
ASSOCIATIVE ADVERTISING OF NON-SPONSORS: THE RELATIVE EFFECTIVENESS OF DIFFERENT ASSOCIATIVE CUES AND THE INFLUENCE OF TEMPORAL DISTANCE TO THE EVENT

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Synopsis:

This research examines the relative effectiveness of different types of cues in associative ads of non-sponsors in creating an association between a brand and a property. The study also examines how temporal distance to the event influences the cues' effectiveness.

Abstract:

MOTIVATION AND RESEARCH GOALS

Associative advertising of brands that are not officially affiliated with a sponsorship property—often referred to as ambush marketing—is a widely observed practice in the context of major sport events. Legal actions against associative advertising of non-sponsors have proven ineffective because such activities are not necessarily a violation of traditional trademark or unfair competition laws. Many countries have therefore introduced special legislation that extends the rights of sponsors by prohibiting any kind of unauthorized association with the sponsorship property. The phrase ‘unauthorized association’ refers to attempts to indirectly associate with the property. However, due to the vagueness of the phrase, law enforcers are left alone in deciding which activities should be prohibited because the conditions that constitute an unauthorized association are not entirely clear. This research attempts to remedy the situation somewhat by examining the relative effectiveness of two types of ad cues (sport- and event-related) in creating an association between a brand and a sponsorship property. The study also examines how the temporal distance of the advertising campaign to the event influences the effectiveness of the cues.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

The literature identifies several types of associative cues that can be used to link a brand to a sponsorship property, such as imagery, terminology and

symbols (Chadwick & Burton, 2011; Humphreys et al., 2010). The Search of Associative Memory model (Raaijmakers & Shiffrin, 1980) suggests that the less ambiguous a cue is in relation to a particular concept, the more likely will the cue be associated with that concept. Thus, cues more directly related to a sponsorship property (e.g. picture of the Copacabana + slogan “major event in 2014” for the 2014 soccer World Cup in Brazil) should create stronger associations with the event than more ambiguous cues (e.g. picture of a soccer ball) because the latter offer more potential for alternative interpretations. Since people encode stimuli in relation to contextual information in their current cognitive environment, the ambiguity of a given cue can vary over time (Appleton-Knapp, Bjork & Wickens, 2005). We hypothesize that 1) ads using event-related cues have a higher associativity with the sponsorship property than ads using sport-related cues and 2) the difference in associativity between sport-related and event-related cues gets lower as the temporal distance to the event decreases.

METHODOLOGY

A repeated experimental study that was conducted in Germany in the context of the 2014 soccer World Cup in Brazil tested the hypotheses. Quota sampling was used to produce three samples each of which matches the German population: two months before the event ($n = 810$), two weeks before the event ($n = 810$) and during the event ($n = 810$). Participants in each sample were randomly assigned to one of two versions of an associative ad of a large car manufacturer in a one-factorial (cue type: soccer-related vs. event-related) between-subjects design. A questionnaire assessed to what extent participants associate the ad and the brand with the soccer World Cup using both a thought-listing task and a quantitative measure of associativity.

RESULTS

Consistent with our propositions, a chi-square test shows that the ad containing event-related (vs. soccer-related) cues resulted in a significantly higher percentage of thoughts related to the World Cup two months before the event and two weeks before the event, while no significant difference was found during the event. ANOVA results reveal a similar pattern for the quantitative associativity measure: event-related (vs. soccer-related) cues result in significantly stronger associations between the ad and the World Cup in all three samples. However, a significant interaction of cue type and time shows that this effect decreases as temporal distance to the event gets lower. Mediation analyses show that these effects also transfer to the associativity between the brand and the event.

DISCUSSION

Many call for a balanced approach to ambush marketing legislation, an approach that harmonizes the interests of sponsors, properties and non-sponsors. The idea of a balanced approach is that legislation aimed at protecting official sponsors and event organizers must not impinge on legitimate rights of third parties and should therefore be limited in scope and time. The results of this study are important as they provide initial guidance as to where the line should be drawn between acceptable forms of non-sponsor advertising and ambush marketing violations. Our findings indicate that ads containing event-related cues tend to create a potential unauthorized

association to a larger extent compared to ads using sport-related cues. This difference, however, becomes less pronounced shortly before or during the event. These findings may support decision making, for instance, regarding the temporal boundaries of ambush marketing legislation.

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