Understanding the Effects of Sponsorship Disclosure on Television Consumers as a Function of Visual Attention: An Eye Tracking Technological Method

David W. Walsh, The University of Texas 
Kyung-un Kim, The University of Texas 
Matt Bowers (Advisor), The University of Texas

Abstract 2014-080 Thursday, May 29, 2014 4:40 PM 20-minute oral presentation (including questions) (Conference Center C)

Ambush marketing has been vociferously debated for the past several decades in the sport sponsorship forum. In large part, this debate is caused by the frictional nexus between ambush marketing's ability to produce highly effective outcomes (Meenaghan, 1998; Welsh, 2002) versus its ability to elicit strong emotional condemnations concerning questionable ethical principles (Payne, 1998). Research in ambush marketing has supported both perspectives, continuing to fuel a controversial discourse. However, one aspect is clear: sponsorship practices, particularly in the sport context, could be significantly altered from the outcome(s) of this debate. Dynamic advertising in the television medium for sport sponsorship is the most valuable commodity for major sporting events. Further, television advertisements receive more visual attention than field (or venue) sponsorships (Lardinoit & Derbaix, 2001; Lardinoit & Quester, 2001). Marketers, therefore, place a heavy emphasis on television advertising to deliver their messages to target audiences. This is known to both ambush and official marketers. But, we do not know how or what type of television ads produce the most impact on consumer responses via visual attention.

Eye tracking may prove to offer a promising new technique for understanding visual attention and attitudinal responses. A major conundrum in determining the efficacy of sport sponsorship advertisements on consumers is during game action on television. However, eye tracking technology can pinpoint the exact location of a person's visual attention during the game, providing more precise data on what the consumer is actually viewing and for how long they gaze upon the particular stimuli.

This is important for two reasons: cognitive processing and brand attitude formation via visual attention. Measuring visual attention of the eyes has been supported as a strong determinant of increased cognitive processing in the brain and information acquisition behavior (Russo, 1978, Wedel & Pieters, 2008). Further, increased cognitive processing and information retention leads to a higher probability a person internalizes that information and forms attitudinal responses. Eye tracking provides measures on behaviors of visual attention via eye movements and fixation gazes, and visual attention in static advertising has been shown to have strong predictive validity for future attitudes and behavior (Chandon, 2002; Pieters & Warlop, 1999; Pieters, Warlop, & Wedel, 2002; Russo & Leclerc, 1994; Wedel & Pieters, 2000). However, more evidence is needed to support this validity in dynamic advertising, such as television (Wedel & Pieters, 2000).

From a sport consumers' perspective, the extant literature has focused almost entirely on how sponsorship (both ambush and official) tactics affect brand recall and recognition with little emphasis on consumer brand attitudes (e.g., d'Ydewalle & Tamsin, 1993; Portlock & Rose, 2009). Recall and recognition measures are inadequate in determining the practical outcomes of the efficacy of ambush marketing tactics. If consumers do not feel or behave differently between ambush and official sponsorship advertisements, then there is little practical relevancy outside of a moral debate. If sponsorship recall measures provide, at best, speculative inferences on consumer's favorability toward brand association, then understanding the viability of marketing techniques, such as ambush marketing, becomes increasingly irrelevant from a sport sponsorship perspective.

A recent study by Breuer and Rumpf (2012) used eye tracking in a dynamic (television) setting to assess sponsorship effectiveness and found that placement of sponsor signage at an event venue determines a television consumer's level of attention capture. They concluded that eye tracking reveals visual attention as a crucial mediator in identifying complex sponsorship information processes. Mazodier, Quester, and Chandon (2012) found that disclosure, or "corrective advertising," of an ambush marketer negatively impacts consumer's attitudes toward the ambusher's brand. Further, they argue that the source of an ambusher's deception is a function of the interaction between the audience's beliefs, attitudes, and/or experience and advertising. However, attitudinal responses as a
function of visual attention still remain unexplored and more research is required to examine whether attention is also a valid predictor of attitudinal information processing (Breuer & Rumpf, 2012). The illumination of this mediation process would significantly impact our understanding of the effects sponsorship advertising has on consumer attitudinal responses, supporting practical relevancy in the ambush marketing debate.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to use eye tracking to provide a more robust measure on sponsorship information processing (viz., attitudinal responses) via consumer visual attention in dynamic television consumption when ambush marketing is present. This in-progress study uses a randomized-control, experimental design that groups participants according to the type of sponsorship disclosure (corrective advertising) during an international televised basketball game. A total of five groups receive visual stimuli in the form of a scroll-type "ticker" that contains different sponsorship disclosure messaging, including ambush and/or official. Fictitious sponsors will be used to account for previous sponsorship brand attitudes. Visual attention will be measured in aggregate fixation time during the broadcast using Tobii T60 Eye Tracker technology (Wedel & Pieters, 2000). Then, participants' brand attitudes containing three dimensions [cognitive (brand recall), affective (brand affect), and conative (purchase intention)] will be measured using the attitudinal brand construct used by Mazodier, Quester, & Chandon (2012). They reported strong internal reliability with Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$.

Multiple regression (Keith, 2006) will be used to analyze the strength and the path of the effects of disclosure and visual attention on attitudinal responses. In addition, MANOVA will be used to examine group differences (i.e., type of disclosure) in visual attention on attitudinal responses. An a priori power analysis was conducted using alpha level of .05, effect size of .15, and power of .80 in which 80 total participants will be required for both statistical procedures to produce significant results. Participants are recruited from the researcher's university website, both student and alumni association groups, and local community centers in order to obtain a diverse population. Participants will receive a small gift ($10) for their participation in the study.

The managerial implications of our research results aim to inform visual attention to the brand, inform how to market with official marketing, and inform the impact of corrective advertising on ambush marketers. Further, the theoretical implications should extend Mazodier et al.'s model in explaining the effects of disclosure (i.e., corrective advertising) on consumer responses via visual attention. To conclude, our study should illuminate the ramifications of dynamic television advertisements on consumer responses, impacting potential strategic management decisions on one of the most valuable medium in the sport industry.