Demographic and Psychographic Variables Predicting NASCAR Sponsor Brand Recall

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Perhaps no other sport has been as closely allied to its sponsors as automobile racing, with $1.76 billion of expenditures in 2005. The most dominant auto racing league in the U.S. is NASCAR. Sponsor brands are involved with the NASCAR league, NASCAR racing teams and drivers in all imaginable product categories. The NASCAR league alone boasts 55 sponsors. NASCAR has more than 200 licensees retailing merchandise exceeding $2.1 billion in sales (US) annually. Despite primary NASCAR sponsorships running as high as $15 million, brands still seek opportunities to be involved with NASCAR. NASCAR touts its fans to potential sponsors and media partners as being among the most fervent, loyal fans in all of sports. NASCAR data cited in the marketing kit of Brewco Motorsports, Inc. reports the league's 75 million fans are 60% male and 40% female. The index number for NASCAR fans in the $30,000 - $75,000 income range exceeds the index for the general U.S. population. Despite the assumption that NASCAR is primarily followed in the southeastern U.S., fans are evenly distributed about the country. Double-digit growth is reported among Hispanics and African Americans. But perhaps the most important figure to NASCAR sponsor partners is the brand loyalty touted by NASCAR: Fans are three times more likely to purchase sponsor brands.

This research examines four demographic variables, education, age, sex and Internet use, and two psychographic variables, attitude toward NASCAR sponsors and NASCAR involvement, that allow self-identified NASCAR fans to recall sponsor brands. Research subjects were randomly selected for telephone interviews from Survey Sampling, Inc.'s LIte targeted lists. A total of 1000 self-identified NASCAR fans 18 years or older completed the survey. Reported NASCAR sponsorship recall levels ranged from 0 to 39, with a mean of 11.63 (SD=5.62). Male respondents were able to recall significantly more sponsors than females. Age and education were also significant predictors of sponsor recall. Younger and more educated respondents were likely to recall significantly more sponsor brands. Sex, age and education combined to explain an adjusted 11% of observed variance.

The measure of fan avidity was a statistically significant predictor of sponsor recall levels, explaining an additional 12% of the (adjusted) variance in total sponsor recall scores. Those who have attended a NASCAR race reported significantly higher levels of sponsor recall. As the number of NEXTEL Cup broadcasts viewed by respondents increased, so did their ability to recall NASCAR sponsors. Likewise, if a respondent reported monthly usage of the Internet to access NASCAR-related information, it had a positive effect on the number of sponsors they could recall. The two media consumption variables helped to explain an additional 8% (adjusted) of the variance. Positive attitudes toward NASCAR sponsor brands makes a small but statistically significant contribution to the model, explaining an additional 1% of variance. There are a number of notable findings in this research, especially its confirmation of the role several variables play in sponsor brand recall. This research's unaided recall test confirms the role that fan sex (favoring males), age (favoring younger respondents) and education (favoring more educated respondents) play in sponsor brand recall. The concept of fan involvement, operationalized here as race attendance, self-identified level of NASCAR fanship and interest in NASCAR's NEXTEL Cup Series, is also confirmed. Involvement with the sport may translate into deeper, more elaborate processing of brand information presented via sport. Involvement might also be observed as more frequent media use to follow the sport, more frequent telecast viewing and more frequent sports event attendance. Implications for brands considering NASCAR sponsorship and for the general NASCAR racing league are also discussed.