Source Attractiveness and Credibility in Minority Sports Advertising

Introduction

Sport has become a highly commercialised business, in recent times sports have utilised considerable corporate sponsorship and advertising opportunities (Slack, 1998), to improve their welfare and popularity. “Today, sport is a big business and big businesses are involved in sport” (Slack, 1998, p1). Major spectator sports produce many marketable opportunities (Slack, 1998), however, the analogy the rich get richer and the poor get poorer summarises the dilemma faced by minority sports relative to major sporting networks. Whilst major sports’ power has increased over the past two decades, minority sports are still struggling with minimal funding and capabilities, thus widening the capabilities gap between major and minority sports (Zuleeg & Whyte, 2007; Wolfe et al, 1998).

Within the sports advertising sphere, two main factors have been identified as important qualities of a sports star; physical attractiveness and outstanding achievement or credibility (Ngan et al, 2011). Hence, to ascertain information concerning the most effective ways to advertise in a minority sporting context, this study will focus on these variables. Media that utilises physical attractiveness and high source credibility have been argued to create more positive responses towards the advertisement (Luther, 2009; Pornpitakpan, 2006). However, other authors have argued that these elements do not always result in positive responses, and rather, it is a context driven phenomenon (Yu et al, 2011; Hilligoss & Rieh, 2007; Tsai & Chang, 2007).

While source attractiveness and credibility have proven to be successful in the context of majority sports, a review of the extant literature shows that these factors have not been tested within the context of minority sports. Subsequently, no knowledge had been acquired in terms of the most effective methods to advertise and promote such sports. Minority sports find, sponsorship and funding is hard to obtain and there are often minimal resources for advertising (Zuleeg & Whyte, 2007). While this does not eliminate the potential to advertise; it just makes it a less dominant element of the sport’s marketing mix. Thus, effective advertising is essential and the sporting bodies need to make what advertising they can actually do, count. This lack of knowledge provides an opportunity to create a better understanding on how advertising strategies should be developed by managers in minority sports’ national and provincial governing bodies. The objective of this research is therefore to investigate the effect of source attractiveness and skill on attitudes, and its subsequent effect on consumer behaviour via intent to play and watch.

Conceptual development

Attitude towards the advertisement is used to derive why intentions are formulated based on the independent components (Mackenzenie et al, 1986). Numerous authors have argued
that attitude is found to assess the role of emotions as mediators of consumer responses to advertising components (Poh & Adams, 2002; Bruner & Kumar, 2000; Holbrook & Batra, 1987; Mackenzie et al, 1986). The definition of ‘attitude towards the advertising component’ is based on that proposed by Mackenzie et al (1986, p.130), and Park and Young (1986, p.13), who define it as: “a predisposition to respond in a favourable or unfavourable manner to a particular advertising stimulus during a particular exposure occasion” or as “evaluation of and/or effective feelings about an advertisement”. Ngan et al (2011), describe that the two most important perceived qualities of a sports star are physical attractiveness and outstanding achievement. Therefore, it is expected that these attributes will influence attitude towards the advertisement.

Baker and Churchill (1977) state that physically attractive individuals are perceived to be perfect. They proceed to describe how the perception of physically attractive individuals link with the notion that ‘sex sells’. In recent studies, research has described that physical attractiveness portrayed in the media provides a great insight into how an individual’s actions are influenced by this concept (Yu et al, 2011; Luther, 2009). Hence, there is considerable influence of attractiveness on persuading individuals, making it a compelling tool with which to exploit consumers with. Drawing upon definitions of source attractiveness by Hilhorst (2002), Patzer (1983), and Dion et al (1972), this study defines source attractiveness as the degree to which a stimulus person’s facial and body features are pleasing to observe. The whole body is important in the definition of sports advertising (Ngan et al, 2011; Phau & Lum, 2000). The literature shows that attitudes towards advertising are greater when an attractive model is used (Ngan et al, 2011; Luther, 2009; Baker & Churchill, 1977). Therefore: Hypothesis 1a – The more physically attractive a person is, the greater the attitude towards the advertisement

Lupia and McCubbins (2000) suggest that a recipient will generally accept or reject persuasive messages based on evaluation of the source, which acts as an indicator of the advertisement’s credibility. The definition of source credibility used for this research is based on that of Buda and Zhang (2000), Harmon and Coney (1982) and Einsend (2006). Source credibility is defined as “how expert, trustworthy and sincere the communicator is perceived to be in the area of concern” (Buda & Zhang, 2000, p. 233). This definition is appropriate as it considers all elements that encapsulate credibility in a sporting context (Ngan et al, 2011). Evoking positive emotions towards the advertisement will create a positive attitude for viewers (Nielson et al, 2010; Prabu et al, 2008). Authors argue that a positive relationship is expected between the elements of credibility and attitude, as the higher the source credibility, the less likely consumers are to discard the message (Luther, 2009; Pornpitakpan, 2006; Buda & Zhang 2000). Therefore: Hypothesis 1b – The more skilful a person is, the greater the positive attitude towards the advertisement

The dependent variables, intention to play and watch hockey are based on Elliot (2005) who defines the element as a purpose, goal, result or aim that backs up why an individual participates or watch’s the sport. Behavioural intention is viewed as an outcome of attitude (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Buda and Zhang (2000) believe that the persuasiveness of a
message is determined by high credibility which can enhance positive intentions. Studies have also suggested that physical attractiveness can create positive attitudes towards intentions as it is reasoned that it creates positive power (Luther, 2009; Phau & Lum, 2000; Patzer, 1983). Ultimately, in a sporting context, the behavioural outcomes that can result from advertising is either watching or playing the sport, therefore: **Hypothesis 2** – *The greater the attitude towards the advertisement, the greater the intent to play hockey.* **Hypothesis 3** – *The greater the attitude towards the advertisement, the greater the intent to watch hockey.* Figure 1 shows the full conceptual model.

**Figure 1: Conceptual model**

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Source
Attractiveness

H1a

Source
Credibility

H1b

H2

Intent to play

Atitude

H3

Intent to watch
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**Methodology**

The relationships were tested by manipulating scenarios containing (1) an attractive person/non-attractive person and (2) skilled and successful person/non-skilled (representing credibility) and successful person in a print advertisement. The research was conducted online, the advertisement was displayed prior to the online questionnaire, followed by the exposure to a set of questions based on the constructs, concluding with profiling questions. The independent variables manipulated were determined through a prior ‘like’ audience (pilot test) to assure there was a generalised and reliable consensus on what is deemed attractive/unattractive and skilful/unskilful (McLaughlin & White, 2011). Respondents of the actual survey were also asked to rate the attractiveness/credibility of the source. Female models were used as research shows that female athletes are better endorsers in New Zealand than their male counterparts (Charbonneau & Garland, 2006). Print advertisements were used as other media such as television were deemed outside the realms of most minority sports. The control for this lab experiment included a group of participants who were exposed to an advertisement containing words but no images. Hockey, a minority sport in New Zealand was chosen as the focus of this study. Respondents were randomly assigned groups.

Attitude was measured on a scale adapted from Bruner (2009), measuring a person’s reaction to an advertisement following exposure to it. Intent to play is based on purchase intent toward the product advert (Lepkowska-White et al, 2003). The intent to watch scale was adapted from Buda and Zhang (2000) to meet the requirements of the present study, who measured willingness to purchase a product based on message framing. The target
population consisted of three groups: Hockey Players (past and present club, and representative players, Parents of Hockey Players and Non-Hockey Players. This allowed for different levels of involvement with the sport to be controlled for. Whilst any minority sport wishes to attract new players, existing (and past) players is a market that still needs to be targeted. A non-probability sampling design, including both judgement and snowball sampling was used. The sample frame for hockey players consisted of members of the Wellington Hockey Association database (Sekeran, 2003; Cavana et al, 2001). In addition, a sample of non-hockey players was obtained through snowball sampling.

Results and Discussion

A total of 577 useable responses were received. 333 were from hockey players, 211 from non-hockey players and 33 respondents were hockey player's parents. The demographic makeup of the non-Hockey player segment is largely reflective of the New Zealand population. The Hockey player segment however tends towards younger age groups, which is to be expected. Factor analysis and reliability tests were conducted. All factor loadings were deemed acceptable and all scales obtained a Cronbach’s Alpha score of greater than 0.7. A t-test analysis showed that the attractive and skilful models were considered to be significantly more attractive than the unattractive and unskilful models. Attractiveness and skill were represented in the data as dummy variables. The results showed both skill and attractiveness had a significant influence on attitude at the .05 level. Therefore, hypotheses 1a and 1b were accepted. Interestingly, skill has a greater effect on attitude.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Summary of Regression Analysis</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>H1a</strong> PHYS → ATT</td>
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<td><strong>H1b</strong> SKILL → ATT</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>H2</strong> ATT → PLAY</td>
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<td>PAR → PLAY</td>
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<td>PLA → PLAY</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>H3</strong> ATT → WAT</td>
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Ngan et al (2011) explain that the two quintessentially perceived qualities of a sports star are physical attractiveness and outstanding achievement. However, interestingly, source credibility was perceived to be more important in terms of hockey advertisements. This result supports previous literature findings that explain source attractiveness being context driven in terms of greater/less positive effects in comparison to other advertising elements (Bower, 2001; Phau & Lum, 2000; Till & Busler, 2000). Reasons why credibility may have a greater positive influence can be linked back to Lupia and McCubbin’s (2000) findings. They suggest that a message will generally be accepted or rejected based on evaluation of the source, which acts an indicator of the advertisement’s credibility.
Kumkale et al (2000) argue that source credibility creates a stronger argument in terms of manipulating the consumer's attitudes.

The results suggest a significant relationship exists between attitude and likelihood to play and likelihood to watch. This confirms that the effect of the advertisement positively relates to intent to play hockey. In addition, the level of hockey experience was controlled for. As expected, the results show that both hockey players and parents were significantly more likely to watch and play hockey than the base case which was non-hockey players. These results were potentially due to emotions evoked through the advertisement. With the use of pictures that inspire (in reference to the attractive and skilful shots), and semantic onset, emotions that affect attitudes were triggered and created responses to act. Positive emotions created surrounding the hockey advertisement increased behavioural intentions. This is consistent with the ideas expressed by Nielsen et al (2010) and Brown et al (1998), whereby conclusions that emerged in their studies explain that when emotions are evoked positively, they can act as peripheral cues that influence intentions to act.

Managerial Implications and Future Research

If minority sporting associations or national governing bodies desires to reach the New Zealand population to increase awareness as well as participation in the sport, these results have provided insight into the areas they might best focus their marketing efforts. Advertisers should have skill leading the focus for the advertisement with the secondary focus portraying physical attractiveness. The use of physical attractiveness must take into account whether marketing is aimed at the wider public. This is important as the non-hockey player may not know the individual in the advertisement but may still be attracted to it by peripheral cues such as physical attractiveness. It is also important that managers realise that print advertisements need to evoke emotions and discussion. This can be done through triggering emotions using semantic onset to compliment the skill and attractiveness of the source (Nielson et al, 2010).

While print advertising formed the basis of the experimental treatments, future research could consider other promotional tools. Whilst television advertising is outside the realms of most minority sports the use of cost effective advertising tools such as internet marketing and Web 2.0 could be interesting avenues of further research. It would also be interesting to complete this study in a different minority sporting context to strengthen the application of these results as a generalisation of the minority sporting realm. Lastly, reviewing dominant sporting codes' advertisements and comparing them to the results generated from this minority sports research may prove to gain some interesting insights.
References


