Investigating the Effectiveness of Sponsor Activation of Sport Intellectual Property: The Influence of Identification

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When investing in sport sponsorship, marketers receive access to a variety of rights and assets, including the ability to utilize the organization’s intellectual property. Choosing how to activate these rights in order to receive the greatest return is a consistent struggle (Dees, Gay, Popp, & Jensen, 2019). With more than $65 million allocated to sponsorship each year (IEG, 2019), there is an increasing emphasis on the ROI received (Jensen & Cobbs, 2014).

Accordingly, this research is intended to assist marketers in understanding the effectiveness of the use of sport intellectual property (SIP) on brand-related outcomes, as well as any boundary conditions which may influence its effects. It is expected that one’s degree of identification (Wann & Branscombe, 1993) should serve as a moderator of the effectiveness of SIP on packaging, with schema-based affect theory (McDaniel & Heald, 2000) providing a theoretical justification. As the human brain organizes what they see into useful schemas, the pairing of a product and sport, particularly among highly identified individuals, should improve perceptions of the sponsoring brand.

A between-subjects experimental design was utilized, which involved one group of consumers being shown package designs for various household products without SIP and two groups whose stimuli included SIP from major sport organizations. Given the importance of congruence in sponsorship outcomes, the experimental groups were exposed to either low or highly congruent pairings. A pre-test determined degrees of congruence using a five-item scale previously validated by Fleck and Quester (1997). Highly congruent pairings utilized in the study included motor oil and NASCAR, and foot deodorizer and the NBA, among others. Given the desire to recruit a diverse cross-section of retail shoppers, an online panel (Amazon MTurk) was utilized as the study participant pool (Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010).

The dependent variables investigated include attitudes towards the sponsoring brand (Bruner & Hensel, 1992), brand equity (Yoo & Donthu, 2001), and purchase intentions (Minton & Cornwell, 2016), each a frequently investigated outcome of investments in sponsorship (Speed & Thompson, 2000). Identification was measured utilizing the Sport Fandom Questionnaire (SFQ; Wann, 2002).

A total of 307 individuals participated in the study across the three groups, including 181 females (59%), with an average age of 41.6. Consistent with expectations of schema theory, a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) using gender, age, education, and income as covariates revealed a multivariate effect of identification (p < .001), with a large effect size (η² = .139) and maximum power (1.000). However, there was no main effect of group membership and no significant differences across each of the three dependent variables between the groups exposed to highly congruent vs. non-congruent pairings.

While confirming identification’s importance to SIP activation, these findings are sobering to marketers who assume that the use of SIP at retail should be at least minimally effective. However, even the effects of highly congruent pairings (e.g., deodorant and the NHL) were dependent on high levels of identification. Future research includes testing the effectiveness of official status designations on product packaging and investigations of additional boundary conditions. These and other results will be discussed.