

Exploring Digital Media's Impact on Sports Sponsorship: A Global Perspective

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Abstract : With the continuous proliferation of media platforms, there have been tremendous changes in media consumption behaviors. From the perspective of sports sponsorship, while there is now a multitude of platforms to create brand associations, the changing media landscape and shift of message control also mean that sports sponsors will have to take into account the nature of and consumer responses toward these emerging digital media to devise effective marketing strategies. Utilizing the personal interview methodology, this study is qualitative and exploratory in nature. A total of 18 experts from European and American academics, sports marketing industry, and sports leagues/teams were interviewed to address three main research questions: 1) What are the major changes in digital technologies that are relevant to sports sponsorship; 2) How have digital media influenced the channels and platforms of sports sponsorship; and 3) How have these technologies affected the goals, strategies, and measurement of sports sponsorship. The study found that sports sponsorship has moved from consumer engagement, engagement measurement, and consequences of engagement on brand behaviors to micro-targeting one on one, engagement by context, time, and space, and activation and leveraging based on tracking and databases. From the perspective of platforms and channels, the use of mobile devices is prominent during sports content consumption. Increasing multiscreen media consumption means that sports sponsors need to optimize their investment decisions in leagues, teams, or game-related content sources, as they need to go where the fans are most engaged in. The study observed an imbalanced strategic leveraging of technology and digital infrastructure. While sports leagues have had less emphasis on brand value management via technology, sports sponsors have been much more active in utilizing technologies like mobile/LBS tools, big data/user info, real-time marketing and programmatic, and social media activation. Regardless of the new media/platforms, the study found that integration and contextualization are the two essential means of improving sports sponsorship effectiveness through technology. That is, how sponsors effectively integrate social media/mobile/second screen into their existing legacy media sponsorship plan so technology works for the experience/message instead of distracting fans. Additionally, technological advancement and attention economy amplify the importance of consumer data gathering, but sports consumer data does not mean loyalty or engagement. This study also affirms the benefit of digital media as they offer viral and pre-event activations through storytelling way before the actual event, which is critical for leveraging brand association before and after. That is, sponsors now have multiple opportunities and platforms to tell stories about their brands for longer time period. In summary, digital media facilitate fan experience, access to the brand message, multiplatform/channel presentations, storytelling, and content sharing. Nevertheless, rather than focusing on technology and media, today's sponsors need to define what they want to focus on in terms of content themes that connect with their brands and then identify the channels/platforms. The big challenge for sponsors is to play to the venues/media's specificity and its fit with the target audience and not uniformly deliver the same message in the same format on different platforms/channels.

Keywords : digital media, mobile media, social media, technology, sports sponsorship

Conference Title : ICSB 2017 : International Conference on Sports Business

Conference Location : Barcelona, Spain

Conference Dates : December 14-15, 2017