MOTORSPORTS SPONSORSHIP A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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INTRODUCTION

Sponsorship is an extremely important integrated marketing tool for public relations practitioners. “To many public relations professionals, integrated marketing can be the most important, yet, most underutilized aspects of a campaign,” (Sherry, 2000, 24). According to Sherry, there can be several missed opportunities when areas like promotions, advertising, and marketing are left out of the public relations mix.

Meenaghan (1991, 36) defined sponsorship as, “an investment, in cash or in kind, in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that activity.” Madrigal (2000) found two main objectives for sponsorship. “First, sponsorship is used to increase brand awareness by exposing the brand to as many potential consumers as possible through the use of on-site signage, identification on printed promotional material and media coverage. Second, marketers seek to establish, enhance or change a brand image by linking their brand to a favorite cause, event or sports team,” (2000, 14). “Corporations are looking to begin or expand existing sports sponsorship to take advantage of consumer interest and the ability to reach large and yet specifically targeted audiences,” (Sherry, 2000, 24). The IEG Sponsorship Report (1999a) stated that, $7.6 billion dollars was spent that year by North American companies, with most of it (67 percent) going to sport sponsorship.
“Within the broad spectrum of sports marketing campaigns, motorsports have proven to be an especially popular form of sponsorship-linked marketing,” (Corwell, Pruitt, and Van Ness, 2001). This was, “perhaps due partly to the fact that motorsports are the fastest growing spectator sports in the United States,” (2001, 12). For example, the National Association of Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) is the second most watched sport on television, right behind football in the United States. The ratings have increased almost 50 percent, since they signed their latest television contract five years ago (Burke, O’Keefe, Schlosser, and Mero 2005). Gnuschke (2004) wrote, in 2002 motorsports was the world’s most popular sport, with ticket sales exceeding two million. The author also stated that, “media coverage of motorsports events is up 1,000 percent in the last ten years,” (2004, 2).

When it comes to sponsorship dollars, Oliver (2005) stated that companies spent over $1.5 billion on NASCAR sponsorship alone in 2004. Primary NASCAR team sponsorship could cost between $8 million to $20 million per season. Associate sponsorship on a teams car could cost anywhere from $500,000 to $5 million.

Donahay and Rosenberger (2007) looked at Forumla One sponsorship. Primary team sponsorship in this series ranged from $15 to $50 million per season. Each team run could one to two primary sponsors, which depended on the size of the team. Teams associate sponsorship ranged anywhere from $2.5 to $15 million per season. Formula One teams ran on average 15 to 30 total sponsors.
One reason that motorsports fans are so important to public relations practitioners, is due to their high levels of loyalty to the favorite drivers, teams, and their sponsors. A 1999 IEG Sponsorship Report (1999b), stated that the NASCAR fans are loyal to their sponsors for four major reasons: a fans passion for the sport, fans’ awareness of the sponsors, sponsors integrating themselves into the series, fans’ appreciation for the sponsors being a part of the series, and emotional linkage for the fans.

In 2001, Johnson analyzed NASCAR fan loyalty. “NASCAR estimates that 12 percent of the nation are hard-core fans. Of those, seven percent of the population consists of die-hard fans who spend at least 6.5 hours a week following the race series in person, on TV, in print, and on the Internet,” (2001, 34). The article also stated that the reason the NASCAR fans are so loyal is due to their feeling of belonging to the series.

Sponsors are placing millions of dollars into motorsports sponsorship (Oliver, 2005). It is very important, as public relations practitioner, one understands what truly makes sponsorship effective. The following literature review examined several of the key issues that public relations practitioners should examine before becoming involved in motorsports sponsorship.
This motorsports sponsorship literature review has been structured into four different categories: the effectiveness of tobacco sponsorship in motorsports, motorsports sponsorship affects on corporate stock prices, the effects of fan loyalty on motorsports sponsorship, and other motorsports sponsorship issues.

The Effectiveness of Tobacco Sponsorship in Motorsports

In his study, Siegel (2001) looked at how tobacco sponsorship in motorsports was affected by the Tobacco Settlement of 1999. The settlement restricted almost all forms of tobacco advertising. The researcher used the Sponsor Report, to calculat national television exposure from sponsorship, to see how much tobacco sponsorship was seen between 1997 and 1999. The Sponsor Report reviewed total television exposure and verbal mentions. The study focused on 11 automobile racing series that had tobacco companies as a sponsors. “A total if 17.3 million people (an average of 82,000 per race) attended the 211 races in our sample, and these events were viewed on television by an average of 2.4 million people per race,” (2001, 1107).

The authors found that the tobacco companies used motorsports sponsorship to achieve the equivalent of $410 million in advertising value from 1997 to 1999. This was about 70 percent of their annual sponsorship budget.
Morrison, Haygood, and Krugman (2006) took Siegel’s 2001 study, and used the statistics data from the 2000 to 2002 motorsports seasons. The authors wanted to see if there was an increase or a decrease in the amount of tobacco sponsor air time. The researchers also looked at what tobacco brands received the most amount of race coverage, along with which series provided the most valuable coverage for their tobacco sponsors. The Sponsors Report was also used in this study to look at the 12 auto racing series and the seven tobacco sponsors. This report, “provides comprehensive documentation of in-broadcast brand exposure during sports, special event, and entertainment television programming,” (2006,11). The results showed that, ”the seven cigarette brands achieved an average of $203.2 million in television advertising value annually through their sponsorship and presence in the 12 racing series,” (2006, 12). It was also found that 2002 had the highest increase in tobacco sponsor exposure, with a 127 percent increase from 1997. By far, the Winston brand received the highest amount of valuation with over 86 hours of television exposure valued at $559 million. The series that displayed the highest tobacco sponsor coverage was NASCAR, which “represented over $472.2 million in total advertising value for its cigarette sponsors,” (2006, 12).

Dewhirst and Hunter (2002) studied Formula One and Championship Auto Racing Teams (CART) association with tobacco sponsors. The researchers examined, “tobacco brand exposure and enhanced symbolic imagery through co-sponsors’ third party advertising,” (2002, 146). Tobacco companies used motorsports sponsorship to fill a promotional and advertising void, left after the United Kingdom restricted tobacco
advertising. The researchers found that, “Marlboro received nearly 3.5 hours of in-focus exposure during the 15 races of the 1989 Championship Auto Racing Teams (CART) season,” (2002, 146). Between 1997 and 1999, 169 hours of tobacco advertisement was achieved through motorsports sponsorship in the United States, which was valued at over $411 million.

The authors also looked at Formula One’s tobacco sponsorship. Formula One has an international audience of over 300 million viewers world-wide. With the high budgets and the global coverage of Formula One, tobacco companies were the perfect sponsorship match. “Collectively, tobacco manufactures annually spent $250 million towards F1 (Formula One) teams,” (2002, 146).

Even with the effectiveness of third party advertising for tobacco companies, it may soon come to an end. “While cost efficiencies may also be fulfilled through third party advertising and co-branding activities, the senior advertising practitioners interviewed for this paper consistently maintained that tobacco companies are highly unlikely to assist with the cost of such advertising,” (2002, 149).

In 2004, Carlyle, Collin, Hurt, and Muggli studied one tobacco company’s efforts to build their brand through Formula One. The researchers looked at internal and external documents from British American Tobacco. “In 1999, a new development emerged, when British American Tobacco (BAT) established its own Formula One team, British American Racing.” (2004, 104). The authors found internal documents stating that, “BAT was able to develop the global appeal of its brands through extensive broadcast
media coverage specifically directed at young people, merchandising proposal and activities aimed at children and young people, and race sponsorship in emerging markets in Asia,” (2004, 104). British American Tobacco received $80 million in advertising and public relation exposure in 1999, immediately after the team first launched. “During its four years and a $500 million investment by BAT, the team has never achieved higher than fifth place,” (2004, 105). The real goal was never track position, but rather to expose British American Tobaccos newest product lines. In this, the company was very successful.

**Motorsports Sponsorship Effects on Corporate Stock Prices**

In a 2001 study, Cornwell, Pruitt, and Van Ness looked at how winning the Indianapolis 500 impacted the winner’s sponsors’ stock prices. The researchers stated that by using stock prices to measure sponsorship gains, they had found a research tool that was more free of bias and less subjective. The sample consisted of all 36 Indianapolis 500 winners from 1963 to 1998. The study looked a sponsors’ stock over a 150-day time period, which extended to 21 days after the race.

The authors found mixed results. The major gains came from sponsors that were closely tied to motorsports or the consumer automotive industry. Sponsors that were not closely related to either industry were less likely to see an increase in their stock prices after an Indianapolis 500 win. The sponsor that saw the most gain in the 36 years was
STP. The researchers stated that was in part due to their association with four Indianapolis 500 winners during this time period.

In 2004, Cornwell, Clark, and Pruitt took the previous study and applied it to NASCAR. They again used stock prices as their unbiased measurement for motorsports sponsorship. The authors focused on 24 different sponsors’ announcements between 1995 and 2001. The researchers looked at both primary and secondary/associate sponsorships. The authors begun by tracking each stock’s activity for 100 days preceding the announcement of a new sponsor. Then they continued to track each sponsor’s stock for 25 days after the announcement.

As a result, the authors found, “that NASCAR sponsorship announcements were accompanied by the largest increases in shareholder wealth ever recorded in marketing literature in response to a voluntary marketing program — represents a striking and unambiguous stock market endorsement of the sponsorship,” (2004, 281). It was also determined that, “sponsors experienced a staggering increase in shareholder wealth of over $300 million ($500 million in the case of companies with direct ties to the consumer automotive industry), net of all of the costs expected to be associated with the sponsorship,” (2004, 289). Finally, the authors, also, established that the highest returns came from sponsors that signed with the “best teams” in NASCAR.

Mahar, Paul, and Stone (2005) examined the sponsors’ stock performance for each of the primary teams during the 2002 through 2003 NASCAR race season. The authors specifically looked at the sponsors’ stock prices on the first day following each
NASCAR race. The researchers gathered stock market information from Finance.yahoo.com and compared it to the team’s race results as reported on NASCAR.com. Second, the authors compared the type of business the sponsor is involved in, either business-to-business sales or business-to-customer sales.

The findings show, “that the performance (as measured by points accumulated in the race) of a sponsored team in NASCAR is associated with change in shareholder wealth of the sponsors,” (2005, 85). The biggest impact seemed to be seen in companies that are directly related to the automobile industry, and companies that sell directly to the customers. There was little to no change observed with companies that were based in business-to-business sales.

**Effects of Fan Loyalty on Motorsports Sponsorship**

Spann (2002) researched NASCAR fans’ specific sub-cultural phenomena, sense of community, and identities. The researcher stated that there are two main subculture patterns amongst NASCAR fans: loyalty to a specific car manufacture (i.e. Chevy, Ford, or Dodge), and loyalty to and identification with a specific racecar driver. “Sport spectating is a social activity and if NASCAR fans are a subculture then we should find a higher sense of community among them,” (2002, 357). Identity was also found to be very important to these fans. This, “refers to who or what one is, to the various meanings attached to oneself by self or others,” (2002, 358). “Fans might reinforce such identity by cheering for a particular brand, rooting for a particular driver, and finding themselves in
social settings where other people have similar identity characteristics.”

In 2001, Johnson looked at NASCAR fans and their loyalty to both the sponsors and sport itself. The author stated that motorsports, in general, is the second most watched sport, just behind National Football League’s regular season games. When it came to motorsports, 83.9 millions Americans consider themselves a fan. Of that number, 38 percent of Americans over the age of 12 state that they were fans of NASCAR.

“NASCAR estimates that 12 percent of the nation are hard-core fans. Of those, seven percent of the population consists of die-hard fans who spend at least 6.5 hours a week following the race series in person, on TV, in print, and on the Internet,” (2001, 34). Johnson found that NASCAR knew what kept their fans coming back for more. That would have to be that “family feeling” between the drivers and their followers. NASCAR found that the difference between their “hard core” fans and the casual ones was that the “hard core” fans felt that “family feeling”.

The Johnson stated that these loyal fans are spending the money to back their favorite teams and drivers, the most avid of fans spent an average of $683 a year on merchandise. NASCAR fans, “are twice as likely as non-NASCAR fans to buy sponsor’s products and services, and 72 percent of them actively do so,” (2001, 35). “The perception of fans, and it is accurate, is that, ‘My driver couldn’t run without that sponsor,’ that without DuPont, Jeff Gordon couldn’t run.” The fans also tend to have
more positive feelings toward NASCAR sponsors and their products, then non-NASCAR fans.

Levin, Joiner, and Cameron (2001) observed fans’ attitudes and abilities to recall NASCAR sponsors during televised races. The authors surveyed 60 undergraduate students. The students were shown 28 minute segment from a recent NASCAR race. Also contained in the segment, were two full commercial breaks. Some of the commercials featured NASCAR sponsors, while other did not. The authors wanted to compare the subjects abilities to recall and attitudes toward, both NASCAR sponsors and products featured during the commercial breaks. The respondents were also given a separate survey to determine their level of NASCAR fan loyalty.

The researchers concluded, that brand recall and attitudes were stronger for on-car sponsors, than for products featured in the commercials alone. The highest levels brand recall occurred when on-car sponsorship and product commercials were combined. Finally, maximum positive brand attitudes occurred when on-car sponsorship and product commercials were viewed by participants whom scored highly on the NASCAR fan loyalty scale.

In 2008, Kinney, McDaniel, and DeGaris also studied NASCAR sponsor brand recall. “Four demographic variables (education, age, gender, and internet use) and two psychographic variables (attitude towards NASCAR sponsors and NASCAR involvement) were investigated for impact on NASCAR fan ability to recall sponsor brands,” (2008, 169). The research was conducted during a random phone survey to
1,000 self-identified NASCAR fans. Each of the respondents answered basic demographic questions and asked to, “address how important NASCAR-related sponsor brand are for these fans,” (2008, 173). Lastly, each person was asked to identify as many of the NASCAR sponsors as they could.

The authors concluded that, “the majority of respondents classified themselves as either big (49 percent) or average (38 percent) NASCAR fans, while the remaining 13 percent considered themselves casual fans,” (2008, 174). The higher the involvement with NASCAR (watching races on television, going to NASCAR races, and following NASCAR online), the more likely a fan would correctly recall NASCAR sponsors. It was also found, that female fans were less likely to correctly identify NASCAR sponsors, then male fans. “The research confirms the role that fan gender (favoring males), age (favoring younger respondents), and education (favoring more educated respondents) play in sponsor brand recall,” (2008, 176). The researchers conclude that there are two factors behind why males were able to correctly name more NASCAR sponsors: most of the sponsors are male-related products and NASCAR is a hyper-masculine sport which has a 60 percent male fan base.

Levin, Beasley, and Gamble (2004) examined, “brand loyalty of NASCAR fans to sponsoring brands of beer and compares this level of brand loyalty to non-fans’ brand loyalty towards the brand of beer they most commonly drink,” (2004, 11). The authors surveyed two different groups. First, they surveyed 413 adults who attended the 2003 NASCAR Busch Series race in Sparta, Kentucky. An additional 135 adults living in the
Greater Cincinnati area were also surveyed. Both groups were given the same three surveys. The first survey measured each person's beer consumption and brand loyalty. Then each respondent was given a NASCAR Fan Identification Index survey, to determine their level of fan loyalty. The last survey measured how likely one would be to purchase products, if they were a NASCAR sponsor.

The results of the survey showed, “that NASCAR fans who favor a NASCAR-sponsored beer are more loyal to that beer than non-NASCAR fans are to their favorite beer,” (2004, 12). The study also found that the higher a person scored on the fan identification scale, the more likely the person would be to purchase NASCAR sponsor products. The survey found that, “among NASCAR fans, 90.4 percent consumed a NASCAR-sponsor beer more often, while only 77.6 percent of non-NASCAR fans consumed a NASCAR-sponsored beer,” (2004, 18). Fans that scored higher on the NASCAR loyalty scale were more willing to purchase the sponsors' brand, even if it was more expensive. Finally, “respondents who scored higher on the NASCAR fan identification index show stronger attitudinal brand loyalty than fans who scored lower on the measure,” (2004, 18).

Levin, Beasley, and Gibson (2008) examined NASCAR fans' loyalty to purchase past and present sponsors. The authors surveyed 413 fans at the NASCAR (Busch Series) race in Sparta, Kentucky. The study took Terry and Hogg's (1996) research in social identity theory and the NASCAR Fan Identification Scale used in the previous study, to determine each fans' level of identification and normative behaviors towards NASCAR
sponsors. The survey also focused on fans ability to identify current and the previous years race sponsors, their likelihood of purchasing said sponsors and reasons behind purchase these sponsors’ products.

The authors demonstrated that, “not only were bigger fans more likely to purchase from the sponsor of the event, they were also less likely to purchase from the previous year’s event sponsor because they were no longer a sponsor,” (2008, 194). It was also shown that fans who scored higher on NASCAR Fan Identification Scale were significantly more likely to purchase the sponsors’ products, than for the previous years sponsor. Over 36.6 percent of respondents were more to loyal to the current years sponsor, while 16.1 percent of the respondents we less likely to purchase from the previous years sponsor. The study concluded, “sponsors benefits from normative pressures that result in purchase loyalties, but if they cease being a sponsor, some fans, those who feel the need to behave as they think other fans would want them to behave, will look negatively on the sponsor,” (2008, 194).

**Other Motorsports Sponsorship Issues**

Gage (2006) reviewed NASCAR sponsors’ return on their investment and how it was affected by new qualifying rules. The author stated that, “a top 25 finisher in the Daytona 500 got airtime equivalent to $7 million worth of 30-second commercials on average, given how often the car’s logo had ‘in-focus exposure time’ in front of viewers,” (2006, 126). Dale Earnhardt Jr.’s sponsor, Budweiser, received $149 million in television
exposure last year. The sponsorship reportedly cost Anheuser-Busch only $15 million. If a team cannot qualify for a race, the sponsorship was completely ineffective. NASCAR’s new qualifying rules are set up to reward both drivers and teams for consistency. The new rules will assure the top 35 team cars qualifying positions, no matter what happens during qualifying.

The author stated that this will help top 35 teams draw more potential sponsors, since they are guaranteed a starting position. When Jack Daniels was looking for a NASCAR team to sponsor, they picked Richard Childress Racing. This team had three of its six cars finish in the top 35 last year. Jack Daniels stated that they were willing to pay a premium price to sponsor a team with those kinds of numbers. This, however, only helped the top 35 team cars. New teams and teams that did not fall within the top 35 cars, had to fight harder to find sponsorship.

**Research Question 1.)** Will motorsports fans as a whole (not just NASCAR fans), score as high on a sponsor fan loyalty scale?

**Research Question 2.)** Look at motorsports fans’ loyalty as it relates to inter-group behavior theory, social identity framework theory, and group identification theory.

**Research Question 3.)** Apply previous research in tobacco sponsorship, to alcohol sponsors in motorsports.
CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF LITERATURE


Cornwell, Pruitt, and Van Ness (2001), Cornwell, Clark, and Pruitt (2004) and Mahar, Paul and, Stone (2005) all looked a quantitative method of measuring the effectiveness of motorsports sponsorship. The articles looked at the sponsors of Indianapolis 500 winners and the NASCAR series. The researchers used stock prices to determine if winning the Indianapolis 500 and announcing a new NASCAR sponsors positively affected the sponsor’s stock prices. The articles stated that Indianapolis 500 winner’s sponsors were positively effected by win, as long as the sponsor has some kind of tie to motorsports or the automotive industry. There were also positive results for sponsors with business that sold products directly to the customers, rather then relying on
business-to-business sales. When the authors looked at new NASCAR sponsorship, they found that almost all of the sponsors had major stock price increases immediately after the sponsorship announcements.

Spann (2002) and Johnson (2001) examines motorsport’s fan loyalty, and what motivated fans to purchase drivers/teams/series sponsors. The authors found that motorsports fans, most of all NASCAR fans, are very loyal to their drivers. This loyalty drives fans to support their favorite drivers sponsors. Just about half of NASCAR fans purchased products that sponsor their favorite drivers. Most researchers found that NASCAR fans are far more loyal than the fans of any other sport.

Levin, Joiner, and Cameron (2001) and Kinney, McDaniel, and DeGaris (2008) studied NASCAR fans’ ability to recall sponsors. Both studies found that the higher the level of NASCAR loyalty, the more likely the fan would be able to recall the sponsor. It was also found that by combining on-car sponsorship with television advertisements during the race, fans were more likely to recall the brands.

Levin, Beasley, and Gamble (2004) and Levin, Beasley, and Gibson (2008) created surveys to measure NASCAR fan loyalty and how that translates into purchasing NASCAR sponsors’ products. Both surveys found that the more a fan followed NASCAR (watched televised races, going to a race in person, and following NASCAR news), the more the fan would feel the need to purchase NASCAR sponsors in order to follow social norms and be part of the group (NASCAR fans).
Gage (2006) took a qualitative look at how NASCAR’s new ‘top 35’ qualifying rules effect sponsorship. The top 35 cars in NASCAR points are guaranteed a qualification position, no matter if their qualifying speed is fast enough. The author stated that sponsors were less likely to develop relationships with teams that fall out of the ‘top 35’. The will also make it harder for new teams to acquire new sponsors.
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The tobacco sponsorship compiled in this literature review is very focused. They only examined tobacco brand exposure during televised motorsports broadcasts. While this research is very important to public relations practitioners and sponsors, none of the tobacco studies were based on the theory, and to do not examine fans’ purchasing habits. Future tobacco research could observe the effectiveness of the sponsorship, as it related to motorsports fans brand loyalty. Research should also examine, if tobacco sponsorship in motorsports sent a negative message to young adults motorsports fans.

These tobacco surveys used in this literature review do have a place. It is important for the sponsors to see their return-on-investment, and these studies do provide a quantitative way of accomplishing this task. With the banning of tobacco sponsorship in many countries, this topic may be limited in future research. Siegel (2001) stated that in future, this research void might be filled for alcohol sponsorship research.

The three studies that focused on stock prices to determine the effectiveness of motorsports sponsorship, were quantitative attempts at showing return-on-investments for motorsports sponsorship. While two of these studies examined race wins as predictors of stock price fluctuations, the third looked at how new sponsor announcement positively influence stock prices. The biggest limitation on these studies was time. The studies
only looked at stock price change immediately after race wins and sponsor announcements. None of the research focused on the long term stock price chances for motorsports sponsorship.

The fan loyalty research used in this literature review is limited by several factors. Most of the research used in fan loyalty was quantitative, but lacked in theory usage, sample size, location of samples gathered, and duration of study. This area of research seems to have the most open possibilities for research. Most of the loyalty research did not use theory in an attempt to validate reasons why NASCAR fans are loyal and why they tend to adhere to the cultural norms. All of the sponsorship loyalty studies were conducted with NASCAR fans, and not with fans of other racing series. Future research should take these fan loyalty surveys and administer them to fans of other motorsports series. Some of the studies surveyed fans at NASCAR events, and not NASCAR fans in general, which taints the purity of the sample. Lastly, none of the surveys used research that spanned more than one season, to see how the length of sponsorship can affect fan loyalty.
SUMMERY AND CONCLUSIONS

The research in the area of motorsports sponsorship is a fair mix qualitative and quantitative. The quantitative research in this paper has grown steadily over the last 10 years, but still has lots of room for development. However, the qualitative research discussed in this paper lacks focus and theoretical based research methods.

Most of the Tobacco sponsorship and stock price research studies seems to have a very strong studies to back up their research, but the articles lacks any theory based research. The fan loyalty studies were all limited by the short time span of the studies, the location where the surveys were administered, and the number of people who were included in each study. Fan loyalty research seems to be a good fit with many public relations theories, so it was strange to see that none were being utilized in any of the research.

Future research should look into using intergroup behavior theory, social identity framework theory, and group identification theory as they pertains to the purchasing habits of motorsports fans. These seem to be the key research theories to help public relations practitioners find the true effectiveness in motorsports sponsorship.

Most of the fan loyalty research gathered for this review of literature comes from the world of NASCAR. Researchers should see if these same theories and research
can be duplicated with open-wheel (IndyCar and Formula One) and sportscar (American Le Mans and Grand-Am) series fans.

Finally, future research should look at the past effectiveness of tobacco sponsorship, and apply it to alcohol sponsorship using the same research parameters. The research could also examine alcohol sponsorship affect on motorsports fans under the age of 21.
WORKS CITED


