

WHY BORING BRANDS PROFIT FROM SPORT-INDUCED EXCITATION EVEN BEFORE THE ACTUAL EVENT TAKES PLACE

Abstract ID: EASM-2015-288/R1 - (700)

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Date submitted: 2015-03-20

Date accepted: 2015-04-28

Type: Scientific

Keywords: Sponsoring; Pre-Event; Branding; Emotions; Excitation; Suspense; Priming

Category: 5: Marketing in and Through Sport

Synopsis:

Abstract:

AIM OF PAPER – RESEARCH QUESTION

Sport is suspenseful, thrilling and exciting. Unlike other forms of entertainment, the outcome of sport events is uncertain which has an effect on consumers' affective reactions accordingly (Bee & Madrigal, 2012). This is why we love to watch football matches or the Olympic Games—it is the core of our fascination. However, these familiar statements refer to the event itself. Based on that, we pose the questions whether sport events are exciting even before they actually take place and whether this excitement may be induced externally to emotionally load brands with specific emotions.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Consumers rely on their feelings when making judgements and decisions. Past emotional episodes serve as reference points for similar episodes in the future (Schwarz & Clore, 1988). These emotionally charged memories and their corresponding bodily reactions are activated, when consumers are thinking about an upcoming sporting event (Knutson & Greer, 2008).

Based upon these results, we propose that consumers feel the excitement associated with sport events, and do anticipate this feeling of excitement when primed to think about the event. This prime should produce even stronger excitement, the closer the actual event gets, since consumers are more aware (top-of-mind) of the event and thus relevant emotional episodes can be accessed easier.

H1: Consumers are more excited, when the actual event is about to begin compared to one day before the event.

Moreover, we propose that this level of excitement will be—according to the excitation transfer theory by Zillmann (1983)—misattributed to brands advertising in the context of the pre-event, and that the consumers therefore will perceive these brand to be more exciting. Furthermore, especially brands that are perceived to be not exciting i.e. boring, will profit from excitation-transfer.

H2: Boring brands are perceived to be more exciting, the more exciting the associated event is.

METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS

The research design consists of two studies. The respondents had to perform the first study on the day before the event (UEFA Champions League Final 2013), whereas the same respondents answered the questionnaire of the second study exactly 30 minutes before the game.

In both studies respondents were asked to rate the level of outcome uncertainty (as cognitive component of suspense, Cronbach's alpha: .83), the level of perceived physical arousal (as affective component of suspense i.e. excitation, Cronbach's alpha: .96), the attitude towards the boring brand as well as four filler brands (including the additional dimension "exciting – not exciting"). In total, 69 respondents voluntarily took part in the study (Mean age = 25.66, SD = 6.30; 57% male). The study was promoted on the university campus and participants registered prior to the event to take part.

On average the reported level of outcome uncertainty ($M = 19.42$, $SE = 1.43$) in t_1 is significantly higher than in t_0 ($M = 14.20$, $SE = 1.25$), $t(69) = -4.39$, $p < .001$, $r = .46$. Same holds true for perceived physical arousal ($M = 2.33$, $SE = 0.22$), which is significantly higher in t_1 than in t_0 ($M = 1.98$, $SE = 0.16$), $t(69) = -2.32$, $p < .05$, r (effect size) = .27, supporting H1, that consumers cognitively and affectively anticipate the excitation associated with suspenseful events.. The boring brand is perceived to be significantly more exciting in t_1 ($M = 3.87$, $SE = 0.17$) than in t_0 ($M = 3.32$, $SE = 0.19$), $t(69) = -3.79$, $p < .001$, $r = .41$, supporting H2.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The results indicate that consumers do access emotional memories which serve as a reference point which leads to an increase in excitation the closer the sport event gets. The results are in line with the excitation-transfer theory by Zillmann (1983). Nevertheless, one limitation of this study is the measurement of excitement as it was measured only on a verbal basis. Previous studies show that consumers generally prefer suspenseful over non-suspenseful commercials (Alwitt, 2002). Therefore, sponsors and advertisers could make their advertisements more suspenseful by priming the excitement associated with upcoming suspenseful sport events to improve advertising

effectiveness. This priming may refer to the outcome uncertainty or the anticipated physical arousal (e.g. “your heart will beat faster than ever”, fast music) associated with the event. Moreover, advertisements could refer to the fact that the event is coming closer and closer. Future research might further investigate the mechanism of the transfer process and look for other specific emotions to load brands with.

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