Assessing the Impact of Second Screen Activity During Television Broadcasts on Sponsor Brand Awareness

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Recent advances in technology have influenced how viewers consume the broadcasts of sports events. Broadcast spectators can not only watch sports on television, but also via the internet on personal computers, tablets, and smartphones. Furthermore, fans can enhance their consumption experience by utilizing ‘second screens’—mobile devices simultaneously used while viewing television programming—to access statistical information, view different camera angles and discuss the event with friends and experts via social media, such as Twitter.

A study by Nielsen (2012) found that not only are sports fans more likely to own mobile computing devices, but they frequently use them to multi-task while consuming sports content. Fifty-seven percent of smartphone and tablet owners check email while watching television, and 34% use their mobile devices to check sports scores (Nielsen, 2012). In addition, Twitter conversation about (and presumably during) live television has grown substantially over the past two years, with 19 million unique users in the U.S. composing 263 million Tweets about live television in just the second quarter of 2013 alone (Nielsen, 2013).

Given brand marketers’ increasing interest in the broadcasts of sports events, as well as the importance of broadcast rights fees to sport organizations (McCarthy, 2013), assessing the impact of these consumption trends on returns for sponsors of these events is an important consideration for both parties.

While the media consumption habits of sport fans have evolved, empirical research has not kept pace. Several previous studies examined the effects of televised brand exposure received via traditional sponsorships (Levin, Joiner, & Cameron, 2001; Olson & Thjomoe, 2009; Breuer & Rumpf, 2012) or virtual advertising (Bennett, Ferreira, Siders, Tsuji, & Cianfrone, 2006; Tsuji, Bennett & Leigh, 2009). However, no study to date has evaluated the new dynamics of sports broadcast consumption, such as increased opportunity for out-of-home viewing through online streaming and the propensity for second screen use during the consumption of sports broadcasts. Therefore, the purpose of our research is to investigate the influence of brand integration in sports broadcasts across different consumption experiences. Specifically, we utilize dual coding theory to evaluate the importance of visual and verbal broadcast cues for generating brand awareness under conditions of second screen use. Examining the brand recall and recognition of event sponsors was measured utilizing a brand recall and recognition procedure similar to those employed in previous studies (Miloch & Lambrecht, 2006; Pitts, 1998; Walsh, Kim, & Ross, 2008).
To test these hypotheses, we constructed a six-minute segment consisting of clips from two 2012 college football games as the stimuli for the study, with all groups being exposed to the same stimuli. In order to best approximate a typical viewing experience, and similar to the approaches of Levin et al. (2001), Walsh et al. (2008) and Breuer and Rumpf (2012), we utilized actual segments from college football game broadcasts on ESPN.

In order to assess the potential effect of second screen activity under various viewing conditions, the study utilized a 3 (audiovisual stimuli, audio-only stimuli and visual-only stimuli) x 2 (second screen, control) between-subjects experimental design with six total groups. A total of 189 individuals from a large, Midwestern university participated in the study, with an average age of 20.54 (SD = 1.62). To best control for Type I error in hypothesis testing, we utilized MANOVA with correct brand recall and recognition and incorrect brand recall and recognition as dependent variables. The results indicated a significant multivariate main effect of group membership ($\Lambda = .68$, $F = 3.69$, df = 4, 183, $p < .001$). The univariate post hoc test (ANOVA) for brand recall revealed significant differences across the groups ($F(5,183) = 5.95$, $p < .001$) and results were similar for brand recognition ($F(5, 183) = 9.91$, $p < .001$). Consistent with the hypothesis, brand recognition for the audiovisual group that used the devices was only slightly lower than the group who did (M = 2.44 vs. M = 2.63; $p = .343$), and the difference was not significant. However, when consuming the stimuli under restricted conditions (audio-only and visual-only) with second screen use, brand recognition was negatively affected. Brand recognition was significantly lower for the visual-only group that utilized second screens compared to the visual-only group who did not (M = 1.61 vs. M = 2.05; $p = .016$) and recognition was also significantly lower for the audio-only group who used second screens compared to the audio-only participants who did not (M = 1.58 vs. M = 2.14; $p = .004$). Consistent with DCT, brand recall was also significantly lower for the audio-only group with second screen use compared to the audio-only group who did not use a second screen (M = 1.35 vs. M = 1.83; $p = .044$). Brand recall among those in the visual-only group who used the second screens was also lower than those in the group who did not (M = 1.35 vs. M = 1.64; $p = .190$), though the difference was not statistically significant.

Given increased use of second screens during television broadcasts in recent years, sponsors expecting to receive lifts in brand awareness due to traditional brand integration into the broadcasts of sports events may be disappointed. Brand integration into the second screen activity (such as sponsored Tweets and use of Twitter hashtags during broadcasts) may help to mitigate these effects, and further research should investigate the efficacy of such tactics in stimulating sponsor brand awareness during game broadcast consumption. Other practical implications, as well as additional results of the study (i.e., moderation tests) and recommendations for future research, will also be discussed.