Influence of Brand Exposure Frequency and Brand Familiarity on Sport Sponsorship Effects

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Background

Because sponsorship has grown very rapidly over the last three decades, many empirical and theoretical studies have been conducted to explain how sponsorship affects sport consumers’ perceptions and behaviors. While most of these sponsorship studies (e.g., Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Madrigal, 2000; Madrigal, 2001; McDaniel, 1999; Meenaghan, 2001) have used models such as image transfer, match up, and social alliance, mere exposure (Zajonc, 1968) is another possible theoretical framework that explains the sponsorship mechanism. Mere exposure suggests that the brand exposure frequency is positively related to attitudes toward the brand and brand awareness. While some sport sponsorship studies (e.g., Cornwell et al., 2000; Lacey et al., 2007; Levin et al, 2001; Pitts & Slattery, 2004) considered mere exposure, no study could be found that identified mere exposure effects. Additionally, because non-sport mere exposure studies (e.g., Baker, 1999; Carrillat et. al., 2005) have concluded that brand familiarity has a negative relationship with mere exposure effects such as attitude toward the brand, there is a need to examine brand familiarity in a sport sponsorship context.

Purpose

The study sought to examine mere exposure effects in sport sponsorship. The relationships among two independent variables (sponsorship brand exposure frequency and brand familiarity) and two dependent variables (attitude toward the brand and brand awareness) were tested. The research hypotheses expected that there would be a more favorable attitude toward the brand and greater brand awareness when more frequent brand exposure occurred and the subjects’ brand familiarity was low. It was also hypothesized interaction effects between exposure frequency and brand familiarity on attitude toward the brand and brand awareness. The current study is significant because this is the first known mere exposure experiment in sport sponsorship. Furthermore, the results of the study will theoretically justify measuring the media exposure value the sponsorship segment of the sport industry.

Methods

An experiment was conducted to investigate the relationship between IVs and DVs. University students (N = 137) participated in the study. The subjects were randomly assigned into a control group and an experimental group. While those in the control group responded to questionnaire items related to their sport involvement, attitudes toward the brand, and other without watching a video stimulus, the others in the experiment group were exposed to a 20-minute NASCAR video and answered the questioners. In the video, brand exposure frequency was manipulated by two brands: Office Depot (high frequency) and DeWalt (low frequency).

Results

ANOVA, t-tests, correlation analyses, and repeated measures were used to analyze the data. The analyses indicated that brand exposure frequency had a positive relationship with attitude toward the brand (t = -2.83, df = 58, p = .01) and brand awareness (t = -2.27, df = 28, p = .03). The results also indicated that brand familiarity had significant relationships among DVs (e.g., correlation between brand familiarity and Office Depot recall: r = .58, p < .001) Furthermore, brand familiarity had a negative influence on creating mere exposure effects. Interaction effects were also observed, F(1, 133) = 5.20, p = .02.

Conclusion

The current study found mere exposure effects in sport sponsorship as frequent brand exposure resulted in more favorable attitudes toward the brand and higher brand awareness. Additionally, a unique finding of this study

Tampa, Florida June 1 – 5, 2010 Page 318
related to the impact of brand familiarity on mere exposure effects. While an unfamiliar brand (DeWalt) created significant mere exposure effects, a familiar brand (Office Depot) gained little mere exposure effects and attitudes toward the familiar brand were more dependent on its familiarity (i.e., pre-existing attitudes) than on mere exposure. The application of this study’s findings to sport management scholars and sport sponsorship practitioners will be discussed in detail.