Determining the Effectiveness of NBA Jersey Sponsorship

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Strategic approaches to sport sponsoring have gained attention in sport management research (Demir & Soderman, 2015). Among various sponsorship strategies, jersey sponsorship has been a key tactic to generate revenue in European professional sport. Starting from the 17/18 season, the National Basketball League (NBA) granted permission to teams in the league to negotiate jersey sponsorship deals with companies. This was the first initiation of jersey sponsorship among the four major U.S. sport leagues. Research related jersey sponsorship has been examined in the European sport market (Rowe & Zemanek, 2014). Nevertheless, it is still unknown whether this sponsorship strategy would be effective to U.S. sport consumers.

The purpose of this research was to explore whether jersey sponsorship in a U.S. professional sport team would be an effective medium for sponsors. Specifically, we examined how sport consumers acknowledge NBA jersey sponsorship in relation to game quality. Gan et al. (1997) suggest that the suspense of the game represents an important game quality that contributes to the consumer’s cognitive and emotional response. Following Gan et al.’s approach, we divided game quality into two categories based on the final game score difference: close game (within 3-point difference) and blow-out game (over 15-point difference). We hypothesized that consumers who watched a close-game would have significantly higher sponsor acknowledgment than consumers who watched a blow-out game.

We used a 2 (game exposure: pre- vs. post-tests) × 3 (game quality: close vs. blow-out vs. control) within-between factorial design. A total of 96 students in a mid-size university in Ohio participated in the research. Participants were randomly assigned into three groups: Close (n = 34), Blow-out (n = 30), and Control (n = 32). A pre-test survey was distributed that includes four multi-item measures of sponsor’s acknowledgement validated in prior research: sponsor’s recognition, sponsor’s image, sponsor’s attitude, and purchase intention toward a sponsor’s product. After the completion of the pre-test survey, Close group watched the fourth quarter of an NBA game in which the game score difference was 3 points, whereas Blow-out group watched the fourth quarter of an NBA game in which the game score difference was 15 points. Participants in Close group and Blow-out group completed the post-test survey which was identical to the pre-test survey. Control group completed the post-test survey 15 minutes after they completed the pre-test survey.

Repeated Measures ANCOVA was performed to test our hypotheses. Results suggest that, after controlling for the participant’s fan involvement toward an NBA team, the interaction between game exposure and game quality was significant for jersey sponsor recognition (p < .01, \( \eta^2 = .26 \)); however, the interaction between game exposure and game quality was not significant for jersey sponsor image, jersey sponsor attitude, and purchase intention. Our findings provide new evidence of the effectiveness of jersey sponsorship in sponsor’s recognition based on game quality and add to sponsorship effectiveness research in sporting events (Alexandris & Tsiotou, 2012). The results also offer insight into sport marketing professionals to guide their sponsorship strategy that maximizes exposures to sport consumers.