

Corporate Credibility, Sponsorship and Drink-Driving: A Critical Review of the Traffic Accident Commission's Sponsorship of Australian Football League Clubs

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Keywords: corporate credibility, social marketing, sponsorship, ambush marketing

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to consider the impact of alcohol misuse by Australian Football League (AFL) players on the Traffic Accident Commission's (TAC) credibility and trustworthiness given that TAC sponsors two AFL clubs. The AFL is Australia's dominant sports competition in terms of media exposure and sponsorship. TAC is responsible for the development and implementation of a road safety campaign in Victoria which highlights, amongst other things, the dangers associated with speeding and drink driving.

Credibility is one of the most commonly studied characteristics of any advertising source. Perceived expertise and trustworthiness are the two most significant measures of source credibility. Most literature on source credibility focuses on the spokesperson or endorser credibility. However, the organisation producing the advertisement has also been identified as requiring source credibility (Goldberg & Hardwick, 1990). Corporate credibility refers to the degree to which consumers, investors, and other stakeholders believe in the company's trustworthiness and expertise (Goldsmith, Lafferty, & Newell, 2000).

In sponsorship, both the spokespersons' and the company's trustworthiness can be challenged when a spokesperson acts in manner contrary to the interests of the relationship. In recent years the TAC campaign has been undermined by poor player behaviour, including but not restricted to drink driving and excessive alcohol consumption at many AFL clubs including those that TAC sponsor.

This research presents a number of case studies that highlight the public relations implications for these organisations.

The results indicate that TAC's reputation and credibility is dependent upon the behaviour of all clubs and their athletes in particular, not just those that it sponsors. On the basis of these results, it is argued that these events can be conceptualised as a form of ambush marketing against the TAC's social marketing campaign.

This represents an advance on existing conceptualisations of ambush marketing because these have all been premised on service/ product marketing assumptions (Bhattacharjee & Rao, 2006, Farrelly, Quester & Geyser, 2005, Payne, 1998, Scherer, Sam & Batty, 2005.) The research concludes with the presentation of a model that links social marketing sponsorship (O'Reilly & Madill, 2007), corporate credibility and exchange theory (McCarville & Copeland, 1994) to explain how social marketing

campaigns can be ambushed by players behaving in a manner contrary to the message being promoted by their teams sponsors.

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