Consumer Preferences for Sponsorship Activation: A Second Screen Analysis

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The growing number of consumers utilizing smart phones, tablet computers as well as other digital platforms to augment the spectator experience has created new activation platforms for properties and sponsors (IEG, 2012). Today’s consumers want to be engaged, demanding up-to-minute-platforms that provide exclusive content, statistics and interactive forums based upon live, on the field, action. Engagement not only extends brand support but also provides consumers with the opportunity to have real-time interaction enabling the procurement of exclusive content and an aforementioned sense of belonging (Lyberger, 2012). All the while, professional and collegiate leagues, teams, and sponsors struggle to stay abreast of these “second screen” alternatives. Whether consumers are spectating in-person or live at the event, they are using digital platforms to deepen their level of engagement and drive value for sponsors.

According to a recent Nielson study (2011) over 86 percent of tablet and smartphone users utilized their devise while spectating (Nielson, 2011). The 2013 Global Sports Media Consumption Report reported that over 40% of fans that attend live professional sport events use mobile devises before, during or after the event (Kantar Media, 2013). In the build-up/pregame stage, one in two consumers (51%) engaged in texting, 37% utilized social networking, 33% watched video content, 30% read news and 17% listened to sports content online. In-game activities consisted of 56% of consumers texting, 48% utilizing social networking, 37% followed live scores and commentary, 25% watched video content and 21% listened to sports content online. Post-game use consisted of 48% utilizing social networks, 45% texting/calling, 42% watching video content, 29% reading news, and 23% following live scores. In the U.S. almost a quarter of all sports fans consume sports via sports networking platforms (Kantar Media, 2013).

While the primary drive behind many apps is fan engagement, they provide the added benefit of creating new consumer touchpoints (IEG, 2012). Marketers are challenged to decide how to best tap into these communities to cultivate engagement and an awareness of the brands. The NHL launched Molson Canadian NHL Preplay, a predictive online game that engaged fans while watching the Stanley Cup finals. Consumer participants could garner points by correctly predicting outcomes of on-the-ice action. To be effective in today’s marketplace sponsors must focus on creating social engagement to facilitate fun and power of the brand. Today’s sponsorship relationship must focus on extending the spectator viewing experience.

Second screen strategies enable sponsors the opportunity to amplify their message further connecting them to the social activity unfolding at the event. Multi-faceted social media platforms afford properties a myriad of opportunities to engage consumers at a higher level. They enhance opportunities for viewership, help to amplify sponsorship messaging, and provide a new onslaught of inventory for broadcaster and sponsors tie-ins. They also, as Zimmerman (2013) suggests “help sponsors get closer to the holy grail of sponsorship, which is, what if I knew what my target, the fan really wanted to do? … social conversations, and being able to listen and infiltrate those conversations, tells exactly what that fan would like to do. … and be so much more impactful with activation and be real time, because actual fans are telling us what they want to do as opposed to us supposing what they want to do.” The popularity of second screen uses are expected to grow as more consumers begin and continue to utilize mobile devises to garner a deeper interaction with their team.

However, to maximize impact it is important for sport organizations to differentiate and understand the unique differences consumers may have relative to these offerings. Therefore, this study sought to:

1) identify differences in consumer spectating preferences associated with build-up/pregame, in-game, and post-game/after game activities and

2) identify consumer preferences and expectations as they relate to sponsorship activation and engagement in build-up/pregame stage, in-game stage, and post-game/after game activities.
Utilizing both qualitative and quantitative measures a total of 300 surveys/interviews were conducted to identify consumer spectating preferences at two distinct events. A total of 150 surveys/interviews were collected at a Midwestern professional sports event, of which 75 survey/interviews limited inquiry to professional sport, and 75 survey/interviews included inquiries on both professional and collegiate sport. An additional 150 survey/interviews were conducted at a Midwestern Division I collegiate event. A total of 75 survey/interviews limited inquiry to collegiate sport, and an additional 75 were conducted specifically addressing both collegiate and professional sport. This afforded the researchers the opportunity to complete a relative comparison across consumer spectating platforms, i.e., professional and collegiate. The data was collected during the Fall 2013 sports season.

Data analysis will consist of both multi-level and pattern coding. A preliminary identification of factors contributing to consumer spectating preferences will be identified. Preferences as they relate to demand and duration of engagement will also be presented. Engagement strategies are an important part of any sponsorship platform, and in the current environment where there is strong competition for retaining sport consumers, identification of consumer preferences as they relate to pre, in and post-game alternatives, can provide sport sponsors and properties an opportunity to strengthen and further integrate social and sport mediums. This will add to the increasing body of knowledge defining sponsorship activation.

The presentation will focus on the findings of the study along with a discussion of implications for sport managers.