Advergames: Gamification as a Tool to Improve Event-Sponsor Advertising

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Sponsor-event incongruity restricts the ability of brands to navigate a cluttered sponsorship environment. Existing research in sponsorship predominately focuses on associative-learning-based techniques, such as articulation to improve sponsorship-event congruence and attain positive attitudes toward sponsors (Cornwell et al., 2006). However, sponsors are increasingly utilizing “advergames”, or gamified advertisements, to develop lasting impressions on consumers by making unappealing offers engaging (Medium, 2015). The current research proposes three hypotheses to investigate the effect of gamified and non-gamified articulated advertisement on consumer’s attitudes toward sponsors and explores the potential mediating role of enjoyment and annoyance.

Information-processing theory proposes the level of processing of advertisements influences consumers’ attitudes toward the product (Bettman, 1979). Brand information processing is the extent to which a consumer allocates cognitive resources to comprehend the brand’s information in the advertisement (Curry & Moutinho, 1993). The more effort a consumer allocates to the advertisement, the stronger the associations formed in memory connected to the sponsored product (Fazio, 1986). As gamification provides consumers novel, complex, and figural tasks to process brand information, elevated consumer engagement with the sponsor can emerge (Dehghani et al., 2016; Lounis et al., 2014). Findings from gamification research show that playing a game increases favorable association, loyalty (Freudmann & Bakamitsos, 2014), as well as remembering and learning (Kampker et al., 2014). As a result, we hypothesize that

Gamified articulated advertisement (advergame) of an incongruent sponsor will elicit more positive attitude toward the sponsor than non-gamified articulation advertisement.

Previous research has also demonstrated the positive effect of enjoyment on attitude toward learning (DiEnno & Hilton, 2005). Consumers will yield more enjoyment from gamified elements in the articulated advertisement than from the non-gamified articulated advertisement (Yang et al., 2017), leading to an increased brand attitude induced by an enjoyable information processing experience (Dismore & Bailey, 2011). As a result, we hypothesize that

The effect of advergame on consumers attitude toward the incongruent sponsor is mediated by the level of perceived enjoyment while engaging in the advergame.

In contrast to enjoyment, annoying advertisements can negatively influence consumer attitude toward the sponsor (James, 2011). However, by increasing cognitive activity, an individual can underestimate the duration of the time (Thomas & Weaver, 1975) and thus may experience reduced annoyance levels. Gamification can lead to cognitive processing by increasing attention (Boot et al., 2008) and therefore, can help reduce the effect of annoying advertisement. As a result, we hypothesize that

The effect of advergame on consumers attitude toward the incongruent sponsor is mediated by the level of annoyance while engaging in the advergame.

To test the three hypotheses, data will be collected using a between subject laboratory experiment after Institutional Review Board approval. This research will contribute to the sport management literature by investigating how gamified elements can produce favorable attitudes toward a sponsor in an incongruent brand-event image situation. Findings of this research will encourage sponsors to employ gamified techniques in their advertisements to gain more favorable attitudes toward their brand by giving their customers a more enjoyable and less irritating advertising experience.