

CONSUMER RECOGNITION OF SPONSORSHIP AT PROFESSIONAL TENNIS TOURNAMENT AT THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL

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INTRODUCTION

When sport marketing would be discussed in terms of corporate communication, the sport event itself should be distinguished and characterized from other events such as art and music. If the company has the same consumer target in the sport event, the company has a chance of making consumer awareness of the company by sponsoring the sport event.

The purpose of this research was to assess consumer awareness of sponsorship at the grassroots event, the Futures Professional Tennis Tournament. Although this tournament is the lowest pyramid of the ATP/ITF tour tournament, the players achieve world ATP point for their first time if they won in main draw. Therefore, the Futures Professional Tennis Tournament is the gateway for professional tennis players to the Grand Slams.

Since the “Measurement of consumers’ ability to recall and a recognize sponsors of an event is a well-established intermediate method for examining consumer awareness of sport sponsorship” (Bennett, 1999; Bennett et al., 2002; Lardinoit & Derbaix, 2001), I wanted to clarify the recognition level of attendees at the tournament this time.

I focused attention on Miloch & Lambrecht (2006)’s study on assessing consumer awareness of sponsorship at a grassroots and niche sport event through an examination of recall and recognition rate, which mentioned recall and recognition rates were influenced by location of sponsors’ signage in the venue and sponsors’ activation with souvenir or sampling. Also volunteers posted the highest recall and recognition rate. Therefore in this study, whether the location of signage and the activation by sponsors will influence the attendees’ (spectators & volunteers) recognition rate, and whether the volunteers post the higher recognition rate than normal spectators will be discussed.

METHODS

Data for this study was gathered during “Adidas-Waseda Futures Tennis Tournament 2007” which was held in March 24th through April 1st in Tokyo, firstly hosted by universities in Japan. The questionnaire was distributed at the entrance to spectators randomly with “chance of winning original T-shirt” incentives. Also, the questionnaire was distributed to volunteers post-tournament.

Sponsor recognition was assessed by asking attendees to correctly identify tournament sponsor name and brand name from a listing of correct and incorrect.

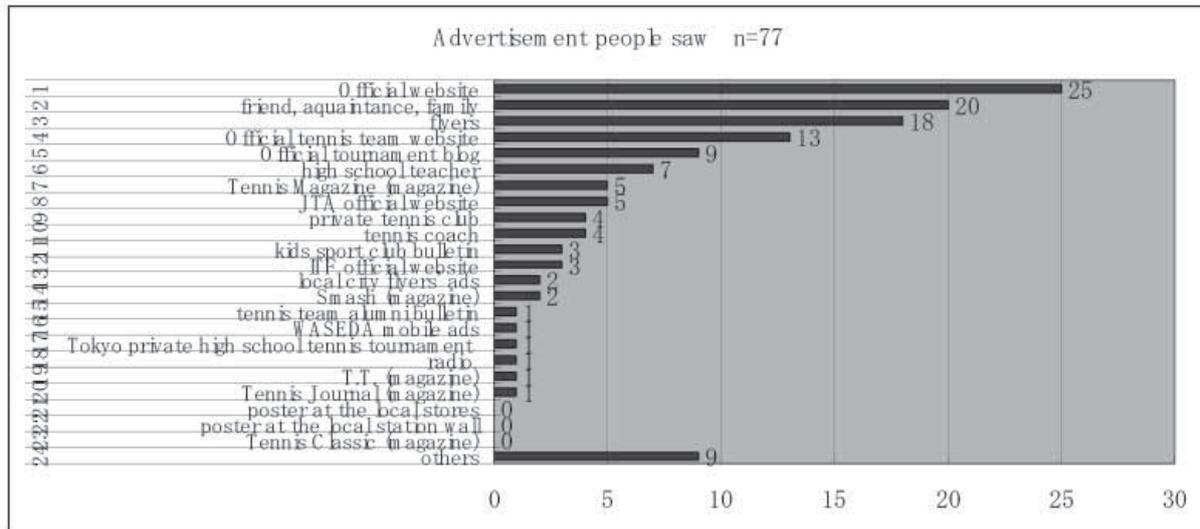
Another question was asked to spectators regarding the most effective media activation for making them aware of the tennis tournament.

RESULTS

Sponsor recognition rate made difference among sponsors with signage and activation by sponsors. For example, the event sponsor Adidas activated with tournament name, all-court-around banner, net ad, Adidas bench, line judges and ball persons with Adidas tennis wear, and ad on tournament catalogue. The Adidas recognition rate among spectators was (n=70) 85.3%, Incorrect rate to competitive sport wear company X 6.1%, company Y 8.5%, and company Z 8.5%. Therefore Adidas may be successful in sponsoring the tournament. All the other

sponsors was clustered into same categories, such as beverage, supplement, curry, bananas (Del Monte), fitness club, court surface brands (Deco Turf, US Open surface; and Rebound Ace, Australian Open surface), and hamburgers (McDonald's).

The most effective media was official website, www.wasedafutures.com (n=25), and friend, acquaintance, family word-of-mouth was the second.



DISCUSSION

The findings suggest recall and recognition rates were influenced by location of sponsors' signage in the venue and sponsors' activation with souvenir or sampling. Also volunteers posted higher recall and recognition rate.

Since this Futures Professional Tennis Tournament was the initial tournament, there were only limited number of spectators, but the sponsorship awareness feedback would suggest the better sponsorship and effective advertisement for next year.

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