Influence of perceived and effective congruence on recall and purchase intention in sponsored printed sports advertising

An eye-tracking application

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the influence of congruence (perceived and effective) and the level of visual attention towards sponsors on recall and purchase intention in sports sponsorship by applying neurophysiological measures.

Design/methodology/approach – This study is part of neuromarketing research applied to sports. The experiment entails eye tracking with 111 men and 129 women (n = 24) with 24 sports posters of three different disciplines (sailing, tennis and F1), varying the congruence, the number of sponsors and the position (2 x 2 x 2). The data are analyzed via analysis of covariance and regression using ordinary least squares.

Findings – Brand recall is influenced by the number of sponsors present on the poster and by the time of fixation. Effective and perceived congruence covariance the purchase intention, but the full time of fixation on the sponsor does not. The latter only, purchase intention indirectly.

Practical implications – The results enable managers to implement better poster designs and sponsors to have objective measures of sponsorship.

Originality/value – There are few studies that analyze print media in sponsorship using neurophysiological techniques. This research is a pioneer in considering attention to sports posters to examine recall and purchase intention.

Keywords – Sponsorship, Intention to buy, Recall, Eye-tracking, Congruency, Sport poster

Paper type – Research paper

Introduction

Investment in sponsorship continues to increase; global sponsorship spending now stands at US$65.8bn in 2018 (IEG, 2018). However, most authors calculate that the results of the investment in sponsorship still cannot be accurately measured (Meenaghan and O'Sullivan, 2013; Novais and Arcodia, 2013). Previous academic studies have examined the effects of sponsorship on consumer behaviour measuring purchase intention (Biscaia et al., 2013), attitude towards the brand (Alonso-Dos-Santos et al., 2016), recall (McDonald and Karg, 2015), or identification with the sponsor (Olson and Thjømøe, 2009). However, visual attention to poster sponsors has not been analyzed to date, despite the fact that visual attention is a prerequisite for the aforementioned results (Breuer and Rumpf, 2012), and sports posters (print media) are one of the most-ignored types of media in the academic literature (Dudzik and Gröppel-Klein, 2005), although they are an important part of communication for small and medium sporting events (Bennett, 1999). In this context, there are two types of attention (Smit et al., 2015): active attention, which indicates high-level processing and leads to recall, and passive attention, which is based on stimuli and linked to eye-gaze. Either way, active attention and processing can only occur after passive attention...
has been established (Lardinoit and Derbaix, 2001; Smit et al., 2015). Therefore, the measurement of passive attention in sport poster is relevant and important.

Some researchers recognize that the effect of the sponsorship of sporting events influences the attitude towards the sponsor, but also in favourable purchase intentions towards the products of the sponsor (Madrigal, 2001; Papadimitriou et al., 2016). The effectiveness of the sponsorship has also been measured through its capacity to influence memory. According to congruence theory, generally congruent information is remembered better than information that is incongruent or irrelevant for the existing scheme (Jagre et al., 2001). However, other studies have found that incongruent information is remembered better (Alonso Dos Santos and Calabuig Moreno, 2018; Stangor and McMillan, 1992). Likewise, the congruence or fit between sponsor and sponsored is one of the most-used variables in the literature as a variable of influence in the processes of image transmission in sports sponsorship (Alonso Dos Santos and Calabuig Moreno, 2018). However, neurophysiological means have not yet been used to measure the moderating effect of congruence and perceived congruence and its effect on the consumer. Therefore, the aim of this manuscript is to examine the influence of the level of visual attention to the sponsor and congruence on the recall and purchase intention of the sponsor’s products. We wish to respond to the following questions: Do visual attention, effective and perceived congruence influence memory and purchase intention? Does visual attention exert a mediating effect between memory and purchase intention?

The results will allow us to measure the success of the sponsorship with greater reliability, to determine the underlying processes in consumer behaviour and its influence on the individual, and, in addition, to obtain indicators for the performance of the sports posters. This manuscript presents at least four relevant contributions: our research contributes to understanding the processes of memory formation and purchase intention based on effective and perceived congruence isolating the effect of visual attention; this research uses neurophysiological techniques to measure the response of the consumer to the effect of sponsorship, a technique rarely used in sports sponsorship to explain the formation of recall and purchase intention (i.e. Boronczyk et al., 2018); and we contribute to explaining the effectiveness of sports posters, a medium that, despite its importance, has had very little research.

This manuscript is structured in the following manner. The research questions and their justification will be explained first, and the experiment will be described next. In the subsequent section, the results of the analysis of covariance and regression will be presented. Finally, we will discuss the results and the limitations and propose future lines of research.

**Poster advertising**

Posters are a particular case of publicity (Gardner and Luchtenberg, 2000) that can be located outside in streets, trains, buses; or inside in sporting centres, for example. It is crucial to not assume that the generalized results of advertising, where there is in-depth research, are applicable to sponsorship (Alonso Dos Santos et al., 2018; Tipps et al., 2006) because for some time now, sports managers have realised that the methodologies and techniques that were usually applied in other industries could not be extrapolated to their firms (Alonso-Dos-Santos, 2018).

The normal size in the industry for a poster tends to be 24 × 36 inches (A1) for big posters (bus stops), 18 × 24 inches for medium posters (street) or 11 × 17 inches for small posters (in the metro, for example). There are three main advantages of using the sport poster as a communication media (Breivik and Nysveen, 2005): due to their low cost, they are especially attractive for small and medium sporting events, which are the majority of events that occur. For example, more than 3,000 running events were counted in Spain in