

Sponsoring the Tour de France vs. sponsoring a cycling team : what is the most valuable means to increase the brand's awareness ?

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Introduction

Sponsorship evaluation is a growing research area in sport management because it is not seen as a 100% efficient communication means (Farrelly & Quester, 1998 ; Meenhagan, 1998 ; Stotlar, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c). As the costs for becoming an official sponsor on major events have dangerously increased and ambush marketing practices are more and more common, some firms wonder if it is still valuable to pay for the official rights.

Known as “the third sport event in the world” and probably one of the best organizations, the Tour de France was created in 1903 by the newspaper “l’Auto” that wanted to control the information source in a big sport event : that is why it had a commercial goal from its beginning. Therefore, sponsorship has always been a mean to finance cycling teams or the organization of the event. As sponsors give their name to cycling teams, it is seen as a strong advantage for brands which want to be popular and increase their awareness. On the other hand, the existence of a doping-system among these teams that was revealed in 1998 and is known as “the Festina case” has had a bad influence on the values carried by cycling. But most studies have showed that brands could still increase their memorization when they were involved in such scandals.

In this communication, we will try to answer these questions : is it valuable to be sponsor of the Tour de France and in which conditions ? Is the memorization higher when you sponsor a team or the event itself ? What are the main factors of success for a brand on this event ?

Method

As it was already underlined in the French literature in sport marketing (Desbordes, 2001, 2002), the methodology used by agencies to “track” the brands in the media is inefficient because it measures only the presence of the brand on TV or its visibility in the press. But it cannot appreciate the success of the firm among consumers, which is obviously the goal of every firm. Therefore, it is almost impossible to avoid using heavy methodologies in this field. There are two major studies carried by the Tour’s organization to measure the success of the brands involved on the Tour de France. These studies are the result of a collaboration between TNS Sport (an opinion poll agency) and a research centre in sport management.

“L’étude caravane” is a survey that consists in measuring the brands’ awareness among spectators after having watched the Tour. 605 of them were surveyed in 2003 on 6 different days.

“L’étude Club Tour de France” is a survey that consists of a classic pre-test and post-test measure. 1006 people representing the structure of the French population over 15 (sex, age, region, social class, housing conditions) were surveyed in May (two months before the beginning of the Tour). In the same conditions, 1012 persons were surveyed in August (two weeks after the event). In our communication, we will focus on this major part.

Results and discussion

The 2003 edition was particularly hard-fought because Armstrong seemed to be less invincible compared to the previous editions. This sportive situation had probably some very positive consequences on the marketing side. Here are the main results.

In average, people have less memorized sponsors compared to the 2002 edition.

Table : number of brands memorized on the Tour de France

	2002	2003
Spontaneous memorization	3,8	3,3
Global memorization	10,3	9,3

n=1012

The average interest is higher than in 2002. On the same

side, positive values are more named and negative values are less named. There is a strong correlation between the number of sponsors memorized and the interest for the Tour.

Compared to 2002, the memorization for the Tour's sponsors has decreased while it has increased for the teams' sponsors : this shows the interest of a show with suspense from the first to the last day.

Concerning the link between the TV exposure and the memorization, the results show that memorization is much higher again for the teams' sponsors than for the event's sponsors.

Together with these results, we will compare the effectiveness of the sponsorship policy regarding the means of the firms and the goals of these policies.

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