



The Impact of Sports Event Sponsorship Marketing on Corporate Brand Image in the Social Media Era

Fangzhe Liao

Business School of Jiangxi Normal University, Nanchang 330022, Jiangxi, China

DOI: 10.32629/memf.v4i6.1501

Abstract: Sports sponsorship marketing in the social media era has an important impact on corporate brand image. It can enhance brand awareness, build brand association and identity, increase customer trust and loyalty, and convey brand values. However, companies also need to deal with negative communication, fierce market competition and evolving consumer expectations. Therefore, understanding the impact of sports sponsorship marketing on corporate brand image, setting clear objectives and strategies, choosing the right partners, and building authentic and meaningful connections with consumers, is crucial for companies to maintain a competitive edge in the age of social media.

Keywords: sports event sponsorship, event marketing, brand image

1. Introduction

In the era of social media, the rapid development of the Internet and mobile technology has changed people's lifestyles and consumption habits, and social media platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, Tiktok and Red Booklet have become the main channels for people to obtain information, share content and interact with others. At the same time, sports events have also become one of the most popular contents on social media. With the prevalence of social media, sponsors widely use social media such as Weibo and Tiktok to integrate brand (product) information with event information. In this context, sports sponsorship marketing has become an important means for enterprises to promote their brand image in the age of social media, and more and more enterprises have begun to realize the potential of sports event sponsorship marketing in the hope of enhancing their brand image and market influence.

Sports sponsorship is one of the many marketing strategies used by companies. Schaaf defines sports sponsorship as a business relationship, where the provider of the sponsorship is the supplier of resources and the recipient of the sponsorship is the sports organization or sports activity, both of which are exchanged through the exchange of resources and rights, enabling the sponsor to reap the rewards of the business interests, while the sports organization or sports activity receives the financial support[1]. At present, the Olympic Games, the World Cup and other international large-scale sports event sponsorship in the spotlight, to become the official sponsor of the sports event is the most direct way for enterprises to carry out event sponsorship marketing. Sports event sponsorship marketing is a mutually beneficial business cooperation between the sponsoring company and the sponsored sports event. By sponsoring sports events, companies can carry out targeted marketing activities, realize their own interests, promote the sales growth of products or services, and then improve profitability[2]. At the same time, the sports event can also expand its influence through marketing activities, and get the corresponding material returns, this mode of co-operation to achieve the common development of both sides.

2. The Impact of Sports Sponsorship Marketing on Corporate Brand Image

As a kind of 'soft marketing' that spreads marketing messages while watching sports events, sports event sponsorship marketing is more easily accepted by consumers and thus has a positive impact on corporate brands.

2.1 Increasing brand awareness and exposure

David in Building Strong Brands suggests that 'sponsorship is living brand awareness'[3]. The rise and widespread use of social media has had a profound impact on sports sponsorship marketing. One of the effects of sports sponsorship marketing on corporate brand image is to increase brand awareness and exposure. Sporting events usually attract a great deal of attention and media coverage. Whether it's a sponsor's logo on a billboard at the match, during the live broadcast of the event, or sponsored event content posted on social media, brands are able to gain wider exposure through sports sponsorship marketing. This exposure helps to increase brand awareness so that more people recognize and remember the brand and take it into account when making purchasing decisions[4].

In the age of social media, traffic itself is a scarce resource, and the big TV screen is no longer the primary brand-

building medium. In the Hangzhou Asian Games, CCTV has authorized new media platforms such as China Mobile's Migu, Tiktok and Kuaishou to broadcast the Asian Games. These platforms provided massive amounts of content, giving brands plenty of room for exposure. Taking Tiktok as an example, in its Asian Games feature page, in addition to live streaming of the games, there is also a series of self-produced programme, which have their own title sponsors, such as Whisper, Chaoneng and Kiehl's, etc. Through the content of the programme and the hosts' oral broadcasts, they resonate emotionally with the users and enhance brand awareness and exposure.

2.2 Building brand association and identity

Each thing has its own unique impression and characteristics, representing a specific inner temperament and value pursuit. When a brand sponsors activities similar to its own image, consumers will naturally associate the two together, believing that they share the same pursuit of quality, and through this association, the audience will unconsciously believe that the brand's products also possess the same qualities. For example, the mention of ARCTERYX will be associated with outdoor sports, NIKE will be associated with basketball, and Red Bull will be associated with extreme sports.

Social media offers a new communication channel that allows brands to capture the attention of users by posting photos, videos and relevant content from sponsored events. This direct interaction helps to build brand associations and create a sense of identity in the minds of consumers. By partnering with audience-favourite sporting events and athletes, brands are able to leverage their influence and fan base to engage their target audience. For example, Anta Group, as an official partner of the Chinese Olympic Committee, has provided medal-winning equipment, competition equipment and life training equipment for more than 30 major international sports events, including the Tokyo Olympics, the Beijing Winter Olympics and the Hangzhou Asian Games for 36 national teams and the Chinese sports delegation, and has signed up athletes such as short-track speed skating Winter Olympics champion Wu Dajing and freestyle skiing Winter Olympics champion Gu Ailing Eileen as brand spokesperson. This kind of brand association can help companies build a positive image in the minds of consumers and increase their identification with the brand.

2.3 Communicating brand values

In the context of fragmented social media, sports events have become an excellent window for brand exposure, and how to better use sports events to convey brand concepts to gain attention and influence has become an important marketing issue for brands to focus on. By posting content about sports sponsorship on social media, brands can share their brand stories, social responsibility programme and the motivations behind their partnerships with sports events and athletes. Sporting events and athletes often represent values such as initiative, teamwork, and hard work. Companies can associate themselves with these positive values through events, sponsor logos, and social media content to convey a positive brand image to consumers.

In the current streaming media era where consumers' emotional threshold is getting higher and higher, brands should not stay at a shallow level in expressing their claims in sports marketing, but should dig deeper into the connotation of sportsmanship, fit the brand connotation and values, and emphasizes a higher dimension of spiritual appeal[5]. As the official dairy supplier of the Hangzhou Asian Games, Yili's concepts of quality nutrition, energy supplementation, and healthy living are very much in line with the spirit of never-say-die sports. During the 60-day countdown to the Hangzhou Asian Games, Yili called on all people to participate in sports, public welfare and environmental protection through online and offline themed activities, such as sports games, shopping weeks and promotional videos, which attracted widespread attention in social media and drove the Asian Games craze for all people and promoted the spirit of sports for all people. Asian Games fever for all people and promote the concept of healthy living for all.

2.4 Increasing brand trust and loyalty

When people's love for a sport reaches a certain level, they will show a special loyalty to the products of the sponsoring brand. If a company is able to continue sponsoring a sporting event over a long period of time, this will leave a deep and lasting impression of its brand in the minds of its audience and earn their brand loyalty.

Social media in today's era not only plays the role of information dissemination, but is also a platform that allows brands to interact with their audiences in real time. It breaks the one-way communication model of traditional media, allowing brands to respond to audience questions and feedback in a timely manner, and this interactivity plays a huge role in enhancing brand trust and loyalty. Enterprises can interact with audiences in real time through social media to understand their needs and feedback and adjust marketing strategies in a timely manner, making brands closer to consumers. At the same time, through social media communication, enterprises can show their brand image in a wider range, so that enterprises can establish a deep emotional connection in the target audience, so that consumers do not only buy because of the function of the product, but also because of the emotional connection with the brand and loyalty.

3. Challenges of sports sponsorship marketing in the social media era

However, sports sponsorship marketing in the age of social media also faces a number of challenges. The first is the risk of negative impact spreading. On social media, negative events and controversies can often spread quickly and cause damage to a brand's image. If a brand partners with a sporting event or athlete who is embroiled in a scandal or controversy, the brand's reputation may also be implicated[6]. Therefore, companies need to conduct adequate due diligence when selecting sporting events and partners. In the course of the cooperation, companies also need to pay close attention to the behaviour and performance of their partners, as well as the related social and media reactions, and have the ability to respond flexibly to various emergencies, such as default of the partner, cancellation of the sports event, or a sudden change in public opinion.

Secondly, fierce market competition is also a challenge for sports sponsorship marketing in the social media era. As more and more brands realize the huge potential and value of sports sponsorship marketing, many companies have established partnerships with sports events, athletes and teams, expecting to enhance their brand image and market share in this way. However, this market competition has also brought some problems. On the one hand, the large number of brand sponsorship activities makes consumers feel information overload and advertising fatigue. On the other hand, the market is flooded with a large number of sports sponsorship activities, which also makes it necessary for companies to conduct more in-depth market analysis and brand positioning when formulating their marketing strategies, so as to ensure that their sponsorship activities can stand out in the market.

Finally, consumer expectations are also evolving, which brings new challenges to sports sponsorship marketing in the social media era. In today's market environment, consumers' demands on brands are no longer limited to the quality of their products or services. They are also concerned with aspects such as social responsibility and sustainable development. Therefore, companies need to closely integrate their sports sponsorship activities with their social responsibility and focus on sustainable development in order to build real and meaningful connections with consumers.

References

- [1] Schaaf Phil. Sports marketing: It's not just a game anymore[J]. New York: Prometheus; 2005.
- [2] Morgan Ashlee, Taylor Tracy, Adair Daryl. Sport event sponsorship management from the sponsee's perspective[J]. Sport Management Review. 2020; 23(5): 838-851.
- [3] David A. Aaker. Building Strong Brands. New York: Free Press; 1996.
- [4] Toscani Giulio, Prendergast Gerard. Sponsees: the silent side of sponsorship research[J]. Marketing Intelligence & Planning. 2018; 36(3): 396-408.
- [5] Chiu Cheryl, Pyun Do Young. Investigating brand image transfer in sport sponsorship of a participation sport event in Singapore[J]. Event Management. 2020; 24(2-3): 263-275.
- [6] Cui Ge-Qi, Lee Jung-Yong, Jin Chang-Hyun. The role of sports sponsorship in negative new stories about a brand: Approach the halo effect[J]. Cogent Business & Management. 2019; 6(1): 1699284.