

Sponsorship logos on FMCG packaging – what factors impact effectiveness?

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ABSTRACT

With worldwide sponsorship spending now exceeding US\$33 billion, it is essential that sponsorship investments be carefully managed to ensure their effectiveness. In the Australian FMCG industry, sponsorship leveraged packaging (SLP) is widely used to communicate sponsorship arrangements to consumers. This paper develops a research framework, specifically addressing the factors impacting effectiveness of SLP. It is hypothesized that effectiveness of SLP will be impacted by loyalty to the sponsoring brand and identification with the sponsored property. It is expected that this relationship will be moderated by the degree of sponsorship exposure and the perceived fit between the sponsoring brand and the sponsored property. To explore these factors, research is proposed consisting of an experiment, four group posttest-only with control design.

KEYWORDS – integrated marketing communications, consumer behaviour

INTRODUCTION

The growth and significance of corporate sponsorship over the last 20 years is well documented, with worldwide sponsorship spending now exceeding US\$33 billion (IEG 2007). This suggests that sponsorship has become a widely used marketing communications tool, and as a consequence, the market for sponsorship is becoming intensely competitive, creating both challenges and opportunities. In this climate and given the significant individual corporate spend by companies such as Coca Cola (US\$230 million in 2007) (IEG 2007), understanding sponsorship effectiveness has become increasingly important for marketing managers and sponsors (Ko, Kyoungtae, Laussen and Kim 2008).

Effectiveness of sponsorship has been shown to be a direct result of the degree to which the sponsors are willing to leverage the sponsorship. Leveraging sponsorship presents an opportunity to increase the awareness of the association between the sponsor and the property, ultimately with the view to impacting consumers' behaviour. There are many ways companies can leverage their sponsorship investments: mass media advertising; sales promotion; and sponsorship leveraged packaging being the more common methods. Sponsorship leveraged packaging (SLP), involves depicting the sponsored property's image, logos or symbols on the sponsoring brand's packaging. SLP is widely used in the Australian Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) Industry, with examples such as: Weetbix and the sponsorship of Kids Triathlon; Milo and the sponsorship of Cricket Australia; and Gatorade and Powerade and the sponsorship of the Wallabies.

While there has recently been a growing recognition of the importance of evaluating sponsorship effectiveness in general (Dolphin, 2003), little empirical research exists to explain the factors impacting effectiveness specifically of SLP and it is therefore not yet fully understood. This paper will address these gaps in the known body of literature relating to sponsorship, packaging and marketing communications by empirically investigating the factors that impact the effectiveness of SLP. The findings from this paper will inform marketing decision making in the area of sponsorship communications and packaging. Further, the results will have an important impact on sponsorship investment practices generally by providing answers to the questions of effectiveness and return on investment. As marketing managers worldwide are beginning to allocate more of their marketing budget to sponsorship activities, it becomes increasingly important to have a clear understanding of what to expect when SLP is used and how to maximise its effectiveness in the marketplace.

SPONSORSHIP ASSOCIATION

Sponsorship is a promotional activity that plays a significant role in supporting an organisation's attainment of communication objectives (Seguin 2007). One of the most important goals of sponsorship is to develop an association between sponsors and sponsored properties (Ko et al. 2008). Its premise is that the sponsor's name, brand and/or products will benefit from the successful association with a property, be it a sport, an event, the arts or cause related activities (Fleck & Quester 2007). Leveraging the sponsorship allows the sponsor to increase awareness of the association and to deliver a message about why the sponsorship is being undertaken (Grohs, Wagner & Vsetecka 2004). In fact, the latest sponsorship advice to marketers is that to be effective, leverage of at least three times the original sponsorship investment is generally required (Seguin, Teed & O'Reilly 2005). Hence, leveraging sponsorship through packaging capitalizes on the commercial potential of sponsorship and the benefits of packaging which has been suggested to be one of the strongest associations a consumer can have with a brand (Keller 1998). Given this, and growing management recognition of the ability to create differentiation through packaging (Rundh 2005), sponsorship leveraged packaging is an important tool in building and reinforcing valuable brand associations which may provide new opportunities and competitive advantage in today's global market place.

Information available in the corporate sponsorship domain suggests that it is possible to transfer brand associations from property to sponsor, however empirical measurement of these effects is lacking (Thjomoe, Olsen, Bronn & Peggy 2002). This gap between theory and practice is surprising given the central importance of the ‘association’ component of sponsorship, which suggest that associations linked with the property (e.g. youthful, relaxing, enjoyable, disappointing, sophisticated, elite, etc) become linked in memory with the brand (Keller 1993). The associative memory network theory has been widely used to conceptualise how the transfer of associations occurs between brands.

The associative memory network theory suggests that memory consists of individual pieces of information called nodes. Information is recalled from memory when a node is stimulated (Smith 2004). Within a sponsorship context, an associative link is built between the sponsoring brand and the sponsored property and consumers are exposed to a number of brand stimuli as provided by the sponsors through the sponsoring agreement (e.g. event signage, event broadcasts, public relations, outdoor advertising and packaging promotions). Consumer feelings toward these stimuli may be associated with existing information about the brand and property stored in long-term memory (Coppetti 2004). This approach to transfer of association suggests that, when exposed to stimuli, such as SLP, consumer feelings toward this stimulus are likely to become associated with existing information about the brand and property stored in long-term memory. This then results in feelings and attitudes toward a favoured property being transferred to the sponsoring brand.

The literature highlights debate concerning sponsorship’s effect on consumer behaviour with two emergent schools of thought regarding how sponsorship impacts consumer behaviour. One school is based upon a framework developed from the hierarchical model of effects, whilst the other is derived from Ehrenberg’s (1974) awareness, trial, and reinforcement (ATR) advertising model. The Hierarchy of Effects model renders sponsorship as an initiator of purchasing behaviour whilst the ATR model views the role of promotional stimuli such as sponsorship as reinforcing purchasing behaviour (Hoek, Gendall, Jeffcoat & Orsman 1997). The majority of lead authors follow the hierarchy of effects model

with few studies considering that sponsorship may work by reinforcing existing behaviours, rather than by persuading consumers to take up new behaviours (Hoek & Gendall 2003).

The ATR model predominantly isolates sponsorship as having an effect on consumers who already purchase or use the sponsoring brand (Tripodi 2001). Ehrenberg (1974) suggests that most consumers are already knowledgeable about the various product categories from which they purchase and rather than creating awareness, sponsorship maintains a brand's position in consumers' repertoire. Further, as sponsorship's selling message is often confined to signage, packaging or advertising that promotes the sponsorship association rather than the brand as such, its ability to persuade consumers to purchase the sponsoring brand is suggested to be limited (Hoek & Gendall 2003).

Using Ehrenberg's ATR model, Hoek & Gendall (2003) argue that sponsorship increases the overall attractiveness of a brand within a consumer's repertoire, but that the increase is small, insignificant and insufficient to attract new users to the brand. In Hoek & Gendall's (2003) choice modelling experiment involving instant coffee, sponsorship did not significantly improve the utility of any of the brands tested, although they afforded minor protection when competing brands offered a price discount. These results suggest that sponsorship may not prompt new behaviour, but make existing brand choices slightly more attractive. Therefore it is important to determine how effective sponsorship leveraged packaging is in persuading consumers and whether it has the capacity to create awareness, induce trial, reinforce or improve existing brand attitudes or increase purchase intent.

Factors impacting effectiveness of SLP

It would appear from a review of the literature and exploratory research that effectiveness of SLP is impacted by: the consumer's loyalty toward the sponsoring brand; and consumer's identification with the sponsored property. Further, it is expected that effectiveness of SLP is moderated by the degree of sponsorship exposure and perceived fit. Each of these variables is briefly reviewed.

Brand Loyalty

In today's fiercely competitive FMCG industry, brand managers have attempted to tackle consumers increasing price sensitivity by creating stronger brands. The level of brand loyalty has been used as a measure of the success of a marketing strategy and is the continued consumer preference for a brand despite competitors' offerings (Aaker 1991). In light of brand loyalty's significance as a competitive advantage (Helmig, Huber & Leeflang 2006), some researchers suggest that sponsorship is particularly suitable for low involvement products such as FMCG (Lee 2005) and may provide differentiation.

As decision making in FMCG follows a low involvement pattern where consumers choose between brands that have many common characteristics and little or moderate effort is spent when considering various alternatives, these decisions are most likely to be influenced by other promotions and media (Summers, Gardiner, Lamb, Hair & McDaniel 2005). Moreover, as marketers are aware that most FMCG consumer purchase decisions are made at the point-of-purchase or in-store (Harris 2000); promotion techniques are considered to be particularly important since on-pack promotions can influence the consumer (Royd-Taylor 2007). Accordingly, sponsorship leveraged packaging capitalises on the influential capabilities of packaging and the suitability of FMCG for sponsorship to cut through sales promotion clutter. Importantly, research further suggests that there is an inverse relationship between brand loyalty and responsiveness to competitive promotion. That is: as brand loyalty increases, the vulnerability to competitive action is reduced (Aaker 1991). This would suggest that in the case of SLP, for consumers who are already loyal to a particular brand, SLP will have little effect on their purchase behaviour. Alternatively when a consumer is not loyal to a particular product, SLP may provide a point of differentiation and thus cause consumers to consider the sponsored product. Thus, whether a consumer's loyalty to the sponsoring brand impacts effectiveness of SLP requires further investigation.

According to the sponsorship literature, consumer involvement with promotional materials, such as event signage, advertising and point-of-purchase materials may result from the situational arousal associated with the sponsored property, as well as its enduring personal relevance to the consumer

(Heald & McDaniel 1994; Pham 1992). In particular, customers of a brand are likely to develop feelings of brand loyalty when they recognize that the firm is sponsoring an event or property that they can identify with (i.e. sponsored property identification) (Sirgy, Lee, Johar & Tidwell 2007). This would suggest that SLP effectiveness is impacted by sponsored property identification.

Sponsored Property Identification

Of particular importance to sponsorship is the emotional association that consumers can have with a favourite property or event (Madrigal 2001). This association with a favourite property or event is called sponsored property identification. Sponsored property identification indicates the extent to which consumers identify themselves with a specific activity (be it leisure activity or a cause) through their engagement with the property (Grohs et al. 2004). Identification with the sponsored property helps create a favorable attitude toward that property, and these positive feelings spill over to the firm sponsoring the property (Sirgy et al. 2007).

Empirical evidence suggests that sponsored property identification significantly affects transfer of associations as consumers are more likely to adopt behaviour advocated by marketing communication if they: identify with the sponsored property; if that property or cause is personally relevant; and if they perceive the source as credible (Daneshvary & Schwer 2002). Such feelings are more easily transferred to the firm that the consumer has experience with than other firms, leading to a strong sense of attachment with the sponsor (Sirgy et al. 2007; Gwinner & Eaton 1999). Further, supporters of the sponsored property are likely to exhibit higher levels of purchase intention toward sponsors (Crimmins & Horn 1996; Erdogan & Kitchen 1998). Thus, whilst it is evident in the literature that sponsored property identification is positively correlated with consumer response to sponsorship, whether that relationship remains constant in the case of SLP, requires further investigation.

From the literature reviewed thus far, it can be seen that sponsorship may increase company/brand awareness, create brand loyalty and stimulate purchase. Yet, in order for these effects to occur, the target market needs to learn of the sponsorship via exposure to promotional efforts designed to make

the brand's association with the event or property more prominent to consumers (Crimmins & Horn 1996; Keller 1993; Ukman 1995). Additional communication of the sponsorship through leveraging has been shown to improve consumer responses over time.

Degree of Sponsorship Exposure

Despite evidence that there is a meaningful relationship between leveraging activities and results (Seguin 2003), some sponsors choose to spend nothing on leveraging activities. Recent research suggests that 23 percent of sponsors surveyed spent nothing on leveraging activities, whilst other organisations spend as much as 19 times the amount of the original sponsorship investment (Fullerton 2007). However, researchers also suggest, that it is not just the amount invested that impacts effectiveness of sponsorship but how it is invested. Specifically, it has been shown that it is absolutely critical to reinforce awareness of the relationship between the sponsoring brand and sponsored property (Fullerton 2007). This suggests a need to incorporate into a model of effectiveness of SLP, the variable degree of sponsorship exposure. The final factor impacting effectiveness of SLP is perceived fit, this is now reviewed.

Perceived Fit

Studies examining perceptions of the sponsor-property relationship consistently suggest that the impact of a sponsorship is dependent on the fit [or congruence] between the property and the sponsor (McDaniel 1999). Congruency theory suggests that storage in memory and retrieval of information are influenced by relatedness or similarity of sponsor and property (McDaniel 1999). When an individual receives new information on a brand, any information that is incongruent with, or irrelevant to, the property's characteristics is more likely to be filtered out. In contrast, congruent information is more likely to be encoded, thus leading to subsequent recall superiority for that brand (Misra & Beatty 1990). Transfer of associations from a property to the sponsor has been shown to be higher when the event and sponsor are congruent in either functionality or image (Rifon et al. 2001; Gwinner and Eaton 1999; Ruth & Simonin 2003; Grohs et al. 2004). In contrast, sponsorship activities have been found to be less effective if companies are unable to demonstrate a link between themselves and the

recipient of their sponsorship (Crimmins and Horn 1996; Johar and Pham 1999; McDaniel 1999; Otker and Hayes 1987 Stipp and Schiavone 1996). From the previous discussion, it can be seen that a positively perceived sponsor/property fit is likely to enhance consumer attitudes toward sponsorship leveraged packaging.

This discussion provides direction for developing a model of factors impacting effectiveness of SLP to guide future research. The factors impacting effectiveness of SLP can be described in a preliminary conceptual model shown in figure 1. The model consists of three independent variables: sponsor brand loyalty; sponsored property identification; and effectiveness of SLP (includes recall, awareness and attitude toward SLP). The model includes two moderating variables (degree of sponsorship exposure and perceived fit) and two dependent variables: attitude toward the sponsors brand; and trial/purchase intention toward the sponsor's products.

This model proposes that effectiveness of sponsorship leveraged packaging impacts the dependant variables attitude toward the sponsor's brand and trial/purchase intentions toward the sponsor's products. Effectiveness of SLP is measured by recall of SLP, awareness of SLP and positive attitude toward SLP. This relationship is affected by sponsoring brand loyalty and sponsored property identification. This model proposes that when sponsoring brand loyalty is low, there is likely to be a strong positive impact on effectiveness of SLP. Alternatively when sponsoring brand loyalty is high there will be little or no effect on effectiveness of SLP. Further this model proposes that when sponsored property identification is high, there is likely to be a strong positive impact on effectiveness of SLP. These relationships are moderated by degree of sponsorship exposure and perceived fit between the sponsoring brand and the sponsored property.

METHOD

Calls for better measurement in sponsorship research have been made for some years (Cornwell Maignan & Irwin 1997; Cornwell & Maignan 1998) and one area in need of particular attention lies in

the interchange of sponsorship and consumer behaviour (Ali, Cornwell, Nguyen & Coote 2006) and how the image of the property transfers onto the sponsoring organisation (Close, Finney, Lacey & Sneath 2006). Further, researchers have made a call for well-controlled experimental studies to better investigate the processing of sponsorship communication stimuli (Cornwell, Weeks & Roy 2005; Dudzik & Groppel-Klein 2005; Sneath, Finney & Close 2005) and in particular experimental studies that are able to separate the effects of the sponsorship from the effects of other promotional activities (Sneath et al. 2005). As experimental designs allow for control of extraneous variables (Cornwell et al. 2005; Pham 1991) an experimental design will be adopted for this study.

The experiment will take the form of a four group posttest-only with control design with 2 experiment conditions: SLP and sponsorship exposure. The four groups can be represented as:

Experimental group:	R	x_1	O_1	Group 1 *
Control group:	R		O_2	Group 2
Experimental group:	R	x_2	O_3	Group 3 **
Control group:	R		O_4	Group 4

* x_1 = sponsorship leveraged packaging (high levels of exposure)

** x_2 = sponsorship leveraged packaging (minimal exposure)

The experiment instrument is a self-administered questionnaire using real world examples of SLP packaging and non-SLP packaging currently or recently available in the Australian FMCG market. This research design has the advantages of randomization of participants and test conditions and ability to control for sources of error in the experiment. Randomization assures that the impact of individual characteristics will not bias the results in any given treatment. In addition, this method allows the researcher to isolate the effects of the sponsorship leveraged packaging from the effects of other promotional activities as much as possible.

Measurement

Operationalization of variables for the experiment questionnaire will be based on measures developed for: attitudes toward SLP and attitude towards the sponsor's brand (Stipp & Schiavone 1995; Speed & Thomson 2000); trial/ purchase intention toward the sponsor's products (Speed & Thomson 2000;

Cornwell & Coote 2005; Gwinner & Swanson 2003). sponsored property identification (Grohs et al. 2004; Gwinner & Swanson 2003); perceived fit (Grohs et al. 2004; Speed & Thomson 2000); and brand loyalty (Sen et al. 2001; Dahl et al. 2001; Ahluwalia et al. 2000). Effectiveness of SLP will be a measure developed specifically for the SLP context including: unaided recall of SLP grocery campaigns, level of awareness of SLP and attitude toward SLP.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Based on the literature review, it is expected that effectiveness of SLP will be impacted by sponsored property identification and loyalty to the sponsoring brand. Images and logos relating to the sponsored property, placed on packaging, should bring to mind a consumer's positive feelings for a sponsored property, thereby increasing awareness and creating more positive brand attitudes toward the sponsoring brand, assuming that there are positive feelings and attitudes toward the sponsored property.

This research will make three contributions to the literature on sponsorship leveraging and association transfer. Firstly, this study brings together areas of study not normally considered, sponsorship and packaging, for a marketing strategy that is commonly used in practice, yet has received little empirical attention, sponsorship leveraged packaging. This research will provide information on the factors impacting effectiveness of leveraging sponsorship through packaging and the way consumers respond to that sponsorship. This is important because it adds understanding of the role packaging plays in communicating sponsorship arrangement. This study develops a summary measure of the factors that impact effectiveness of SLP.

Second, this study furthers research on association transfer by examining effects of association transfer, from the perspective of the sponsoring brand. Previous research has considered association transfer from a point closer to inception, i.e. at the event or after viewing broadcast advertising. This study focuses on consumer behaviour at a point closer to consumption i.e. point of purchase. Thirdly, this study will explain the effect of four key variables that affect association transfer i.e. sponsored

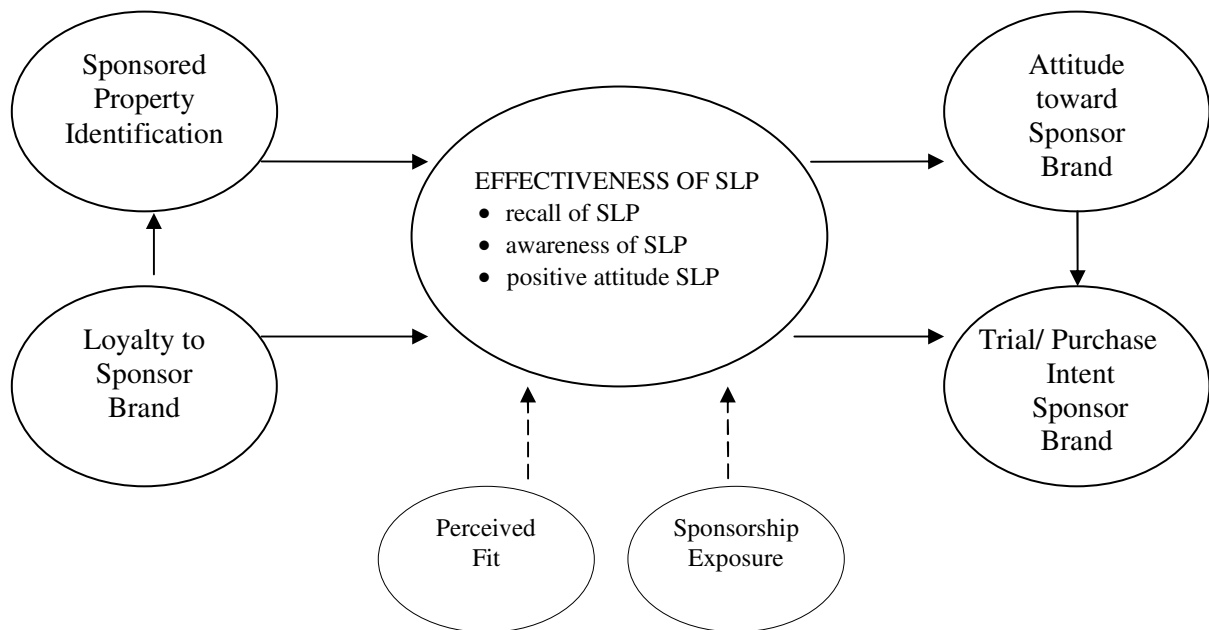
property identification, brand loyalty, degree of sponsorship exposure, and perceived fit. In addition, it examines the relationships between these variables. Whilst previous research has considered these variables, they have not considered them in combination.

Given the current trend for large sponsorship investments (Lardinoit & Derbaix 2001) it is advantageous for organizations to establish how consumer behaviour is affected by sponsorship leverage. The findings from this study will be useful for managers to know if their efforts to communicate sponsorship arrangements through packaging have an impact on sponsorship effectiveness and the way consumers respond to that sponsorship. Management will then be able to adjust their strategies and tactics to suit, justify continued spending on sponsorship leveraging and further differentiate their competitive offerings. Findings from this study will also enable marketers to capitalize on the variables (sponsored property identification, brand loyalty, degree of sponsorship exposure and perceived fit) which prove most effective in predicting effectiveness of SLP, thus allowing them to more effectively communicate the sponsorship arrangement to consumers.

CONCLUSIONS

Although sponsorship has become an increasingly important and popular means of promotion, previous research has not considered its contribution in a packaging context. It is critical that brand managers identify the factors impacting the effectiveness of sponsorship leveraged packaging. This paper outlines a framework of factors that impact effectiveness of SLP. From a review of existing literature and exploratory work, it is hypothesized that effectiveness of SLP is impacted by sponsored property identification and loyalty to the sponsoring brand. It is expected that this relationship will be moderated by the degree of sponsorship exposure and the perceived fit between the sponsoring brand and the sponsored property. Given the call for well-controlled experimental studies to investigate the impact of sponsorship communication stimuli on consumers, an experimental methodology is proposed in the form of a four group posttest only design. The outcomes from the research will contribute to a better understanding of sponsorship effects on consumer behaviour and provide managers with the means to develop more effective branding strategies and promotions.

Figure 1 - A proposed model of factors impacting effectiveness of SLP



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