

## Image Transfer and Sponsorship of Intercollegiate Men's Basketball

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Intercollegiate athletics departments are increasingly dependent on revenue from corporate sponsorships (Dees, Bennett, & Villegas, 2008). In fact, \$515 million in sponsorships was spent on college athletic programs, conference, and events in 2007 which was a 12.5% increase over the amount spent in 2006 (IEG Sponsorship Report, 2007). Mullin, Hardy and Sutton (2000) define sports sponsorship as “the acquisition of rights to affiliate or directly associate with a product or event for the purpose of deriving benefits related to that affiliation or association”(p. 254). Benefits sponsors seek may include increased exposure, improved consumer attitudes toward the sponsor, and increased consumer purchase intentions (J. Kuzma, Veltri, A. Kuzma, & Miller, 2003).

Collegiate sponsorships enable sponsors to reach highly invested, passionate fans (Covell, 2001). A company's image is the sum total of beliefs, ideas and impressions consumers hold about that company and its products (Ries & Trout, 1986). A sponsor seeks to “borrow”the image of an athletic team or event in order to generate a favorable impression and attitude toward the sponsoring company (Crompton & Howard, 2000). Gwinner and Eaton (1999) have developed a model of image transfer to explain how the image moves from the athletic team which carries a sponsor's advertisement to the sponsor's product. They suggest that the congruence between the sports team and the sponsor influences the degree of image transfer. Gwinner and Eaton (1999) call the similarity that exists when a sponsor's product is actually used by athletes in the event functional based similarity. Image based similarity, which occurs “when the image of the event/team is related to the image of the brand/sponsor”(Gwinner & Eaton, 1999, p. 49).

Sports consumers are more likely to have positive responses, both cognitively and affectively, to a sponsor when they perceive the image or brand of the sponsor as congruent with the team or event than if they perceive the sponsor's image or brand as being incongruent with the team or event (Koo, Quartermann, & Flynn, 2006). The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of televised games on image transfer from NCAA Division I intercollegiate men's basketball team to corporate sponsors.

Data was collected from two students in two general education courses at a small, Division I-AA university in the Midwest. A questionnaire with items on a 7 point Likert scale adapted from an instrument previously found to be valid and reliable was used to test for image transfer (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999). Sponsors named in the questionnaire were both national companies and actual sponsors of the men's basketball team. One group of students (N=46) was given the questionnaire after a brief introduction to the purpose of the study while the other group of students (N=46) was shown a 3-minute video of highlights from the nationally televised men's basketball game. The game involved a triple-overtime victory for the home team over the defending conference champions and showed signage of one of the team's sponsors.

An independent t-test was used to evaluate whether the degree of image transfer between subjects who saw the televised highlights and those who did not varied significantly. Students in the television group ( $M = 2.75, SD = .90$ ) reported a significantly higher degree of functional based image transfer ( $t(90) = -2.01, p < .05$ ) than did students in the no television group ( $M = 3.20, SD = 1.22$ ). There was no significant difference in the reported degree of image transfer for image based similarity between the television group and no television group.

Results support the previous work which shows stronger image transfer when a sponsor has functional based similarity with the team than when it has image based similarity (Gwinner & Eaton, Koo, Quartermann, & Flynn, 2006). Sponsors with functional based similarity with a collegiate sports team may receive greater benefit when the team's events are televised, an important implication for schools not in major or mid-major level conferences. A limitation of this study was that the sponsors depicted in televised highlights are large advertisers on televised sports programming nationally. More research is needed to examine image transfer from teams to local and regional corporate sponsors who do not advertise nationally.