

Lithuanian Rally: A sponsors' image building opportunity

Contact details

Name author(s): Diana Komskiene & Vilma Cingiene

Institution(s) or organisation(s): Lithuanian Academy of Physical Education

City and country: Kaunas, Lithuanian Republic

Email address for correspondence: d.komskiene@lku.lt

Aim of paper and research questions

The aim of this paper is to identify data relating to the Lithuanian Rally sport demographics and perceived image in order to highlight opportunities for potential sponsors in creating, shaping or changing their image.

Literature review

Sport sponsorship is a marketing integrated communication strategy through which commercial and institutional goals are realised, while using direct and valuable associations from sport to company products, brands and applying commercial agreements between related parts (Ferrand & Torrigiani, 2005; Quester & Thompson, 2001; Lagae, 2003).

Sponsors mainly strive to achieve goals such as (Crompton, 2004; Smolianov & Shilbury, 2005; Koo et al., 2006; Seguin, 2007): increase of awareness and sales, image building/shaping/ changing, sampling possibilities, etc. Alexandris et al. (2007) add other goals, like community involvement, recognition of brand, and brand loyalty.

Image building is one of the important goals the sponsors are seeking. Good image creates good reputation, a most difficult desired characteristic for any company.

Activities such as sport events share specific associations, images and characteristics. The „image transfer“ describes the transfer of such associations to a brand or company sponsoring this activity. Drivers for image transfer are: event-sponsor fit, event involvement, sponsorship exposure. An optimal event-sponsor fit in that regard is the key determinant for a successful image transfer (Grohs & Reisinger, 2005; Koo et al., 2006).

Research design and proposed data analysis

We conducted a survey among Rally direct – event' spectators (N=208), who were asked to express what associations and images they derive from this sporting event. A second survey was distributed to Rally direct – event' spectators (N=396), where the questionnaire was constructed resulting from the first survey results. Image items in regard to the rally sport event amounted to 29 items. Demographic and consumer behaviour data from two surveys of spectators was collected as well. Data has been transcribed and analysed using Software STATISTIKA.

Discussion of progress

It is important to mention, that not only the image of event-sport-sponsor must fit, but it has to fit the profile of the audience as well.. The Rally audience consists of: men – 58% and women – 42%. Sponsors reach an audience of workers, students, civil servants who range in age from 19-24 years old (44 %) and business people – in the 25-44 years bracket (36 %).. Motives to attend rally competitions are related to interesting races/competition (24%), the possibility to be with friends and have fun time (35%), and to feel the exciting atmosphere – 17%. Business people and workers are more likely to call themselves fans than civil servants and students. Rally audience is very attached to sport and represents a loyal group of sport consumers, because 78 % of all audience comes to all or attend most races. Most loyal visitors in rally are workers,

civil servants and business people. The image that people have about a rally event includes risky – 11%, attractive to experience and to watch – 8%, exciting – 6%, youthful – 5%, friendly – 5%, involving – 5%, entertaining – 5%, and hospitable, useful, commercial – 4% each. 58% of spectators estimated that the quality of the competition is excellent or good.

In the case of the Lithuanian Rally sport, sponsors can reach a youthful audience and may shape, strengthen or change their image to include characteristics such as: youthful, dynamic, friendly and hospitable company (or product) on an exceptional rally sport platform, while reaching targeted audience and building positive attitude towards company and products. For Rally and potential sponsor it is important to understand that the event is not the final activity for both of them. Each of them must strive to expose the message of being together in the market.

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