An Examination of Sponsor Outcomes at Different Tiers of IndyCar

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Sponsorship is a crucial revenue stream for professional sport organizations, and the motorsport segment is no exception. Sponsorship is especially prevalent and important in the NTT IndyCar Series due to a lack of mainstream media attention compared to many professional sports. Within motorsport, NASCAR and Formula 1 receive the majority of this attention, and are also the focus of most sponsorship research compared to IndyCar. While similar on the surface, NASCAR, Formula 1, and IndyCar each offer differing opportunities for sponsors. For example, IndyCar offers more tiers of sponsorship (e.g., arguably more integrated title sponsorship than Formula 1 or NASCAR; IndyCar, 2019), which can create both opportunities and confusion for brands in terms of how they should align with IndyCar. As such, the purpose of the study was to examine the influence of event satisfaction, fan involvement, and sponsor-event fit on sponsor awareness, image, and behavioural intentions for the title and official sponsors of an IndyCar event.

Previous research across a variety of sport contexts has examined how involvement (Ko et al., 2008) and sponsor-event fit (Grohs & Reisinger, 2014) affect sponsor image (Biscaia et al., 2013), sponsor awareness (Wakefield et al., 2013), and behavioural intention (Alexandris & Tsiotsou, 2012). Specifically, sponsor-event fit and involvement have been shown to have consistently positive impacts on sponsorship outcomes (Kim et al., 2015). Contrastingly, the role of event satisfaction as a predictor of the various outcomes (e.g., behavioural intentions) has received little attention, despite its frequent inclusion in events research (Koo et al., 2014; Yoon et al., 2010). Additionally, sponsorship research has focused on either the title sponsor (Clark et al., 2009), or official sponsors (Wakefield et al., 2013) for an event, but not both in the same study. Thus, incorporating both levels of sponsorship in this study allows for a more detailed examination of the outcomes for the sponsors at each level.

A sample of 189 attendees from an IndyCar event completed an online survey that was distributed via the event's email list and social media channels. Measures of event satisfaction (Yoon et al., 2010), involvement with motorsport (Zaichkowsky, 1985), sponsor-event fit (Speed & Thompson, 2000), sponsor image, and behavioural intention (Alexandris & Tsiotsou, 2012) were adapted from the literature. Aided recall measures were used to capture the awareness of official event sponsors across four product categories (Wakefield et al., 2013). For survey parsimony, sponsor-event fit was only measured for the title sponsor.

A path analysis revealed that sponsor-event fit positively influenced the title sponsor’s image (Speed & Thompson, 2000), which in turn positively influenced behavioural intentions toward the title sponsor’s products (Alexandris & Tsiotsou, 2012). Multiple linear regression models revealed that event satisfaction, which was not significant in the title sponsor model, was a significant predictor of image for the official sponsors. Theoretical and practical implications of the findings will be discussed in the presentation.