

Effectiveness of Sports Sponsorship In Swimming Competitions

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Abstract. Sponsorship of sports events is a commonly used marketing communication tool for many commercial organisations and its effectiveness has been well documented. However, as the effectiveness of sponsorship has been found to be correlated with the duration of exposure, it remains to be examined if sponsorship of events of short duration remains effective. In this study, an experiment involving 12 students was conducted to determine if exposure to 4 short video clips of swimming events will result in successful brand recall of the sponsors. The findings showed that even though the duration of the four video clips was less than 15 minutes as compared to longer sports games, the rate of brand recall was comparable. The findings also suggest that in this study, brand congruence was an important factor in determining the level of brand recall. This suggests that sponsorship in shorter sports events remains effective although brand congruence will be an important factor. However, as the sample size is small, the findings remain limited in its generalisability and future research with a larger sample size which allows for more sophisticated statistical techniques to be applied will be needed.

Keywords: Advertisement Recall; Brand Recall; Sports Sponsorship; Perimeter Banners; Swimming

1. Introduction

Sponsorship of sports events is a commonly used marketing communication tool for many commercial organisations. The aims for sponsorship are varied and include increasing public awareness of the company and its product, identifying the company with particular market segments, involving the company in the community, enhancing employee morale and achieving the sales objectives of the company [2,4,7].

Of the many studies conducted on sponsorship, the largest proportion had been focused on measuring the effectiveness of sponsorship. This is mainly in terms of whether spectators to a sponsored sports event take notice of the sponsors and are able to recall the brands after watching the event [7]. This is not surprising as sponsorship of a sports event is considered as a form of marketing communication and as such, its effectiveness or return on investment must be measured.

While there are many factors affecting the rate of sponsor recall, the studies have generally concluded that duration of exposure of the sponsored brand is an important factor in determining whether a sponsored brand gets recalled. However, the majority of studies on the effectiveness of sponsorship of sports events have been carried out on sports events with a longer duration. These include American football (60 minutes), soccer (90 minutes) and basketball (40 minutes) [1,3,5,6]. As such, it remains to be tested if the effectiveness of sponsorship in terms of the rate of recall of sponsored brand will be diminished when the sponsored sports event is of a shorter duration. Noting that there is a difference in the brand recall rates of different games [5], it further suggests that a study on the effectiveness of sponsorship of sports events of short duration merits consideration.

The aim of this study is to examine the effectiveness in the sponsorship of sports event of short duration and to compare the recall rate of sponsor brands with findings from earlier studies conducted using events of longer duration.

2. Literature Review

Sponsoring sports events allow commercial organisations to gain access to a captive audience watching the sports event. The sponsored brands are communicated to the spectators within the sports venue through various forms including announcements, banners along the perimeter of the competition arena, stickers behind seats and advertisements on scoreboards. As spectators watch the game, they are likely to be exposed repeatedly to the sponsors' message. Hence, it is not surprising that many studies have found a high percentage of spectators who are able to recall at least one sponsoring brand effectively.

Table 1 below shows the sponsors' brand recall rates for several studies. While there is variation between the studies, the percentage of respondents who correctly identifies at least one brand is generally high, with the highest rate at 92.8% [3,5,6].

TABLE I. SUMMARY OF SPONSORS' BRAND RECALL RATE

<i>Study</i>	<i>% of respondents who correctly identified at least one brand</i>	<i>% of respondents who correctly identified the most popular brand</i>
Moore, Pickett & Grove (1999)	92.8	75.1
Stotlar & Johnson (1989)	63.1 - 77.1	Not reported
Turley & Shannon (2000)	85.9	27.3

The percentage of respondents who correctly identifies the most popular brand is more divergent across the studies. While one study reports 75% of the respondents is able to identify the most popular brand, another study reports a much lower proportion of 27% [3,6].

This divergence in sponsored brand recall has been studied extensively in earlier studies. A recent literature review summarised that the rate of sponsor brand recall is dependent on several factors including the duration of exposure, sponsor familiarity or congruence with the sponsored event, prominence of the advertisement, socio-demographics of the spectators and the interest of the spectators in the sponsored event [7].

Brand recall rates are affected by the frequency and duration of exposure. When the sponsored brand occur more frequently or is exposed to spectators for a longer period of time, spectators will have more opportunities to process the message and hence, have a higher recall rate of the sponsored brand [1,3,6]. However, even if a sponsor brand has a higher frequency and duration of exposure, it does not mean that it will have a higher recall rate [3]. This is because other factors can influence the sponsor brand recall rate as well.

When the sponsor brand is prominent, it is more likely to be noticed by spectators and hence, the recall rate of the brand is likely to be higher. This can be in terms of its banner size or colours [3] or its placement in an important spot in the competition arena eg near the clock or scoreboard [5]. In addition, products which are familiar to spectators or are congruent to the event are likely to have higher levels of brand recall rate as there is a higher level of perceptual fluency [3,5,6]. It thus follows that the more interested the spectators are in the game, the more likely they will be able to recall the sponsor brands [1,6].

However, while the rate of brand recall is high in sports sponsorship, the rate of respondents recalling brands that are not sponsored can be high as well. False hits were found to be as high as 87% of the respondents with a single brand wrongly identified by as much as 46% of the respondents [3]. With spectators recognising less than half the sponsored brands in some studies, it has been generally concluded that while sports sponsorship is effective, the rate of brand recall is subject to many different influencing factors that are difficult to control [3,6].

3. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to examine whether respondents are able to recall sponsor brands in sports events of short duration at the same level as those of longer duration. For this study, the sport selected was swimming as the events in swimming are usually completed within minutes. Respondents will be shown video clips of swimming events in an international competition and subsequently will be asked to recall the brands from the video clips that they have watched.

The sports event selected was the 14th FINA World Championships 2011 held in Shanghai. This event was selected because it is considered one of the most important competitions in the sport of swimming. As such, the event is able to attract sponsors that are international in scope and likely to be familiar to the respondents. The six official partners were Nikon, Yakult, Myrtha Pools, Omega, Midea and Speedo. Their logos were of the same size and placed along the perimeter of the competition pool.

The four events selected were the men’s 100 metres breaststroke, men’s 100 metres backstroke, women’s 200 metres butterfly and men’s 100 metres front crawl. This selection covered the four major events in the swimming sport and with each event covering at least 2 laps of the pool, respondents have the opportunity to view the perimeter banners at least twice for each event and for a total of 10 times for the whole research.

Video clips of the four events were shown to a group of 12 students studying a course in swimming. Each video clip was between 2 minutes to 4 minutes. The students were between 21 to 32 years of age, with a mean of 24.8 years of age. Four of the respondents (33%) were female.

After watching the video clips, the students were asked to write down as many of the brands that they can remember that appeared in the video. This recall testing required students to name the advertisement from memory without any aid. The entire process took less than 15 minutes.

4. Analysis and Discussion

Table 1 below shows the frequency of brands recalled. Of the six official partners, only three brands were remembered. These are Speedo (10 counts), Yakult (3 counts) and Nikon (1 count). The numbers in parentheses shows the percentage of total respondents recalling the brand. Four other brands which were not official partners were also recalled by respondents. These were Arena (8 counts), TYR (5 counts), Aqua (2 counts) and Seiko (1 count).

Table 1. Ecuency of Brands Recalled

Brands						
<i>Speedo</i>	<i>Yakult</i>	<i>Nikon</i>	<i>Arena</i>	<i>TYR</i>	<i>Aqua</i>	<i>Seiko</i>
10 (83%)	3 (25%)	1 (8%)	8 (67%)	5 (42%)	2 (17%)	1 (8%)

The results showed that sponsorships in swimming events are effective as 83% of the respondents are able to recall at least one of the partnering brands. Similar to earlier studies, some brands like Speedo in this case, are recalled by more respondents than other brands. This has usually been attributed to the placement and prominence of the advertisements, and the congruence of the product with the event. In this case, the advertisements for all partnering brands are of the same size and are placed at equally prominent positions along the perimeter of the competition pool. However, as many of the swimmers are wearing Speedo swimming gear for the events, it may explain the higher recall rate of Speedo as the frequency and duration of the exposure of the brand is slightly higher than the rest of the sponsoring brands. Interestingly, Yakult’s logo also appeared on the swimming caps of some of the swimmers. This may support the above argument that brands appearing on the swimming gear of the swimmers are recalled at a higher rate due to higher frequency and duration of exposure.

Omega was the official timer for the competition. As such, its logo often appears at the bottom of the screen as a means to keep the audience informed of the time the swimmers are taking to complete the event. Hence, its exposure is likely to be of a longer duration than the other brands. Interestingly, none of the respondents remember Omega as one of the partnering brands. Indeed, one respondent recalled a competing brand wrongly. This concurs with earlier studies that spectators can recall brands that were not present and that frequency and duration of exposure alone does not guarantee a higher rate of recall.

Other non-partnering brands that were recalled by respondents include Arena, TYR and Aqua. In this case, it was possible that respondents were able to recall the brands Arena and TYR because some of the swimmers were wearing swimming gear from these organisations. The Arena logo was featured on the swimming caps of two swimmers and on the swimming suit of another swimmer while TYR was featured on

the swimming caps of two swimmers in the video clips. This may also explain the slightly higher recall rate of the Arena brand as opposed to the TYR brand.

Interestingly, another sports brand, Mizuno, was shown on the swimming caps of two swimmers but none of the respondents recall seeing the brand. This concurred with earlier research that product congruence is an important factor in influencing brand recall as Arena and TYR brands are more established in the swimming sport than Mizuno. Indeed, the brands that had the highest recall rates were all established brands for swimwear.

5. Conclusion

The findings in this study suggest that sports sponsorship in events that are of shorter duration can be as effective as those of longer duration even though the frequency and duration of exposure is not as high. The proportion of respondents recalling at least one brand is comparable to findings from other studies of sports events of longer duration.

In addition, the rate of recall of individual sponsor brands remain subjected to the influence of other factors including prominence and congruence of the product to the sports event. This is no different from the sponsorship of sports events of longer duration.

6. Limitations and Future Research

With only a sample size of 12 respondents, this study is limited by its small sample size in using more sophisticated statistical techniques to analyse the results and generalise the findings further. Future research should consider replicating the study with a larger sample size which will also allow for more sophisticated statistical techniques to analyse the data.

In addition, as the sample size was small, the study did not examine if demographics had an effect on the rate of recall of sponsor brands. Extending this study to other demographics will be useful as it has been shown in other research that there exists a difference in recall rates between different demographic groups [7].

Like other studies which involve the use of recall as a method for collecting data, this study is unable to limit the effect where respondents are using guesswork instead of recall when asked to indicate the brands that they have seen in the video clip [5]. The high proportion of false hits apparent in this and other studies clearly suggests that there is an element of guesswork involved. This also implies that the real effectiveness of sponsorship may not be as high as some of the respondents may have guessed the sponsored brand correctly.

Future research should also consider analysing the actual exposure duration of each of the sponsoring brands and compare with brand recall rates. This will ascertain if the brands truly enjoyed equal exposure duration and if the recall rates of the brands are correlated with longer duration of exposure.

7. References (This is “Header 1” style)

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