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Event Brand Image and Awareness: A Review on the Persuasiveness of Sponsorship Leveraging Activities

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Abstract

Although leveraging is not the sponsor responsibility, a substantial number of research concluded that sponsorship effectiveness is highly related to the activeness of sponsors to leverage their investment. This research discusses the issues of sponsorship, brand image as well as sponsorship leverage strategies namely the use of sponsorship leveraged packaging (SLP), association and co-visibility, TV sponsorship, emotional connections and cause-related marketing (CRM). More studies should be undertaken on the issues of linking leveraging strategies to enhance brand image and most importantly, how to measure not only the sponsorship, but the outcome of the leveraging activities.

Keywords: Sponsorship Leverage, Event Management, Brand Image, Sponsorship Activation, Brand Awareness

Introduction

Sponsorship, as distinguished by Woodside and Summers (2012) supported by Makkonen and Olkkonen (2017) involves two principal activities: *an exchange occurs between the sponsor and the property, in which the property receives compensation, and the sponsor acquires the right to associate itself with the property. Additionally, the sponsor leverages this association by communicating it through marketing activities related to the sponsorship.* In event sponsorship, the amount of money a sponsor invests into an event is merely a start. A good strategist in sponsorship will not hesitate to spend more beyond the sponsorship fee to maximize the return on investment (ROI) and return on objective (ROO) in the sponsorship (Cook et al., 2021). This is called *leverage* and it is a practice encouraged for a sponsor. By spending at least, the same value of the sponsorship they purchased in their own promotional activity relating to the sponsored event (Adams et al., 2018), the impact of the sponsoring brand towards the event's audience would be increased. However, it is not unusual for many sponsors to spend several times the property rights fee to support their sponsorship investments (Jung & Kim, 2015). Most of prior studies on sponsorship activities discussed facets such as sponsoring sportsmen, sporting teams as well as sporting events and other cultural and special events (Carrillat, Harris, & Lafferty, 2010; Comperior Research, 2006; Smith, 2004; Sylvestre & Moutinho, 2008; Tsiotsou & Alexandris, 2009), but omitting the theory of leveraging.

Aims of the Study

This study is intended to investigate how sponsorship leverage activities could help to increase a corporation's brand image on its target audience. In order to achieve this, literature review on issues of public relations, of sponsorship, brand association and image transfer as well as sponsorship leverage strategies have been conducted.

Literature Review

The function of brands have been described as one of identifying and differentiating products and product line decision, however, brand definitions are more complex because *brands can also be defined as products, corporations, persons and places* (de Chernatony, 2001). Uggla, (2005) has given an interesting example of how a famous football club in Europe did not only buy a skilful soccer player, but also *reinforced their corporate brand presence and brand portfolio structure* where this particular soccer player *has very strong associations, brand recognition and loyalty among fans*. Therefore, understanding the definition of brand and their role in the formation of attitude towards brands is necessary for sponsors to comprehend the dynamics of their brands and how consumers evaluate and make brand choices (Scheinbaum et al., 2019).

A corporate brand marketing strategists usually believed that the brand itself should be enough to attract it consumers (Melovic et al., 2019). Nonetheless, numerous corporate brand managers overlook the potential of connecting their corporate brand and other assets in their portfolio with prospective elements, such as associating themselves with events or even other brands. Furthermore, corporate marketing brand managers tend to ignore the power and possibilities in brand association, through sub-brands such as Nescafé by Nestlé or Playstation by Sony and endorsed brands such as Holiday Inn by Intercontinental Hotels Group (Uggla, 2005). Brand associations is how we take advantage of suitable situations, product categories and product attributes to relate with customer which could benefit both parties (Kunkel & Biscaia, 2016). Many companies opted to promote the brand as it is, simply because the economics of it. They believed that managing and developing a single corporate brand is a more cost-effective and time-saving rather than managing a portfolio of other sub-brands or involving themselves with events which for them, are of *different nuances* (Scheinbaum et al., 2019).

Consumer-derived brand, on the other hand, are communicated in the associations they make with the consumer of which a strong and positive associations will contributes to the establishment of the brand and this associations act as a leverage depending on the types of associations it has with its consumers (Kunkel & Biscaia, 2016). Generally, it is about how likeable a brand is to the consumer and it is the likability that is assisting in the formation of the brand itself. Consumer's associations with corporate brands revolve around three conceptual main streams, associations based on social expectations, associations based on corporate personality traits and associations based on trust (Cobbs et al., 2016).

Public Relations and Sponsorship

For decades, companies have dwelled upon communication and promotional tools available for them to make an impact in the market such as of advertising, sales promotion and public relation. Public relations particularly, play a very important role in an organization. It ranges from customer services, media relations, and cultural diversity to marketing and promotion,

including sponsorship (Chen et al., 2020). As one of the elements in marketing strategies, public relations may determine what others perceive of an organization and organization mission (Woisetschläger et al., 2017). See it from a different perspective, public relation also reflect on how an organization perceives others as well. From this point of view, organizations will develop strategies to compete with each other's. As a result, the right placement of public relation practice helps the organization to overcome the problem and produce a good image, in other words, good organization image can be achieved by the effectiveness of public relation practices.

Sponsorship, as one of the public relation branches is fast becoming a formidable tool to reach to the core of customers brand awareness and brand associations (Reddi, 2019). One of the primary reasons for undertaking sponsorship is understood as to develop image (Shin et al., 2018). Since a couple decades ago, sponsorship has also become a conventional marketing communications tool as evidence showed a worldwide sponsorship spending reaching US\$33 billion (IEG, 2007 cited in Woodside & Summers, 2012). Now, sponsorship has become an integral part of organization marketing and one of the fastest growing public relations platforms (Chanavat & Bodet, 2020).

Likewise, public relation could also be used to support sponsorship activities in return. Sylvestre and Moutinho (2008) in their study relating the activities involved to leverage sponsorship of four companies in London found that public relations activities were used to support advertising for branding and to promote corporate hospitality and community relations of sponsoring organizations in an event. It could be understood that apart from being one of the major tools in public relations activities itself, sponsorship leveraging activities also include public relations as one of its tools simultaneously (Cudny, 2021).

Sponsorship Leveraged Packaging (SLP)

SLP involves depicting the sponsored property's image and logos on the sponsoring brand's packaging (Woodside & Summers, 2012). In this case, instead of displaying company logo on the marketing items, the event's logo is rather displayed on the company's products packaging. It is to associate the event with the brand, a situation where a customer would be reminded of the event every time they see, for example; a car brand that sponsoring an event, passing by the car brand's service center or stumble upon that company's promotional items, hence the next time they attend a similar event for example, they would associate the event with the brand, although the event is not actually sponsored by the company. The *association* aspect is highly important in leveraging sponsorship because any association which a sponsor established with the events could also be established in memory of the consumers with the brand (Walzel & Schubert, 2021). As such, *when consumers are emotionally involved with a sponsored property and identify with it, it may also lead to a strong sense of attachment with the sponsor* (Walzel & Schubert, 2021).

Association and Co-visibility

By actively involving the brand with other types of activities held by different co-sponsors, they could impose the brand on different types of customers. The visibility of the sponsor during the event is conducive of a *halo* effect, where in some competitive environment; this could also be considered as an ambush marketing (Anderson, 2020). Although some types of ambush marketing are considered against the laws, more elaborated types of ambush marketing might

not as long as: (1) they do not contravene any existing law; or (2) enforcement is unlikely, given uncertainty regarding the application of the law, the timing of the event, and/or the costs of litigation (Chan & Hudson, 2007). For example, as many major sponsors and partners of sporting events comes from different kind of businesses such as hospitality, state government, product manufacturers, clubs to telecommunication companies, different kind of customers would be available to the sponsors. Example of such activities is when a co-sponsor organizes an event; major sponsor (for example a car brand) could send a group of people driving the sponsor's cars to the event to impose a perspective that most of the event attendees are actually driving their brand.

TV Sponsorship

The strength of a sponsorship to persuade its target audience is embedded in the ability to convey the commercial message and influence the consumer in a more voluntary fashion than the standard advertising sell (Bellman et al., 2019). As stated by Bellman et al (2010), millennial television audiences today are more touchable through *sponsored by* advertising rather than television ads that interrupts in the middle of a program and this is still true today. By televising the event, the brand could connect more effectively not only with the audience attending the event, but also those who are watching it on television. It has been proven that by airing an event it could generate more media exposure and the medium value, integrates sponsorship messages more closely with audiences and makes them stand out more for example by switching electronic board messages during televised sports events to ensure brands are visible to the right audience at the right time (Morgan et al., 2020).

Emotional connections with partners

Receiving exposure is ineffective if a sponsor does not establish emotional connections with their partners and the event organizer. Although sponsorship is probably one of the fastest-growing types of marketing, it may be under-utilized if it does not provide some kind of added value to the event organizer and co-sponsors. As stated by Cornwell (2019), too many companies still believe that visibility is everything. However, sponsors can only add relevance, resonance, and real emotional weight to their marketing activities if they adopt a more catalyst approach by adding value to the sponsorship (Cornwell, 2019). The main purpose of sponsorship is not only to create an emotional connection between the event's audience and the sponsor's brand, but it also starts from the fact that the event would not be possible without an effective connection with its sponsors. Therefore, the strategy of integration in the event can only be strengthened with the integration of each sponsor's mark in the event (Barbu, Popescu, Laurentiu, & Diaconescu).

Cause-related Marketing (CRM)

The aim of CRM or also could be known as corporate social responsibility (CSR) is to link the brand with the communities; involves a non-profit motivated giving and enables the firm to contribute to a non-profit cause while tying the contributions to sales (Vrontis et al., 2020). It is an increasingly common form of promotion. Through CRM, the consumers appreciate the value of the products or services that goes beyond quality and functionality, but to consume the abstract and intangible values related to social, ethical, self-image and self-actualization factors (Vrontis et al., 2020).

Conclusion

For a brand to shoot to the top of the list in the ever-competing global free market, there is almost no reference to just mere luck. Intelligent marketing strategies, operations, background of the people within the organization and the determination in exploring opportunities is among the vital factors that are required to bring a brand into such position. It is indicative that for a brand to reach their short, medium and long-term objectives, a well devised plan especially in the area of promotion which includes public relations and sponsorship is paramount for a brand manager. However, merely investing in sponsorship is just not enough. Additionally, how a corporation image is perceived by its target audience is highly depending on the level of activities it involves in the market.

Sports have been the most popular *genre* for a sponsor to invest in for several decades. This belief should not be held by promotion and public relations practitioners for any longer. The most important of sponsorship aspect is the leveraging. Whether it is sports, arts, cultures, entertainment, education or food and beverages, the type of sponsorship selected may not be as important strategically as how the sponsorship is leveraged. Flashing logos is no more effective today as consumers have become more aware of what marketing messages that matters most to them. Therefore, active involvement in a sponsored event must become a priority for a sponsor because it has been proven to change consumer behavior and improve awareness of sponsoring brand.

With the above mentioned information in mind, there are still very scarce studies on the effect of sponsorship leveraging activities on a corporation's brand image and brand awareness. Most of prior studies on sponsorship activities discussed facets such as sponsoring sportsmen, sporting teams as well as sporting events and other cultural and special events, but omitting the theory of leveraging. Furthermore, as the market for sponsorship itself becomes intensely competitive and challenging, sponsorship investments should be carefully managed and the right measuring method should be used to ensure their effectiveness.

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