The Influence of Sponsor Recognition on Brand Perception and Choice: An Ambush Marketing Case in Taiwan Basketball (Ball) Market

Tzu-Yin Kuo, Singapore University of Social Sciences
Jackie Yü-Lin Shao, University of Taipei

Marketing - Sponsorship (Professional Sport)  Friday, May 31, 2019
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)  1:20 PM
Abstract 2019-190  Room: Oakley

Ambush marketer misidentification occurs when consumers fail to identify the official sponsor and mistakenly associate an ambusher brand with a sport event (Wolfsteiner, Grohs, & Wagner, 2015). The official sponsors should fight against such misidentification as it dilutes their sponsorship returns. Past research has identified several antecedents of successful sponsor recall or recognition, such as event identification or involvement, sponsor prominence, brand/sport event fit, and so forth (e.g., Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Koo, Quarterman, & Flynn, 2006). However, there is limited empirical evidence on the downstream implications of successful sponsor recognition. This research aims to fill up the gap by examining the effects of sponsor recognition (vs. misrecognition) on consumers’ perceived brand image and brand choice. Specifically, using the two leading brands in Taiwan basketball (ball) market as the case, we explore how consumers’ recognizing Spalding versus Nike as the official National Basketball Association (NBA) game ball influences their brand perceptions and choice.

We surveyed 1859 basketball participants aged above 18 via the Internet, from 23 April to 5 May 2017. Respondents indicated their first-choice brand if they would be buying a new basketball, followed by their perceived basketball expertise of Spalding and Nike. Next, they were asked to identify the official NBA game ball supplier from a given list of brands (i.e., aided recall or recognition). After removing 197 invalid and incomplete entries, we included 1662 responses in the analysis.

Preliminary analyses showed that Spalding (n = 739; 44.5%) and Nike (n = 524; 31.5%) were indeed participants’ top two preferred brands when it came to buying a new basketball. Moreover, 1156 (69.6%) participants correctly recognized Spalding basketball as the official NBA game ball. On the other hand, 334 (20.1%) mistook Nike as the supplier (i.e., misrecognition), suggesting Nike could be an ambusher of Spalding’s NBA sponsorship. Thus, we focused on these two brands in our further investigation on how participants’ sponsor recognition (vs. misrecognition) affected their brand choice (Spalding, Nike, or others) and expertise perceptions.

Multinominal logistic regression revealed that sponsor recognition significantly predicted whether consumers chose Nike over Spalding (B = 1.34, Wald $\chi^2 = 86.53, p < .001$). Specifically, participants who failed in sponsor recognition were 3.83 times more likely to choose Nike over Spalding. Moreover, we regressed the difference in perceived basketball expertise between the two brands on sponsor recognition and found that sponsor-misrecognizing participants rated Nike significantly higher in expertise than they did Spalding ($B = .86, p < .001$). Mediation analysis also uncovered that the difference in perceived expertise partially mediated the effect of sponsor recognition on brand choice ($B = .33, 95\% CI: [.20 .49]$).

Our results offer the empirical evidence that ambush marketer misidentification harms the official sponsor, lowering the sponsor’s supposed competitive advantages in brand perception and choice share over the ambusher. The research also provides a marketing implication that the NBA sponsorship recognition is one of the keys for Spalding to compete for the basketball market share in Taiwan.