Advertising Clutter in NASCAR: The Impact on Ratings, Share, and Number of Viewers

Stephen Ross, Concordia University
Elizabeth Delia, University of Massachusetts Amherst

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Advertising clutter has emerged as a global problem for marketers. In an effort to capture audience attention, advertisers are advertising more and more. However, this increase in advertisements is creating clutter where the audience is losing attention towards advertisements. Viewers pay varying levels of attention to advertising messages, and there is unquestionably some level of advertising avoidance for television commercials (Rojas- Méndez & Davies, 2005). The level of advertising avoidance erodes advertising effectiveness (Cronin, 1995), and has financial implications for both television stations and advertisers. Although program viewers have the “opportunity to see” the commercials, they often choose not to watch the commercials that have been paid for, so the message is not “delivered” (Cronin, 1995). New technologies, such as the DVR and on-demand programming have advanced the ways in which viewers can avoid commercials (Donaldson, 2005).

These technologies have forced companies to find new ways to advertise, particularly as commercials continue to “cost more and deliver less” (Streisand, 2004). This dilemma forces networks to make tradeoffs between program and commercial scheduling. That is, the quality and length of the program may retain an audience but lead to no revenue being generated, while commercials generate revenue but may lead to advertising avoidance by viewers (Zhou, 2004). The purpose of the current study is to examine the influence of the amount of television advertising on ratings, share, and number of viewers for NASCAR events between the 2007-2015 seasons.

Method

For each NASCAR Nextel/Sprint Cup race between the 2007-2015 seasons, secondary data was collected for eight variables. Data were collected from Jaski.com, a NASCAR themed website hosted by ESPN. The content of the site is controlled completely by a third-party individual, and focuses primarily on the Sprint Cup series but also covers the Xfinity series and Camping World truck series. The five independent variables included, 1) total number of commercials during broadcast, 2) total number of brief promos during broadcast, 3) total broadcast minutes, 4) total race broadcast minutes, and 5) total commercial broadcast minutes, while the two dependent variables included, 1) ratings of race (RATINGS), 2) share (SHARE), and 3) total viewers (VIEWERS). Non-points races, rain-delayed broadcasts, and shortened races due to rain were eliminated from the data set, along with race data that was incomplete. Analysis consisted of utilizing three simple linear regressions where the five independent variables were regressed onto each of the three dependent variables.

Results

The regression model with all five predictors showed that for each dependent variable at least one independent variable had a significant impact. For RATINGS (R2=.391, F(5,252)=9.122, p<.001), only the total number of commercials was found to be a significant predictor (β=.422, p<.05). For VIEWERS (R2=.406, F(5,252)=9.258, p<.001), total number of commercials (β=.166, p<.05), number of brief promos (β=.131, p<.05), and total number of commercials (β=.487, p<.01) were found to be significant. For the dependent variable SHARE, (R2=.359, F(5,252)=3.353, p<.01), only the number of brief promos was found to be a significant predictor (β=.190, p<.05).

Discussion

The findings suggest that as the total number and total minutes of commercials increase, the greater the impact on broadcast ratings and millions of viewers. The results showed that as total number of commercials increase, both ratings and number of viewers decrease. However, as the total minutes of commercials increase, ratings and viewers increase. One possible explanation is that viewers prefer fewer, but longer, individual commercials. Additionally, as the number of brief promos increased, all two of the dependent variables increased (VIEWERS and SHARE). This suggests that viewers prefer promotions that do not interrupt the race broadcast.
Some limitations of the research are worth considering and may be addressed by conducting future research. First, the data collected was provided by a third party website, and complete accurateness of the data cannot be verified. Second, the championship race format changed during the time period under investigation. Given these changes certain races during the season have taken on greater importance in determining the season champion, potentially increasing viewership for these races and creating inconsistencies in the data. In terms of future research, several possibilities exist. Specifically, conducting qualitative research with consumers to understand advertising preferences may shed light on the receptivity of the television commercials. Various advertising strategies are used, and it is possible that some strategies are more effective in garnering and maintaining consumer interest. Additionally, future research could investigate specific products promoted in the television advertising in order to identify differential effects on viewership and ratings. Data can be gathered on the quantity of commercials in various industries (e.g., automobiles vs. beer), and even at what specific times during the broadcast certain products are promoted. Additional managerial implications, limitations, and future research will be discussed.

References


