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**Sport website advertising: The impact of congruity and endorsement on the effectiveness of banner advertising**

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**Sport website advertising:**

**The impact of congruity and endorsement on the effectiveness of banner advertising**

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**Introduction**

According to Internet World Stats (2010), over 1.8 billion people were using the Internet world wide in December 2009, up from .36 billion in December 2000. Further, Internet advertising revenues reached over \$22 billion in 2009, which was increased from \$8 billion in 2000 (The IAB PWC Advertising Revenue Report, 2010). In a popular sport web portal case, espn.go.com generates daily advertising revenue of around \$44,000 (Websiteoutlook, 2009). These figures reflect that “Digital media are now a core component of successful advertising and marketing campaigns” (Rothenberg, 2010). Despite the growth in uses and revenue, questions still remain: Do sport enterprises effectively utilize the Internet as an advertising tool? How do sport consumers perceive banner ads on sport websites?

Over the last decades, advertising scholars have devoted increased attention to the successful advertising strategies which can increase the level of consumers’ attitudes toward the product and patronage intentions. Among the various advertising strategies, the current study applied two of the most dominant approaches: ad-context congruity and endorsement.

According to congruity theory, consumers are likely to produce positive emotions if ad-content congruity is consistent with their anticipations (Keller & Aaker, 1992). Conversely, incongruent advertisement can produce more negative appraisals toward a company (Harvey, 2001).

However, previous studies have produced inconsistent findings related to the effectiveness of congruity strategy. For example, Moore, Stammerjohan, and Coulter (2005) argued that consumers have a tendency to pay more attention to information processing, and consequently exhibit higher recall and recognition if they are exposed to incongruent information. Based on the limitation of previous studies, the purpose of the current study is to examine the effectiveness of banner ad-website content congruity strategy in the sport website. Further, the current study also seeks to investigate the impact of endorsement in banner advertisement.

### **Methods**

To investigate the research questions this study utilized a 3 X 2 between subjects quasi-experimental design: type of congruity (i.e., high congruity, medium congruity, and incongruity) and endorsement (i.e., with sport celebrity vs. without sport celebrity in the banner ad). The six manipulated banner ads used in this study are the same size (468 X 60 pixels) with the same font size and background color (white) in order to avoid biasing the results based on color and size preference. To maximize ecological validity, a manipulated banner ad was put in the right side of a manipulated official FIFA website. In addition to their exposure to one of the six advertisement conditions, one dummy advertisement (i.e., fictitious travel ad) was put under the manipulated ad in an effort to disguise the intent of the study. A soccer store (soccershop.com) was selected to represent a high congruity setting, whereas a snowboard store (snowboardshop.com) and a computer store (computershop.com) were selected to stand for a medium and an incongruity setting, respectively. Further, all stores in the ad manipulations are fictitious in order to minimize pre-existing knowledge due to prior exposure and familiarity. In terms of endorsement setting, Landon Donovan, Shawn White, and Steve Nash were selected to put banner advertisements for the soccer, snowboard and computer stores, respectively. The current study controlled subjects' involvement with soccer because that might influence a subject's evaluation of advertisements.

### **Results and Discussion**

Preliminary data were drawn from a convenience sample of 60 undergraduates (each condition has ten subjects) from a mid-size university in the Midwestern region of the United States. Subjects' ages ranged from 19 to 27 years old and mean age was 21.30. Of the total subjects, 62% (n = 37) were male and 38% were female (n = 23). To verify our research questions, a two-way ANCOVA was used. There was a significant main effect for all independent variables in line with the assumption that ad-content congruity and endorsement indeed have influence on consumers' attitudes toward the ad and intentions to visit stores' website. For example, subjects who were exposed to high congruity banner ad reported higher levels of attitudes and intentions. Further, the tendency was more salient if the ad contained sport endorsers. Moreover, there were no significant interaction effects, indicating that congruity and endorsement act independently on attitudes and intentions.

The research contributes to the sport marketing field in general and the sport product advertisement segment in particular in both theoretical and practical ways, indicating that the proper selection of website will improve the effectiveness of sport product/service advertising. Further, the results indicated that the sport companies should choose a highly attractive athlete endorser to increase consumers' attitudes toward the ad and intentions to click on a banner advertisement.

## References

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