

ASSESSING SPONSORSHIP OUTCOMES AMONG FOOTBALL SPECTATORS OF DIFFERENT FREQUENCY OF ATTENDANCE

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Abstract

Theoretical background

Many companies have turned to sport sponsorship as a communication vehicle in response to the increased clutter and cost associated with advertising media, consumers' changing habits relative to traditional media, and a need to target specific geographic and lifestyle segments. Sponsors hope that the emotional connection sport consumers have with an event, cause or sports team will be transferred to sponsor's brands and services (Madrigal, 2001). It is unlikely however, that emotional connection to a preferred property is the only factor influencing intentions to purchase a sponsor's products. It is also important to consider consumers' beliefs about the benefits of sponsorship and attitude toward supporting corporate sponsors. It has been proposed that a positive attitude towards a sponsor is developed when a consumer evaluates positively the benefits of sponsorship for a team (Meenaghan, 2001). As sport consumers move to higher levels of involvement in a sport (e.g. attend more games per season) they get to be more exposed to marketing and communication strategies that increase sponsorship effectiveness. Examples can be indoor and outdoor advertisement, print material (e.g. match day program), announcements in the stadiums, promotional activities etc. These actions can help on increasing sponsorship awareness and build the sponsor's image (Tsiotsou & Alexandris, 2009).

Aim

The purpose of this study was to examine the difference among football spectators concerning the frequency of their attendance (light, medium and heavy users), on three distinct sponsorship outcomes: attitude toward sponsor and sponsor's products, intention to purchase sponsor's products and intention to develop positive word of mouth

communication.

Methodology

The sample of the study consisted of 444 football fans of a professional football club in Northern Greece. Fans completed a questionnaire prior to the games in designated parking areas surrounding the football stadium. A team of five researchers distributed the questionnaires and collected them back. The questionnaire of the study was developed based on the literature (Kyle, Graefe, Manning, Bacon, 2003; Madrigal, 2001) and examined factors such as attitude toward sponsor and sponsor's products (3 items) (Sengupta & Fitzsimons, 2000), intention to purchase products from sponsor (3 items) (Tsiotsou et al, 2009) and intention to develop positive WOM communication (1 item) (Tsiotsou et al, 2009). Responses were measured using a seven-point Likert-type scale anchored by strongly disagree (1)-strongly agree (7). Questions concerning demographic characteristics (5 items) and frequency of attendance (1 item) were also included. An analysis of variance compared the three groups of spectators (light, medium and heavy users) and whenever a significant difference was found a post hoc Scheffe analysis was used to identify possible differences.

Results

The majority of the sample was men (86%), educated (84.6%), aged from 20-39 years old (75%), who worked as employees in public and private sector (40%), earning 800€-1300€ per month (45%). From the 15 games per year of the Greek league they attended 1-4 matches (light users) 33.8%, 5-9 matches per year (medium users) 25.4% and 10-15 matches per year (heavy users) 35.8%. Comparing the three groups (light, medium and heavy users) according to the dependent variables, it was found that there are significant differences among them. Heavy users evaluated "attitude toward sponsor and sponsor's products" with a higher mean score (M=5.49) than medium (M=5.35) and light users (M= 5.15). Similar results were found for "intention to purchase products from sponsor" as well as for "intention for positive word of mouth communication" where heavy users had higher mean scores (M= 5.11, M=5.03) than medium (M=4.83, M=4.65) and light users (M=4.78, M=4.58).

Discussion

These findings provide support that different sport fan segments according to their involvement consider differently behavioral sponsorship outcomes. When the frequency of attendance is rising they consider they transfer goodwill from their team to the sponsors (Meenaghan 2001). Heavy users are more likely to develop positive image about their team's sponsor and consequently express positive intentions to say good things and buy the sponsor's products. It could, therefore, be proposed that marketers should work on finding ways to raise the level of attendance among sport consumers and creating positive sponsor image, in order to increase sponsorship effectiveness. The key is to create a marketing plan that can satisfy the needs of various consumer clusters and thereby move user groups up the 'sport consumer escalator'. Conclusions are useful in both scientific and applied level, since they advance the knowledge base in the field of sponsorship evaluation and sport consumers' behavior.

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