is running short of money.” Another felt that “Yes [museums need corporate sponsors for] - money. The government's funding them less.” Another visitor explained how he/she was “probably” in favor of corporate sponsorships for museums because it is “hard to publicly fund museums, especially now.” These responses suggest that visitors may think of sponsorships in museums in terms of the financial implications. If visitors view sponsors primarily in terms of funding in the context of museums, they may not consider them to have much direct impact on the exhibit. This may help explain why many visitors’ opinions about the exhibitions did not change when they were informed of the sponsorships.

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### ***1.2 Some visitors reported improved opinions about the exhibition after hearing about the sponsorship.***

Nearly a quarter of interviewed visitors expressed improved opinions about at least one of the measured characteristics of the exhibition after hearing about the sponsorship. In particular, 19% reported that they had more trust in the content of the exhibit knowing that it was supported by the sponsor, and 18% reported that they agreed more strongly that the exhibit explained ideas that were important (See Table 2). This finding contrasts with concerns that museum professionals express about how sponsorships can compromise visitor trust in museums (Waite, 2011).

The qualitative data helps elaborate two reasons why visitors might have had improved opinions of the exhibitions after hearing about the sponsorships. First, some visitors believed that

corporate sponsors could contribute new technologies and ideas to the exhibits. When asked to think abstractly about whether museums should have corporate sponsors, 20% (14 out of 81) of visitors suggested that the sponsorship might actually improve the museum experience. Nine of these visitors specifically noted that corporations could help museums with exhibit development. To these visitors, corporations could potentially offer technology or new ideas. For example, one visitor said that “it’s [a] long established tradition, especially in museums with technology [to have corporate sponsors] - they invented the technology and can explain it.” Another visitor expressed a similar belief, stating, “corporations have so much technology to bring into exhibits.” Others who thought that corporations could help museums with their exhibits suggested they could provide new ideas. For example, one person described how corporate sponsors could “help in development,” while another felt corporate sponsors “bring new ideas and new things to the museum.” Thus, some visitors felt that sponsorships could be positive if, as one visitor suggested, sponsors have “something useful to add.”

Another reason why visitors may have had improved opinions about exhibits after hearing about the sponsorship may be related to a belief that corporate sponsorship could help museums develop new types of exhibits. For example, one person said “I think it’s a good way to get funding for different exhibits” while another visitor explained “[museums] need money for new exhibits.” Although a different visitor stated, they didn’t “really care” about corporate sponsorship and museums, they also expressed that “if [a corporate sponsor] helps them make good new exhibits” this could be a favorable situation.

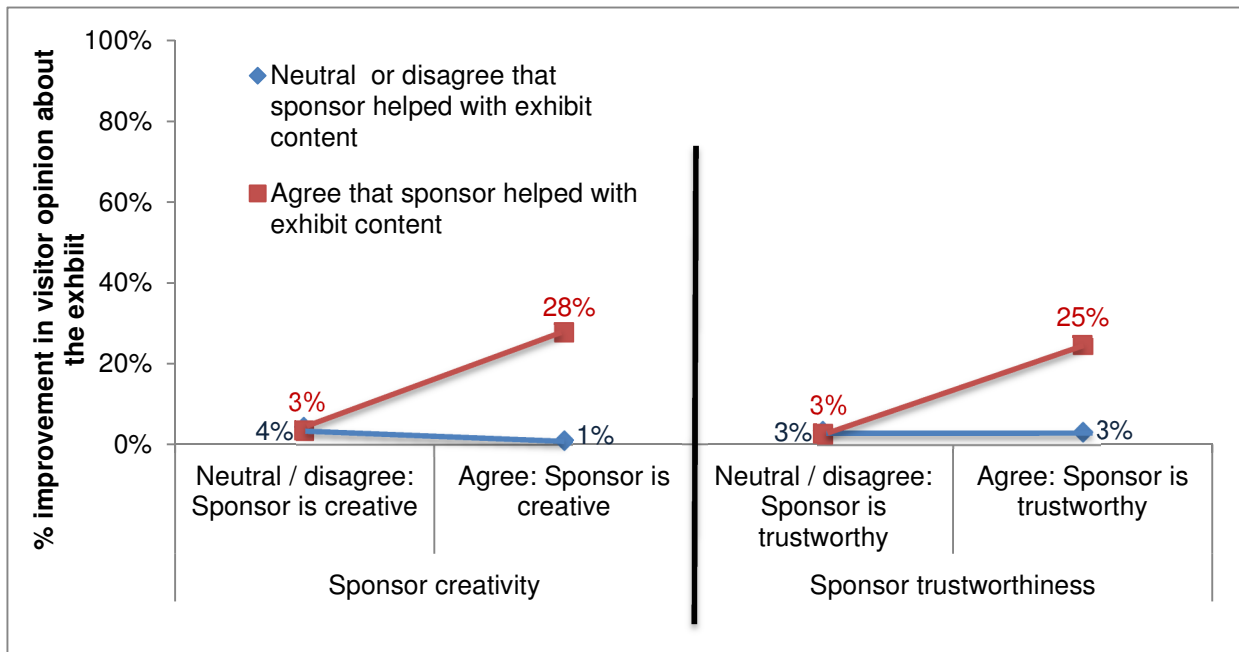
While one visitor even suggested that corporate sponsorships might attract more people to the museum, several other visitors voiced their general approval of the idea of corporate sponsorship for museums. For example, when asked about their thoughts on corporate sponsorship and museums, one visitor answered, “Sure why not?” Others felt this partnership would be useful and as one person explained, “If it’d help the museum, yes, would be great, whatever helps you.”

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***1.3 Visitors whose opinions about the exhibit improved after hearing about the sponsorship were likely to have positive opinions about the creativity and trustworthiness of the sponsor, and were likely to believe that the sponsor helped with the exhibit content.***

When visitors rated a company as creative or trustworthy, and also believed that the sponsor helped with the content of the exhibit, they were more likely to express improved overall opinions of the exhibit (See Chart 3). Thus, if visitors did not think that the sponsor helped with the content, they were correspondingly unlikely to report that learning about the sponsorship improved their opinion of the exhibit, regardless of their opinion of the creativity or trustworthiness of the sponsor.

**CHART 3. Relationship between opinions about the sponsor with belief that the sponsor helped with content and improved opinions about the exhibit.**



Likewise, if visitors did not have positive opinions of the sponsor, they were also unlikely to have improved opinions of the exhibit as a result of learning about the sponsorship, regardless of whether they believed the sponsor helped with the exhibit. For example, nearly half of visitors (48%) who thought that a creative sponsor helped with the exhibit content also reported improved opinions about the exhibit. In comparison, only 11% of visitors with neutral or negative opinions about the sponsor’s creativity who believed the sponsor helped with exhibit content reported improved opinions about the exhibit. Similarly, 44% of visitors who thought a trustworthy sponsor helped with content reported improved opinions about the exhibit, while only 7% of visitors with neutral or negative opinions about the sponsor’s trustworthiness who also believed the sponsor helped with exhibit content reported any improved exhibit opinions after hearing about the sponsorship. This suggests that, in certain contexts, museums can benefit from partnering on exhibit content with sponsors who have positive reputations for creativity and trustworthiness.

#### ***1.4 Visitor concerns reveal several important factors for museums to consider about sponsorships.***

The open-ended responses visitors gave when asked to describe any additional ways their opinions about the exhibition may have changed point to several potential concerns about museum sponsorship that were echoed throughout the interviews. Two visitors expressed potential concerns about the role of the sponsor in the exhibit, and were wary of this when thinking how their opinion may have changed about the exhibit. As one described, “It reduces my trust in the independence of science” while the other felt that museum sponsorship was acceptable “as long as [the sponsor] didn’t tell [the museum] what to put in the exhibit.”

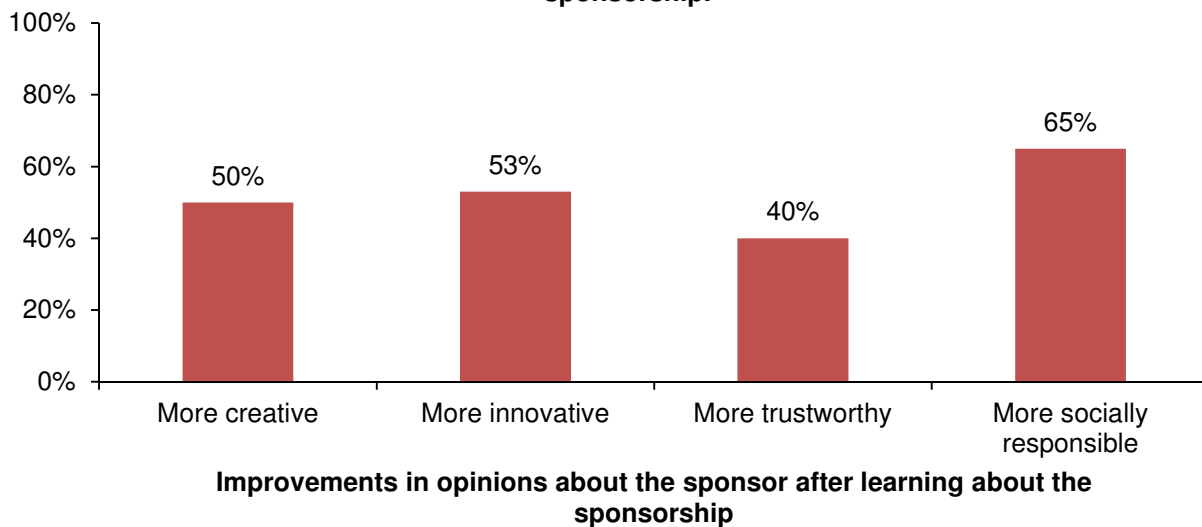
Although no other visitors expressed these concerns within the context of the MOS sponsorships, these sentiments were repeatedly mentioned when visitors were interviewed more generally about their past sponsorship experiences and thoughts about sponsorship in the museum setting, and will be explored in more detail later in sections 3.1-3.3.

## 2. CAREFULLY-CHOSEN AND PRESENTED SPONSORSHIPS, FOR A MAJORITY OF VISITORS, HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON VISITOR OPINION OF SPONSORS

### *2.1 A majority of visitors' opinions of the sponsoring companies improved when they became aware of the sponsorship.*

Nearly three-quarters of visitors (73%) reported that their opinion of companies improved in some way after hearing they had sponsored the exhibition. In particular, a majority of visitors reported that they felt that the sponsor was more socially responsible, creative, and innovative after learning about the sponsorship (See Chart 4). Some visitors (40%) also reported that they had improved opinions about the trustworthiness of the sponsor after learning about the sponsorship. This suggests that sponsorship companies benefit from sponsoring exhibitions in the context of the Museum of Science.

**CHART 4. Percent of visitors who expressed improved opinions about the creativity, innovativeness, trustworthiness, and social responsibility of the sponsor after learning about the sponsorship.**



The qualitative data sheds light on two possible reasons behind visitors' improved opinions about the sponsor: positive feelings about companies that contribute to the Museum or to education in general; and increased knowledge about the sponsoring company as a result of viewing the exhibit. During the interview, seven people indicated they were impressed that the sponsor was involved with the museum because it made the company seem more socially responsible. Six of these visitors specifically explained that they had a more favorable opinion of the sponsor now because they thought of the company as more socially responsible. For example, one person said "I feel a little better that I know they're contributing" while another individual felt the sponsor's involvement "makes me think they care." Another person expressed surprise because he/she "think[s] of them as just [their product], [and it's] good to know they're involved in the stuff as well."

Moreover, while answering the open-ended question about how their opinion of the sponsor may have changed, 12 visitors felt the sponsor's involvement with the museum illustrated their commitment to education. This commitment to educational efforts seemed to be a reason why many of these 12 visitors expressed a more positive outlook on the sponsor. As one person commented, "[it is] nice to hear [the sponsor is] getting involved in hands on with kids, rather than focus on products." Another visitor said, "yeah, the fact [the corporation is] investing in kids' education" was important to them.

These types of positive feelings about companies that contribute to museums were also expressed when visitors responded to questions about museum sponsorships beyond the context of the two exhibits in this study. For example, several visitors indicated they were impressed by companies, in general, that sponsored museum exhibitions because it made them seem involved in educational efforts and community causes. Visitors expressed the fact that companies "[s]hould do something good with all of that money." Visitors saw it as important for "corporations [to] show they're socially responsible" or to "give money to a cause." A few people emphasized how sponsoring museums "keeps [corporations] involved in the community." Still others highlighted the educational aspect of sponsoring museums. As one person said, "I guess I feel [the] same as when companies help schools, [when they] help museums sharing the wealth basically." Another individual said by sponsoring museums, it "[s]hows social responsibility on the part of the corporation, rather than "look what we're doing!" It's educational, so the more funding, the better." One person voiced the fact that he/she works for a science company and thinks "it's a great way for companies to promote science use, especially if they use lots of science technology." Another visitor stated that by helping museums, companies are "help[ing] kids learn."

Some visitors' opinions of the exhibit sponsors at MOS may have improved because they felt they learned more about the sponsor. For instance, three people expressed how up until this interview they had been unaware of the sponsor's involvement in the exhibit. As one person said, "Yeah, [I] didn't know, cool." Six people specifically mentioned that learning about the company's sponsorship made them understand more about the company's work. For example, one individual suggested that her opinions changed "more b/c I didn't know anything about them [at first]." Another said their views had changed "a little, [because I] didn't realize they had to do with this kind of stuff" while a third mentioned that they "might know more about their innovations now."

When visitors were interviewed about general feelings towards museum sponsorships outside of the two exhibits at MOS, they also elaborated on how sponsoring exhibits might increase public awareness of the companies. Several visitors commented on the increased visibility corporations' gain from sponsoring museum exhibits and felt that museum involvement "brings [the corporation's] name out there for people to see" and was a "good way to advertise for their own products." As one person explained, they "[I]ike seeing a big company make things better, expose their products, [the museum is] doing commercials for them too, [so they] help each other." Another visitor acknowledged that companies benefit from the increased visibility if they sponsor exhibits, however, said he/she felt the visibility was best "when [signage is] little like that," and pointed to the Museum's small label.

A few visitors felt that companies who sponsor museums benefit from being able to educate the public in a museum setting about their corporation. For instance, one visitor said, “I think it is a good thing if they are explaining products and services through museum, exhibit educates people.” Another visitor emphasized the same idea and said corporations “can educate on what they are doing...” within the museum.

In regards to other ways corporations might benefit from sponsoring museum exhibits, one person specifically explained that she/he “think[s] you are more likely to buy products if you see them in your community.” Another person felt a company’s involvement with a museum could benefit the corporation because they “could go back and say in their mission statement that they support [this type of cause]....”

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**2.2 Several factors about the context of the sponsorship were related to specific improvements in opinions of the sponsor.**

In the context of this specific study, both opinions about the exhibit and sponsor-content fit seem to be related to improvements in visitor opinions of the sponsoring company. This section describes these relationships. However, visitors also described some contexts in which they would have concerns about corporate sponsorship in museums in general. These potential concerns are elaborated in the next section.

**Opinions about the exhibit can be related to improvements in sponsor image**

Visitors’ opinions of the creativity or innovativeness of the sponsored exhibition were related to improved opinions of the sponsor (See Table 3). In particular, the strongest correlation was observed between visitors who felt that the exhibition was very creative and had improved opinions about the innovativeness of the sponsoring company. Moderate correlations were also observed between opinions of the innovativeness of the exhibition and improved opinions about the sponsoring company’s innovativeness, trustworthiness, and social responsibility. Sponsorship of exhibits with important-to-know content was also correlated with improvements in visitor opinions of the innovativeness and social responsibility of sponsors.

**TABLE 3. Correlations between visitor opinions about the exhibition and changes in opinions about the sponsor.<sup>9</sup>**

		<b>After seeing the exhibit, visitor thinks the sponsor is more:</b>			
		Creative	Innovative	Trustworthy	Socially responsible
The exhibit is:	Creative	.31**	.37**	.22*	.23*
	Innovative	.24*	.28*	.26*	.27*
I trust the content of the exhibit.		<i>n.s.</i> <sup>10</sup>	<i>n.s.</i>	<i>n.s.</i>	<i>n.s.</i>
The content of the exhibit is important for people to know.		<i>n.s.</i>	.29**	<i>n.s.</i>	.28*

<sup>9</sup> Correlation significance calculated using Spearman’s Rho; \* =p<0.05, \*\* =p<0.01.

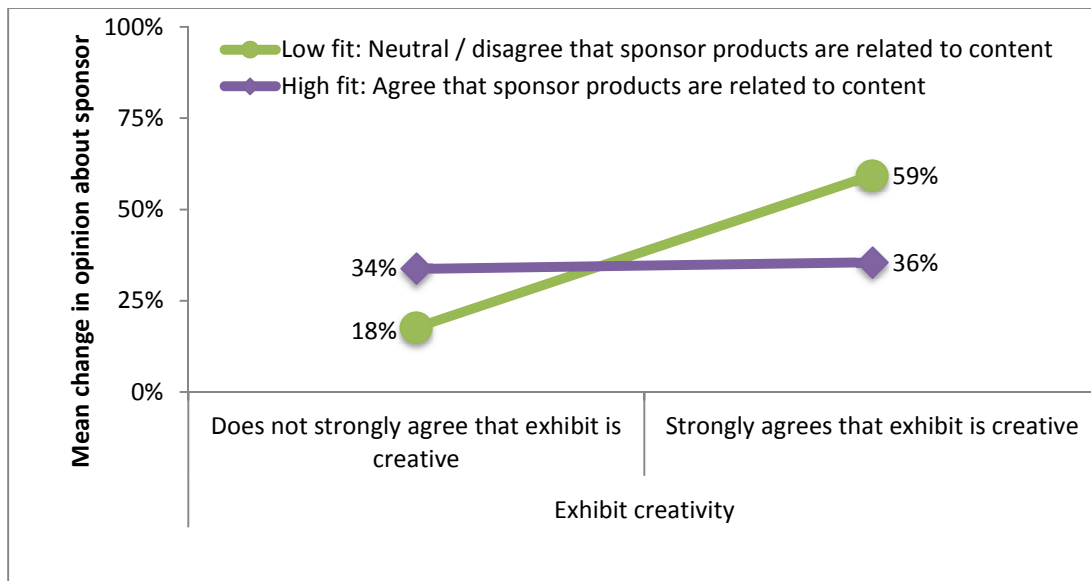
<sup>10</sup> *n.s.* indicates that the correlation is not statistically significant.

Further, as suggested in several previous studies, when visitors had high opinions about the exhibit overall, they were more likely to say that knowing about the sponsorship made them more likely to purchase sponsor products. Nearly half of visitors (49%) with higher than median overall opinions of the exhibit said they would be more likely to buy the sponsor’s products after learning about the sponsorship, while only 16% of visitors with median and lower overall opinions of the exhibition suggested they would be more likely to purchase the sponsor’s products.<sup>11</sup> In particular, visitors who thought that the content of the exhibit was important for people to know were more likely to express an increased intent to purchase the sponsor’s products after hearing about the sponsorship.<sup>12</sup> This suggests that the visitors’ opinions about the exhibit can reflect on the image of the sponsoring company and affect expressed intent to purchase company products.

### Sponsor-content fit

When visitors felt there was a low-sponsor content fit (did not agree that sponsor products were related to exhibition content), they expressed significantly more improved opinions of the sponsor if they also strongly agreed that the exhibition was creative. In comparison, visitors who did not strongly agree that the exhibit was creative did not have significantly improved opinions of the sponsor<sup>13</sup> (See Chart 5).

**CHART 5. Improvement in visitors’ opinions of sponsor after learning about the sponsorship, as a function of beliefs about sponsor-content fit and exhibit creativity**



This suggests that, surprisingly, when there is a high degree of fit between sponsor products and exhibit content, the creativity of the exhibit has little impact on changes in visitor opinion about the sponsor. However, when visitors perceive a low degree of fit between sponsor products and

<sup>11</sup>  $X^2=9.086$ ;  $p<0.003$ .

<sup>12</sup>  $X^2=4.221$ ;  $p<0.040$ .

<sup>13</sup> Two-way ANOVA;  $p<0.003$ ; Adjusted  $R^2=.196$ .



exhibit content, their opinion about the creativity of the sponsor is more strongly related to the exhibit creativity. Thus, when companies support highly creative exhibits that are not closely related to their products, visitors' opinions of the sponsors may likely improve.

This may be explained by two interacting visitor beliefs and concerns. First, when visitors do not believe that sponsors' products are related to the exhibit, they may not believe that they had much to do with the development of the exhibit (See section 1.3). This makes improvements in visitor opinions of the sponsor as a result of viewing the exhibit less likely, particularly when they also do not feel that the exhibit is highly creative. However, when they view a highly-creative exhibit that is not strongly related to the sponsor's products, visitors' opinions about the sponsor may improve for two reasons. First, they may feel that the sponsor is supporting a good cause without high self-interest. Second, as elaborated previously, visitors may feel that they are learning new dimensions of the company's scope when they become aware of the museum sponsorship, therefore, leading to an increased likelihood of improved opinions of the sponsor when they are also impressed with the exhibit.

**Perceived role of the sponsor was related to improvements in aspects of company image.**

A visitors' impression that the company had reviewed the content of an exhibition was also related to improvements in their image of the company. In particular, the belief that the company had reviewed exhibit content was correlated to a moderate degree with visitors' image of the company's social responsibility, and to a smaller degree with improvements in visitor opinion of the company's creativity, innovativeness, trustworthiness (See Table 4). In addition, when visitors believed that sponsors' products were used in the exhibit, they were more likely to express improved opinions of the innovativeness and creativity of the sponsor. In particular, two-thirds of visitors who believed a company's products were used in the exhibit expressed improved opinions of the sponsoring company's innovativeness. This finding may be explained by some visitors' assertions that they learned about new dimensions of the company through their sponsorship of the exhibit (See section 1.3).

**TABLE 3. Relationship between beliefs about a company's role in the exhibit, and improvements in their opinion about the company.<sup>14</sup>**

Sponsor fit and role	After seeing the exhibit, visitor thinks the sponsor is more:			
	Creative	Innovative	Trustworthy	Socially responsible
Helped with the content	<i>n.s.</i>	<b>.25*</b>	<i>n.s.</i>	<i>n.s.</i>
Products were used	<b>.24*</b>	<b>.34**</b>	<i>n.s.</i>	<i>n.s.</i>
Reviewed the content	<b>.24*</b>	<b>.27*</b>	<b>.22*</b>	<b>.41**</b>

<sup>14</sup> Significance calculated using Spearman's Rho; \*= $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*= $p < 0.01$ .

### **3. IN SOME CONTEXTS, CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP OF MUSEUM EXHIBITS MAY CONCERN VISITORS.**

Although the above findings demonstrate that visitors generally viewed corporate sponsorships as positive, visitors indicated several examples of instances when they might have hesitations about sponsorship in museums. In general, three aspects of the context of museum sponsorships raised these concerns:

- Visibility of the sponsor
- Sponsor influence and bias reflected in the exhibit
- Reputation of the sponsoring company and their products

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#### ***3.1 Visibility of the sponsor***

One of the most frequent concerns was related to forceful or overtly visible marketing in museums. Many visitors felt a strong emphasis on advertising would be distasteful and off-putting in a museum setting. Visitors frequently cautioned museums and sponsors to be careful of the amount and size of corporate logos. For instance, one individual felt that museums could have corporate sponsorships “as long as there's no big advertising.” Another person made a similar remark and said, “As long as it's charitable, I think it's fine...as long as they aren't selling you anything.” One visitor specifically explained, “I don't want to see brand names everywhere.” Indeed, a few people gave examples of when sports advertising seemed over-the-top and voiced their concern that museum sponsorship might turn into the same situation. For example, one visitor said, “As long as the name is not on stuff, like Nascar... especially when it comes to science...[you don't] want to force directing stuff.” Another visitor explained, he/she would not have enjoyed it “if [the museum] would have stamped the logo everywhere. Sports sometimes are overkill.” One visitor voiced a similar sentiment and also said, “If it was shoved in my face, it'd be negative, but this [level of visibility] was tasteful.”

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#### ***3.2 Sponsor influence and bias***

A few visitors were uncomfortable with the idea of corporations having a strong input on museum exhibits. As one person put it, “I think [museums] should have overall [sponsorship], but not individual exhibit sponsors, with no oversight of content or education input.” Another individual felt “It's a great way to get money, especially if they allow the Museum and experts to take the lead as opposed to dictate what the exhibit should be. They shouldn't be able to dictate.”

Along the same lines, several visitors were specifically concerned that companies might bring an agenda to their role in the development of an exhibit. As one person said, they would be in favor of companies' involvement “unless it was really self-serving. This isn't Disneyland.” Another individual commented that “If something [in the exhibit had a] bias or political agenda, [I] wouldn't like [that, but] something for sake of learning [would be] ok.” One visitor suggested that “As long as they're not pushing their own agenda, and the information is checked and evaluated for neutral/unbiased information” they would be supportive of museum sponsorships. One person stated, “If info being displayed was biased, it would be a problem.” Another visitor felt that sponsorship is “probably necessary in our economy, [yet] might be limited in feeling accurate, might be due to sponsors' business.” These comments suggest that visitors may object

to exhibits where there is a strong sponsor-content fit since several people raised concerns about the educational viewpoint being affected if sponsors are allowed to shape content.

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### ***3.3 Reputation of the sponsoring company and their products***

Visitors cautioned museums to choose sponsoring companies carefully. There were a few instances when visitors pointed out they would “not have a problem with [corporate sponsors] if it's the right corporate sponsor.” As one visitor said, it “depends on who they are, if they're always in the news being bad...” they might have a strong reaction to the corporate sponsorship. One person explained they thought, “if the museum does their research, why not?” Although a few visitors felt fine with sponsors, they explained knowing of the sponsorship would not change their opinions as it is “obvious branding.”

When visitors were specifically asked if they have had any strong reactions to corporate sponsorship, in general, 61 visitors had no strong reaction, six visitors recalled positive experiences involving sponsors while 15 recalled negative reactions. Although these reactions were generally non-museum related, they reveal several aspects of corporate reputation that could influence visitor reactions to museum sponsorships. These aspects include the perceived:

- Social responsibility;
- Reputation of company products; and any
- Controversial activities of the corporation

For the visitors who had a positive reaction, one mentioned having a personal connection to a company that heavily supports its community. Another individual also recalled being impressed by a company because it was “funding local initiatives, using it to do good, social initiatives.” While a different person recalled that they were at “a [theme park] exhibit, [and] that was the first time I remember seeing a corporate sponsorship. I was really impressed and thought this must be a great company.”

The visitors who mentioned negative experiences with corporate sponsors often highlighted either something about the experience which bothered them, a personal connection which affected their reaction, or the fact that they have a negative opinion of the company’s products. For example, one visitor explained they have a negative reaction to the ads on YouTube because they “get annoying, [and are]...in my face.” Another said, “Anything the company that fired me does [I’ll have a negative reaction to].”

In regards to visitors who had negative opinions of the company’s products, they listed several specific examples. For instance, one visitor explained they have had a strong reaction to, “[A company who donated] breastmilk in Africa, [since they] provide[d] formula to new mothers...[which] malnourished children [and] created a lot of poverty and health problems.” Another said, “Yeah, [I] hate everything [by a certain car company], [they] make crappy cars, if it's a crappy product, [I do] not want something sponsored by them, if [a different car company] sponsored [an exhibit, that would] give it some value.” One visitor explained they have a negative reaction to some fast-food restaurant messages because “you think things are

encouraging kids to eat junk too much....”A different visitor simply named a well-known oil company, stating “[I] -- don’t like them”

Out of the 15 visitors who offered negative reactions to corporate sponsors only one mentioned an experience at a museum. This person explained, “I don't like product placement that much. I was at [a museum in] DC and the movie I saw was really just a plug for [a corporation]. It'd be okay, but they didn't tell me ahead of time.” As these responses to specific experiences indicate, visitors can be affected by a sponsor’s presence, and it is important for museums to carefully choose sponsoring companies.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS

This study suggests that the context of museum sponsorship is very important in determining how sponsorships influence changes in visitor opinions of both museum exhibits and companies. Four overarching factors emerged as essential to visitor perceptions of the sponsorship:

- Sponsor-content fit
- Visibility of the sponsorship
- Reputation of the sponsoring company and its products
- Opinions of characteristics of the exhibit.

Visitor responses suggest that high sponsor visibility may result in concerns about the independence and credibility of the content of museum exhibits, and may also cause visitors to question the motivations of sponsoring companies. Museums may employ stringent policies limiting the influence of the sponsor on the content and products used in an exhibit. However, visitors, unaware of these policies, have reactions to sponsorships informed primarily by their perceptions of the museum, sponsor, and sponsorship context. Thus, some visitors expressed concerns that a high degree of fit between sponsor products and the content of the exhibit might suggest bias in the museum exhibit or an agenda on the part of the company. As the correlational analyses suggest, these impressions may temper visitors' response to the sponsorship. The correlations suggest that visitors' opinions of sponsoring companies improve the most when visitors have a highly positive opinion of the creativity of an exhibit and do not perceive a high degree of sponsor-content fit.

Further, some visitors suggested that the reputation of the sponsoring company and its products could color their responses to museum sponsorships. In particular, visitor responses suggested that museums should consider visitor perceptions of the social responsibility, product quality, and any controversial activities of potential sponsors, as these factors may influence visitor reception of corporate sponsorships.

However, many visitor responses suggest that they feel both museums and companies could benefit from sponsorship relationships. While companies would gain increased visibility within the community, many visitors felt that museums could benefit financially and through the addition of any new ideas or technology that the company could add to exhibits.

In the context of this study, the visibility of the sponsorship was limited, and very few negative opinions of either the sponsoring companies or the exhibits were expressed. When these factors are present, this study suggests that sponsorships do not negatively influence visitor opinions of either the sponsoring company or the museum.

Within this context, museums can best leverage sponsorships by working with sponsors that have positive reputations for trustworthiness and creativity. This research suggests that, for a minority of visitors, opinions of exhibits actually improved upon learning of the sponsorship. These visitors were more likely than other visitors to have both positive opinions of the creativity of the sponsoring company, and to believe that the sponsoring company helped with the content of the exhibit.

In the context of this study, our research suggests that companies can most effectively leverage museum sponsorships by contributing to creative or innovative exhibits, or by sponsoring exhibits that address content that visitors think is important to know. As mentioned previously, our analysis suggests that, in particular, sponsoring creative exhibits that are not perceived to be linked to the sponsoring company's products is related to higher improvements in overall company image than sponsoring exhibits that are closely related to company products.

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## APPENDIX A: INSTRUMENT

### Support Survey: [Exhibit A]

[Say]: “Hi, My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I work at the Museum. We’re looking for feedback about this [Exhibit A] and how we should support it and exhibits like it now and in the future. Would you be willing to share your thoughts with us?”

**1. What are your overall impressions of this exhibit?**

2. [Hand visitor clipboard with fixed-questions and say]: “We’d like to get your opinion about a few different aspects of this exhibit. Please tell us how strongly you disagree or agree with the statements in question 2.”

**3. Have you ever heard of [Company A]? Yes | No**

[Say]: “[Company A] was one of the sponsors of this exhibit. Please note that this study was NOT commissioned by [Company A]. Please tell us your thoughts about [Company A].”

**4. What are 3 things that come to mind when you think of [Company A]?**

**5. Do you use their products? Explain.**

6. [Say]: “Now we’d like to know your thoughts about certain aspects of [Company A]. Please tell us how strongly you disagree or agree with the statements in question 6 on your clipboard.”

7. [Say]: “For question 7 on your clipboard, let us know if you agree more or less with each statement about [Company A] now that you know it sponsored this exhibit.”

**8. Did your opinion about [Company A] change in any other ways due to their sponsorship of this exhibit? Explain.**

9. [Say]: “For question 9 on your clipboard, let us know if you agree more or less with each statement about the **exhibit** now that you know it was sponsored by [Company A].”

**10. Does knowing that [Company A] sponsored this exhibit otherwise change your opinion about the exhibit? If so, how?**

11. [Say]: “For question 11 on your clipboard, we’d like to know your beliefs about [Company A]’s involvement in the development of this exhibit.”  
“For the purposes of research, we would like to ask you for your thoughts about [Company B] corporation.”

**12. Have you ever heard of [Company B] corporation?**

**13. What are 3 things that come to mind when you think of [Company B]?**

**14. Do you use their products? Explain.**

15. [Say]: “Please tell us how strongly you disagree or agree with the statements about [Company B] in question 15 on your clipboard.”

16. Should museums have corporate sponsors? Why / Why not?

17. Have you ever had a very strong positive or negative reaction to a corporate sponsorship?

[If yes] Please explain.

[If no] Can you imagine a situation in which you would have a strong positive or negative reaction to a corporate sponsorship? Explain.

\*Remind visitor to do demographic survey (on back), thank them, give them temporary tattoos and I Helped stickers!\*

Use the following scale for questions 2, 6, 11, and 15:

<b>SD=Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>D=Disagree</b>	<b>N=Neutral</b>	<b>A=Agree</b>	<b>SA=Strongly Agree</b>
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2. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about [Exhibit A]?

	SD	D	N	A	SA
This exhibit was creative.					
This exhibit was innovative.					
I trust the content of this exhibit.					
This exhibit explains ideas that are important to know.					

6. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about [Company A]?

	SD	D	N	A	SA
[Company A] is creative.					
[Company A] is innovative.					
[Company A] is trustworthy.					
[Company A] is socially responsible.					

7. Does knowing that [Company A] sponsored [Exhibit A] make you think [Company A] is more or less:

	Much less	Less	Same	More	Much more
Creative?					
Innovative?					
Trustworthy?					
Socially responsible?					
In the future, I would be more likely to buy products or services from [Company A] because they sponsored this exhibit.					

9. Does knowing that [Company A] sponsored [Exhibit A] make you agree more or less with the following statements about the exhibit?

	Much less	Less	Same	More	Much more
This exhibit was creative.					
This exhibit was innovative.					
I trust the content of this exhibit.					
This exhibit explains ideas that are important to know.					

11. Please let us know your beliefs about [Company A]’s involvement in the development of this exhibit.

	SD	D	N	A	SA
[Company A] probably helped with the content of this exhibit.					
[Company A] products are probably used in this exhibit.					
[Company A] probably reviewed the content of this exhibit.					
[Company A]'s products are related to the topic of this exhibit.					

**15. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

	SD	D	N	A	SA
[Company B] is creative.					
[Company B] is innovative.					
[Company B] is trustworthy.					
[Company B] is socially responsible.					

**Please tell us a little about yourself.**

**When was the last time you visited the Museum of Science?**

- Within the past three months
- 3-6 months
- 6 months to within the last year
- 1-2 years ago
- 2-5 years ago
- 5-10 years ago
- More than 10 years ago
- This is my first time visiting the Museum of Science
- Not sure

**Including yourself, how many people were in your group during your most recent visit to the Museum? \_\_\_\_\_**

**How many people in your group were adults? \_\_\_\_\_**

**How many people in your group were children? (under 18 years old) \_\_\_\_\_**

**Are you a Museum of Science member?**

- Yes
- No

**What is your gender?**

- Male
- Female

**How old are you? \_\_\_\_**

## APPENDIX B: SELECTED QUOTES

### What are your overall impressions of Exhibit A (N=41)

<i>Code</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Selected Quotes</i>
Visitor had a positive reaction to exhibit.	28	“Excellent”
Visitor felt the exhibit was interesting.	8	“Some things were interesting, liked experiments”
Visitor felt the exhibit was interactive.	7	“Good, a lot of hands-on”
Visitor mentioned a specific exhibit feature.	7	“Pretty cool, nice, interesting to get water to the bottom and to top.”
Visitor commented about something that was broken or needs to be fixed.	3	“Very interesting, unfortunately one [component] didn't work (experiment with gears).”
Other	3	“Just started 15 minutes ago”
Visitor felt the exhibit was fun.	2	“It's cool, I liked playing around. My kid had fun.”
Visitor gave a negative remark.	1	“Sparse”
Visitor talked about the age appropriateness of the exhibit.	1	“Depends on age, [this exhibit is] above their age level ... she is 6 and he is 4.”
Visitor didn't understand something in exhibit.	1	“I really enjoyed- wheels and gears, very interesting, but I felt the hands on ask questing but ... [then] don't explain. Wasn't sure if exhibit not working or if I didn't understand.”
Missing	1	--

### What are your overall impressions of Exhibit B (N=41)

<i>Code</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Selected Quotes</i>
Visitor had positive reaction to the exhibit.	32	“Good idea, I like it”
Visitor felt the exhibit was informative.	13	“[The exhibit] was good, lot of different information”
Visitor felt the exhibit was interesting.	8	“Really interesting and well done”
Visitor mentioned a specific exhibit feature.	7	“Interesting stories”
Visitor talked about the age appropriateness of the exhibit.	4	“It's neat, a little boring for the kids.”
Visitor felt the exhibit was confusing.	1	“Confusing”
Visitor didn't know his/her reaction to the exhibit.	1	“I don't know, really”

**Did your opinion of [the company] change in other ways due to their sponsorship? Explain. (N=82)**

<i>Code</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Selected Quotes</i>
No, my opinion of the company did not change.	47	"No, stayed the same"
Yes, my opinion of the company was more positive.	21	"Positive, I didn't know they sponsored it. I guess."
I'm glad to know the company is involved with educational initiatives.	12	"Yes, nice that they care about education."
I think of the company as more socially responsible since they contributed to the museum.	7	"[M1]: I feel a little better that I know they're contributing."
Other	7	"Think it's cool because [I] would not have thought about who did this. [It] makes me want to go home and look up [the company] on the computer."
I learned more about the company.	6	"A little, [I] didn't realize they had to do with this kind of stuff"
I think this is a nice gesture.	4	"Nice that they were a sponsor."
I wasn't aware that the company was involved.	3	"I think, wasn't really aware they made it until now."
Missing	3	--
I'm not sure	2	"Still looking around, not sure"
I wonder if the company had a particular reason/agenda for doing this.	1	"[F1]: I trust they have their own best interest at heart; doesn't really change, [F1]: maybe they'll do more in the future."

**Does knowing that [the company] sponsored this exhibit otherwise change your opinion about the exhibit? If so, how? (N=82)**

<i>Code</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Selected Quotes</i>
No, my opinion of the exhibit did not change.	67	"No."
Other	6	"Well [I'm] not a frequent visitor...."
I think it's good for companies to help fund exhibits.	4	"No, think it's nice they finance it."
The company had nothing to do with the exhibit.	3	"No, it had nothing to do with [the company]."
My opinion of the exhibit changed a little bit.	3	"Just a little bit"
I wonder if the company had a particular reason/agenda for doing this.	2	"As long as they didn't tell them what to put in the exhibit."
I want more information on the company.	2	"It's hard [to respond], if we knew more about the company [we might have an opinion.] [It is] important if representative of the museum, if [the companies] are more trustworthy; No"
Missing	2	--
I'm neutral about this topic.	1	"Pretty neutral about it."
I feel good about company since they are helping with this topic.	1	"Yeah, a little more, they are explaining common things that kids need to understand."

## Should museums have corporate sponsors? Why / Why not? (N=82)

<i>Code</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Selected Quotes</i>
Yes, sponsorship provides needed funding for the museum.	40	"I think, if it doesn't, they won't have necessary funding."
Yes, it is difficult for the museum to get public funding.	5	"Yes, the cost of putting out these exhibits, [the museum is] not getting [money] from the government."
Yes, sponsorships could maybe help lower the cost for visitors.	4	"Yes, museums are expensive, they shouldn't charge as much."
--		
Yes, corporations could help museums with the exhibit.	9	"Yes - it's long established tradition, especially in museums with technology - [the company] invented the technology and can explain it."
Yes, I think museums should have corporate sponsors.	8	"Sure"
Yes, sponsorships could develop new types of exhibits.	4	"Yes, they need money for new exhibits."
Yes, sponsorships might attract more people to the museum.	1	"Yeah, feel like it could get more people to come."
--		
Yes, but there should be no forceful or overtly visible advertising.	7	"I would say it depends, as long as it's not purely for marketing purposes, if they have something useful to add or funding [to contribute]."
Yes, but corporate sponsors should not have a strong input on exhibits.	4	"I think they should have overall [sponsors], but not individual exhibit sponsors, with no oversight of content or education input."
I might be concerned the company has an agenda in the exhibit.	4	"Yes - they get a lot of money. As long as they're not pushing their own agenda, and the information is checked and evaluated for neutral/unbiased information."
Yes, but it would be important to choose corporate sponsors carefully.	2	"[I do] not have a problem with [sponsorship] if it's the right corporate sponsor, don't think it's a problem. Gotta get money from somewhere...."
Yes, but my opinion of the corporate sponsor is not going to change.	2	"If they need it financially, personally, [sponsorship is] not going to change [my] opinions. [It is] obvious branding."
--		
Yes, corporate funding for museums supports a good cause.	12	"Yes, I believe they should- brings [the company] name out there for people to see. [The company] should do something good with all of that money."
--		
Yes, sponsorship has benefits for the company.	5	"Sure, they can educate on what they are doing in the corporation."
--		
Visitor mentioned a personal connection to a company.	3	"Yeah, I work for a US corporation, so I know we sponsored things like this."

<i>Code (continued)</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Selected Quotes</i>
Other	3	“Interesting, come from Australia where they don't have corporate sponsors, in US, [sponsorship is] far more extensive than Australia, perhaps [sponsorship] could improve Australian museums.”
Unsure	3	“Help [the museum] raise money, depends on donations ...it's debatable, [I'm] unsure.”
Probably	2	“Probably, maybe they have to. Maybe they have to have funding. Money's gotta come from somewhere.”
Missing	1	--

**Have you ever had a very strong positive or negative reaction to a corporate sponsorship? Please explain. (N=82)**

<i>Code</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Selected Quotes</i>
Missing	61	--
Negative	15	“Yeah, something [might] trigger negativity, [I] really don't like, [product], like [from Company], [I would] stay away from it.”
Positive	6	“Positive, they help fund things for educational purposes.”
--		
Visitor provided a specific example of a strong reaction to corporate sponsorship.	14	“Yes, medical conferences. Always very wary of sponsorship conferences and things like that.”
There should be no forceful or overtly visible advertising.	7	“Don't get too commercial. [The museum is] good the way it is now.”
No strong reaction to corporate sponsorship.	3	“Not really”
Corporate funding can have a positive social impact.	3	“[I've had] some positive experiences, company that does a lot for communities I work in, [I might] supports it.”
Visitor mentioned a personal connection to a company.	3	“Where I work, we do a lot of sponsored events.”
This relationship provides needed funding for the museum.	1	“It is a positive thing- [it] doesn't make a bad company good, but you shouldn't say no to money in this economy.”



**If visitor has never had a strong reaction from the previous question—Can you imagine a situation in which you would have a strong positive or negative reaction to a corporate sponsorship? Explain. (N=82)**

<i>Code</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Selected Quotes</i>
I would not want any forceful or overtly visible advertising.	14	"I don't want to see brand names everywhere."
I would not want any bias or agenda on the company's part to be part of the exhibit.	6	"Negative if they're pushing an agenda through, rather than just advertising."
It might depends on the sponsor.	5	"No, depends on what sponsoring. Would not like [company] and tobacco for example. Depends on sponsor."
I trust museums more than corporations.	2	"Museum should have more control than corporations."
--		
No situation	25	"No, not really, nothing off the top of my head."
Missing	23	--
--		
I think it is good for corporations to be involved in educational efforts.	3	"Say good thing, more they help out, benefits children learning, anyway they can help out"
I think it is good for corporations to support the community.	3	"No, if doing something for personal gain, not for community."
--		
I think the company could benefit from helping a museum.	3	"No, I think it is a good thing if they are explaining products and services through museum, exhibit educates people."
--		
Other	6	"All I can think of right now are commercials, both positive and negative to it so...."