

The effects of sponsorship-linked IMC on soft drink sales

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Aim

The aim of this study is to examine the effects of sponsorship-linked integrated marketing communications (IMC) on soft drink sales.

Background

Sponsorship and IMC have both grown rapidly as marketing disciplines during recent years. Despite the rapid growth, however, there are concerns about the effectiveness of both sponsorship and IMC. Academics (Crompton, 2004) and practitioners (Show, 2009) have expressed interest in linking sponsorships to sales. Despite the interest, most published research about sponsorship examines the relationship between sponsorship components and sponsorship awareness or purchase intent, but not sales. Cornwell (2008) suggests that one of the most needed areas of research concerns marketing communications collateral to the sponsorship.

Tripodi (2001) recommends that sponsors use all marketing promotion tools—advertising, sales promotions, public relations, and personal selling—in order to maximize sponsorship effectiveness. As integrating personal selling into sponsorship programs usually entails business-to-business relationships rather than consumer-focused efforts and the current study examines only consumer audiences, this paper is limited to public relations (PR), advertising and sales promotions. In a field study, Sneath et al. (2005) adopted an IMC approach to sponsorship and found that experience with an auto sponsor's exhibits at a sporting event was linked to increased purchase consideration for the manufacturer. Sponsorships can be leveraged via public relations by representatives of the articulating the sponsorship relationship in the media. Themed advertising, which features elements of the sponsored property, can leverage the sponsorship into cognitive, affective, and behavioral advertising outcomes. The provision of sponsorship property related prizes and premium items can be used to leverage the sponsorship with sales promotions, which in turn can be linked to affective and behavioral outcomes.

Methods

Data were collected as part of a larger commercial study conducted by sponsorship consultancy Sponsorship Research & Strategy. Respondents were drawn from a national panel and screened for interest in NASCAR. A total of 1000 self-identified NASCAR fans completed an online survey. A subsample of 249 respondents was randomly drawn from

the total sample and asked questions about soft drink brands and sponsorships.

Respondents were asked about their attitudes toward the sponsorship of a major soft drink brand. Measures included 3 items for public relations in which the sponsorship is articulated in the media ($\alpha = .83$); 3 items about sponsorship-linked themed advertising ($\alpha = .86$); and 3 items about sponsorship-linked sales promotions ($\alpha = .90$). Respondents also reported their average weekly consumption of the number of 12 oz. servings of the soft drink brand.

Results and discussion

Attitudes to the soft drink brand's sponsorship were found to be positively linked to soft drink consumption, which averaged 3.85 12-ounce servings per week. On average, respondents who agree that the soft drink brand's sponsorship is effective consume about twice as much of the soft drink brand as compared to respondents who do not agree that the sponsorship is effective. T-tests performed for each of the 9 items about sponsorship-linked IMC found significant differences between respondents who agree with each statement and those who do not agree.

Items for sponsorship articulation, themed advertising, and sponsorship-linked sales promotions were each summed into single variables and used in a regression model to predict soft drink consumption ($F = 5.30$, $p = .001$). Themed advertising ($\beta = .126$) was the strongest predictor, followed by sponsorship-linked sales promotions ($\beta = .106$), and sponsorship articulation ($\beta = .036$). The regression model explains 6% of the variance in soft drink consumption.

This study demonstrates direct links between sponsorship components and product consumption. Soft drinks are fast-moving consumer goods, which likely facilitates the direct link between sponsorship-linked IMC and product usage. Further research is needed in other product categories and the interaction between sponsorship components and its effects as mediated by brand attitudes and other sponsorship outcomes, such as awareness and purchase intent.

References

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