

Spring 2016

## BRAND INTEGRATION AND SPORTS SPONSORSHIP: BENEFITS AND PITFALLS

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### Recommended Citation

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<https://collected.jcu.edu/mastersessays/46>

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BRAND INTEGRATION AND SPORTS SPONSORSHIP:  
BENEFITS AND PITFALLS

An Essay Submitted to the  
Office of Graduate Studies  
College of Arts & Sciences of  
John Carroll University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

By  
Tamzin M. Barroilhet  
2016

The essay of Tamzin M. Barroilhet is hereby accepted:

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I certify that this is the original document

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## BRAND INTEGRATION AND SPORTS SPONSORSHIP

### Abstract

This essay is an overview of all the different ways for brands to integrate their message and identity with sports sponsorships. It also evaluates the current phenomenon of what sports sponsorship is in regards to today's global marketing. This text will assess the relevancy that has allowed the different communication media to stay up to date with all the advancements in technology and how they apply to the sports marketing mix. Models of sponsorship and specific data research on consumerism will also be showcased to explain their influences on best marketing practices for brands to communicate through the sporting industry. Sports marketing and sponsorship would appear to work best when objectives are aligned to the overall marketing strategy, such as winning global recognition, boosting brand awareness, enhancing employee morale or increasing social media engagement. But these 'softer' ambitions set the scene for the ultimate goal for many organizations: increased sales (Fischer, 2014). More importantly we will look at examples and reasons why the association between sports marketing and sponsorship works and the times when it fails. The essay will evaluate the feel good factor of being associated with sports brands and some of the techniques used to maximize their image through sponsorship activities. Furthermore, this paper will gauge the benefits versus the pitfalls of engaging brands identities within the sporting industry. Many sponsorship agreements have resulted in high levels of success for the company; however quite a few have been associated with unfortunate public relations due to a fatal mistake made by an athlete or organization. Lastly, brand integration will be weighed in regards to the ultimate goal and mission of the company and how it affects the return on investment. This is the ultimate end for most profitable organizations; however measurement is not always simple. Nevertheless, however complicated, measurement is an effort to determine the added value that must be made. Without an adequate process of measuring effectiveness, companies struggle to realize the full potential of the sports sponsorship opportunity; ultimately, success will only be achieved if it can be measure (Fischer, 2014).

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### Introduction

#### **Sports And Brands: Old Hat?**

Far from it! Athletic events have been a way of entertainment for the masses and an ongoing tradition since the ancient Greek and Roman times. Civilizations have used sports as an outlet for escapism from their day to day problems. Some of these civilizations clearly understood the power of influence and feel-good factor that can be derived from success or failure in sports events.

Sports and its popularity was closely linked to society, culture, religion, and politics, and the success or failure of a regime sometimes depended on it back then. You can witness this in the height of the Egyptian period, the Greeks and Romans, Aztecs and Mayas in the Americas and so on. The circumstances then were often extreme. However the essential driving elements remain very similar and are true to this day.

These societies had armies; armies need teams; teams needed morale and competition; tournaments developed. For example, as far back as 2000 BC monuments to the pharaohs in ancient Egypt depicted sports events such as wrestling, weightlifting, long jump, swimming, rowing, flying, shooting, and fishing, as well as various kinds of ball games designed to maintain the spirits and morale of their armies (Hamblin, 2006). The Greeks had their famous Olympiads back in 776 BC, the Romans held sports events to sharpen the skills of their armies, and the Chinese held riding events and games similar to modern soccer. The Aztec and Mayans held perhaps the most infamous of all games, the Mesoamerican ball game which

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invariably ended in human sacrifice for the losing side (Raschke, 1988). There was plenty of motivation to win here! The point is that sports create very strong emotions.

Leaders over time learned these emotions can be harnessed, linked, massaged and blended to motivate the masses. Historically this has clearly been the case and sometimes, sporting events lead to very dramatic and extreme endings. Today that power to move the masses still exists and will continue to do so. That power driver is EMOTION.

### **Sports Sponsorship Today: Global And Local**

Emotions are what drive sports fans to continue to support their favorite athletes and teams. Throughout the centuries, sporting events have evolved into multibillion dollar industries through high investments from corporations who want to associate their brand with a team or athlete. In modern days, sports have become a new medium for companies to communicate to the general population (quite similar to ancient history). However, they have moved on from a local scale to a truly global scale at an astonishing pace in the last few years. Media and technology are playing their part. For example, it was just in the fifties and sixties that the Masters golf tournament, although the entrants were from many countries, had coverage mainly centered on the US and Great Britain to a lesser extent. That same tournament now with its various stars is truly global. It has become an important international event with tremendous value to the game of golf. Equally the tennis majors, golf majors, World title fights, Grand Prix Formula 1, FIFA World Cup, the Super Bowl and many others now influence people and their emotions on a global scale. Few other events, if any, manage to generate this grade of global power.

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Sponsorship and endorsements are two elements that companies use to associate themselves with athletes and major sporting events. Brand loyalty is enhanced through the power of brand affiliation because sports fans tend to buy a product or service that a team or athlete is promoting (Mazodier, 2011). Up to the time of writing this in 2016, the world of sponsorship has evolved and exploded with a phenomenal pace of change particularly in the last five years, as have the different and most effective methods of sports sponsorships channels that will best communicate the brand's identity depending on what their objectives are. This essay will also evaluate the mutual risks and side effects associated with agreements between the companies and athletes or sports organizations. Many come to mind such as the FIFA scandal, Tiger Woods, Mani Paquiao, Lance Armstrong and most recently Maria Sharapova.

### **Modern Sponsorship Overview**

Since the late 1930's, sport fans started listening and soon after, started watching their favorite athletes and teams compete live. It was only a matter of time before big telecasting companies and marketers realized the impact sports had on social influence and consumer choices. Sports fans create ties with athletes and teams they look up to and are influenced by their actions. The consumer's self-congruity with the event and perceptions of the fit between the sponsor and the event help explain the impact of sponsorship on brand loyalty (Mazodier and Merunka, 2011).

As a fan, if your team or favorite athlete is doing well, you are happy; you enjoy life more. In marketing it works the same way, if your favorite player is wearing the latest Nike shoes and is playing phenomenally, you are going to want

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those shoes too and hope to play and look as good. Brand association is what makes sports marketing work. The prestige of the team's name or the athlete is what drive sales. Arnold Palmer with the PGA, Chuck Taylor with Converse, Muhammad Ali with Adidas, and Jim Brown with the NFL are some examples of famous athletes who were successful brand ambassadors for many years (Shank and Lyberger, 2015). Michael Jordan, LeBron James and Kobe Bryant with Nike, are all more recent examples of successful sports marketing campaigns that started from a sponsorship agreement.

### **Can The Objectives Of Sports Sponsorship Be Defined?**

There are two types of sponsorship objectives, direct and indirect, according to Shank and Lyberger (2015). Direct is geared to increasing consumerism of a particular product. Indirect is about brand awareness, loyalty, creating relationships, prestige and target markets, something more subtle but powerful.

Bearing in mind the definition of these sponsorship objectives, they must be directly linked to the promotional planning process and marketing goals of what the organization is trying to achieve from a branding perspective. According to Amis, Pant and Slack (1997) sports sponsorship is a cost-effective tool to develop and enhance a company's brand image and reputation. As such, sport sponsorship should be valued as a way of recognizing sustainable advantage. Sponsorship should produce a unique outcome that fits well with the image the sponsor is otherwise trying to convey. By defining these strategic promotional objectives any company's core values and beliefs will ultimately be the tools to underpin the commitment and investment which makes sense for the growth of their brand or product.



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### **Why Does Sponsorship Work?**

#### Jack Birch Transistor model

Jack Birch, sports sponsorship professional consultant for the National Basketball Association and National Football League, has stated that sports are in the “memories business” (Birch, 2 March, 2016). As mentioned earlier, memories are emotional. Sports create reminiscences for a lifetime and are part of the history of cities from all around the world. His sponsorship model, also called the “transistor”, is eight principles on which he bases why sponsorship works:

1. Teach: sponsorship helps brands instruct their difference and brand positioning. It helps consumers understand what makes them different from the competition.
2. Tell: sponsorship allows brands to create a campaign that will reveal their story in a creative fashion.
3. Sell: sponsorship can help a brand increase their sales by promoting product during sporting events.
4. Grow: sponsorship will help a company develop their profits by soliciting their most contributive clients (for example by creating a loyalty program for these individuals).
5. Improve: sponsorship can also help a brand progress its communication to its target market by associating with a sports brand.

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6. Help: it is possible to connect and aid a charitable association through sports sponsorships by turning a community relations event into a positive public relations campaign for the company.

7. Beat: sponsorship enables the creation of competitive separation and defeats the competition by giving the brand exclusive rights to a certain industry category.

8. Prove: sponsorship is measurable and can justify the return on investment on what the brand wants to evaluate (Birch, 2016).

First, Birch emphasizes the importance of amplification and how a team's image enhances the brand's perceived quality from a consumer's perspective. It is also a measurable outcome on how a team's logo can effectively impact the brand's marketing tactics. Second, loyalty is an undeniable factor. Sports naturally create dedicated fans who will use a brand that their team suggests. Integration is a means that, through sponsorship, allows brands to show themselves in more than one place. It creates a multiplier effect by using different media outlets. Lastly, brand equity is the stored value of your brand in the mind of the consumer; it's how much more a customer will pay for a product because of the team's perceived value. All of these values are what make sports sponsorship work; it is evidently up to the sports marketers to create proposals that will make brands want to associate themselves with a team in the long run. Understanding the brand's positioning and how they want to convey their message to the mind of the consumer through a partnership with a sports team will help the sports marketer create a better sponsorship agreement for both parties. "Tell the brand's story by using the team's media assets in a way that reflects their brand's history, personality and values" (Birch, 2016). Examples of this kind of

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multiplier effect are too many to go into all of them, but a simplistic one would be unicolor polo shirt with no logo sells at \$10 USD, and still a difficult sell, whereas unicolor Polo shirt with NIKE logo associated with US Masters 2016 and priced at \$100 USD and will probably sell like hotcakes round the world this first week of April, 2016. The perceived stored value of the golf-packaged US masters equity brand is \$90 USD just for that item. It works.

### **The Different Ways Of Communicating Brand Identity Through Sports**

#### **Sponsorship**

##### **Old Media: Television, Radio, Print**

###### **Television**

State Farm insurance is a perfect example of a successful partnership between the company and the National Basketball Association (NBA). The brand has been able to associate what they stand for with the “Born to Assist” theme and create a whole campaign around players who are famous for assisting other players during the actual games.

Although they started the campaign in 2012 with famous point guard Chris Paul, they continued the story the following seasons by adding other big names from the basketball world such as John Stockton, Damian Lillard, Sue Bird and Stephen Curry (Rodriguez, 2014). In December of 2015, State Farm ended its three year old campaign in favor of a new series that began on Christmas day of 2015, during the prime time game. The nation’s largest auto insurer launched “The Hoopers,” a sitcom which features multiple big NBA names that play a family living next door to a State Farm agent (Pasquarelli, 2015).

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These advertisements are currently being aired on mainstream channels, such as ABC, ESPN and TNT, that broadcast many sporting events during prime time. These television commercial campaigns are a reflection of successful sponsorship partnerships that help the brand establish credibility, awareness and competitive separation because of the mass appeal prime time television has over other types of media.



Photo 1: NBA basketball stars as a sitcom family (State Farm)

The takeaway is that for the past four years, State Farm's advertisements have highlighted the company's biggest assets, its agents, and drawn comparisons between their work and an important aspect of basketball – assists (Rodriguez, 2014).

Advertising campaigns are at their most effective when sports marketers come up with some very creative ways to connect the company's brand identity with the team or sport organization with which they are affiliated. State Farm cited above is an example of a successful story in a pool where not many campaigns reach the level of awareness this one has so far. It is a challenge sports marketers face when writing

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creative ideas to tell a story that will really be impactful in the long run and ultimately build that brand's identity.

Another issue sports marketing departments face is showing the return on investment of spending money on advertisements on networks. To show the impact a media campaign has had on the brand, marketers have established a means of associating their campaigns to major sporting events, popular athletes and teams to impact the awareness in a positive manner. Therefore, the advertisements need to be showcased when the television ratings are predicted to be at a peak, also called prime time television. During these timeframes the viewership is at the highest and the advertisement will get the most impressions. The more the TV audience sees these ads, the more the brand awareness grows (Keller, 1993). The Super Bowl is a showcase of how companies try to maximize their investment for advertising dollars by showcasing their ad during this event because the television ratings are the highest in the US at one given moment. Moreover, the NFL attracts a broader audience with a variety of demographics which can be a good target market for these brands.

However, it is always a challenge to realistically evaluate the long term effects of these television advertisements and if they evidently translate into dollars for the company. Achieving brand awareness is one aspect, but achieving brand loyalty is the real intent that is not always easy to measure. Mazodier and Merunka (2011), assert that we know little about the mechanism by which sponsorship influences brand loyalty and the magnitude of this influence. When consumers perceive the association between a sponsor and an event as congruent, as in say the US Masters or other global sports events, they tend to assume a goodwill motivation and build positive feelings towards the brand (Mazodier and Merunka, 2011).

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The benefits are quite clear with regards to TV; nearly everybody has one. Clearly this was the main medium over the last forty or so years. There are pitfalls however, since with the advent of various recording techniques you can actually skip the ads nowadays, unless the ads are a cultural event in themselves as witnessed during the Super Bowl halftime ads over the last few years.

Add to this the incessant and exponentially growing viral or indirect approach to TV advertising. Has TV had its day? As a tool and a medium, it is facing massive competition from the ubiquitous smartphone, the PC or Mac and with it the viral or experiential marketing potential associated with this. Not to mention the old fashioned radio is making comeback versus TV. It has come to the attention of many radio stations that their listeners stay tuned in while in increasingly long traffic jams. This medium can still pack a punch.

### **Radio**

According to the U.S Census Bureau, in 2013 the average drive-time nationwide was about 24.3 minutes. Americans now spend more than 100 hours per year commuting to work in their cars. Rush hour is primetime for brands to connect with drivers. Often times, a sports team pre-game show is broadcasted on the radio. Sponsors can build into their deals contracted radio spots that run during these broadcasts. Sports fans that are driving to work in the morning or driving home at night will not only hear the report about their favorite teams but also the advertisements from the team's partners.

It is significant to understand why radio spots are valuable to a brand and how they can actually justify the return on investment. Nielsen Catalina Solutions (NCS),

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an expert in studying consumerism around the world, conducted a study to determine a direct link between radio advertising and retail sales. The study showed evidence that money spent on radio is money well spent (Nielsen, 2014). In this first major radio effectiveness study, the research found that each dollar of ad spend generated an average sales return of \$6 from the listeners in the twenty-eight days after they heard the ads.

Rajagopal (2011) analyzed the impact of radio advertisements on urban commuters towards buying behavior in retail stores and attempted to determine the role of radio advertising on dissemination of information on the sales promotions. The impact of radio advertisements on the store choice and buying preferences are analyzed based on observational investigation. Data was collected by means of personal interviews during seasonal periods such as spring, summer and winter sales, Mother's and Father's days, and Christmas celebration between 2007 and 2009 when retailers were heavily advertising on the radio for sales promotions. The study revealed that shopping behavior of urban consumer at retail stores in response to radio advertisement is highly influenced by the physical, emotional and economic variables. Radio listeners are more responsive towards advertisements that are either entertaining or good reminders for certain time periods such as Mother's day (Rajagopal, 2011). No one wants to forget their mother's day gift!

Studies such as the ones by Rajagopal and Nielsen, help sports marketers and brands understand when to communicate to their fans during high seasonal and promotional periods. To make these radio advertisements most effective it is essential to have creativity with the message as there are no visuals. Another way of integrating with the sports teams is to have live in-game reads from the broadcasters themselves

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who are commenting during the game or reporting about it after. Sport fans who listen to these sports radio show on their way to or from work, will connect better to a voice they are used to hearing who is telling them about a product or service rather than a recorded voiceover. Nielsen's single source methodology of study (2013) proved that there was a link between advertising on radio and sales response for the same households. However, this increase in sales is only amongst a small number of audience members where the advertisement had actually been heard.

Overall, the benefits of radio are that it is very effective and precise. The pitfalls are that only a small number of people are reached, in contrast with television advertising that can attain a wider and more substantial viewership. Radio is also under immense pressure in the market share of sponsorship advertising because more revenue market share is going towards the newer viral mediums.

### **Print**

Today, people make very little time to read, especially with the rising popularity of social media websites such as Facebook and Twitter, among others. People are taking less time to read newspaper articles; therefore it has become a real challenge for sports journalism to keep up with the new technologies. In the sports sponsorship world, marketers used to pay for print advertising spaces in sports magazines, in the sports section of a newspaper, the yellow pages and on teams' yearbooks. Although some of these remain, sports journalists, as well as marketers, have embraced the new technologies through websites and started joining the trend by creating blogs or websites that are user friendly and contain much more video content. Sports applications are also very popular amongst sports fans as they are able to collect their information easily and quickly (Kietzmann, et al., 2011). According to



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Yahoo's advertising blog, sports application downloads saw a 210% growth between August of 2013 and August of 2014 (Yahoo advertising 2014). Sports journalists, as well as sports marketers, have followed the trend by increasing their stories telling through these mobile applications. Sports fans not only enjoy watching games via mobile platforms, they are searching for more dynamic, mobile-accessible sports content and information as well. This is why video recaps from sporting events are key for these applications. Brands can integrate themselves by becoming a sponsor for a team and include run of site advertisements (static image or short videos) on the team's application to increase their visibility and encourage fans to tap on their advertisement. It is recommended to offer creative incentives for fans to increase traffic to the sponsor's website of choice. These incentives can be such as discounted couponing, contest entries or fun short videos promoting a product or service.

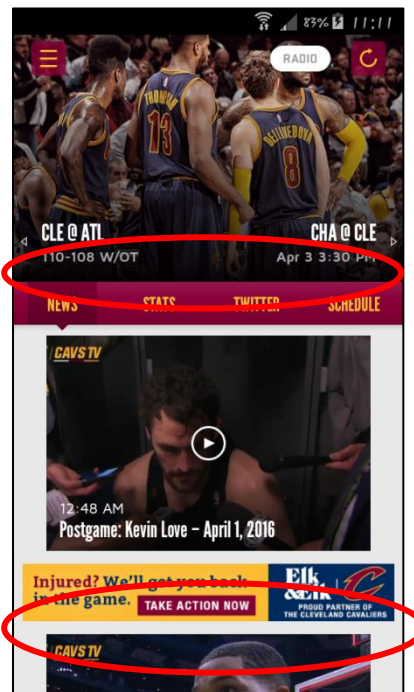


Photo 2: screen shot from the Cleveland Cavaliers mobile application site (Cleveland Cavaliers, LLC mobile application, 2016).

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Photo 2 is a perfect example of how fans collect their information with the score of the game from the latest match-up and which team they are playing next. You also notice video content from post-game player interviews. Lastly, the integration of the sponsor “Elk&Elk” who is also using its logo rights to be more relevant to the app users.

Publicity on billboards and posters gives advertisers the opportunity to reach consumers on the move. Putting posters in retail malls, for example, helps advertisers reach consumers close to the point of purchase. Posters or billboards in train stations, airports or busy town centers have the potential to reach large groups of consumers. Advertisers can change the messages on billboards and posters at a frequency of their choice. In the world of sports marketing, it is important to create signs that will resonate with the sports fans with key messaging. A best practice from a outdoor billboard campaign was one from beer maker Carlsberg in the spring of 2015. FOLD7, a British marketing agency, was tasked to re-launch the iconic slogan “Probably the best beer in the world”. The primary objective for Carlsberg’s campaign was to drive mass brand awareness and engage new audiences. The challenge for the agency was to create a campaign outside of traditional TV advertising and on a small budget. Therefore they needed an idea that could travel beyond print and capture the world of digital and social media. The idea needed to be shared amongst mass audiences. The agency’s approach was based on a simple idea: “If Carlsberg made billboards, they would be the best billboards in the world and therefore serve fresh beer” (Newey, FOLD7, 2015). FOLD7 chose a key area outside of a famous bar in central London where they could place the gigantic beer serving billboard, embedded with a Carlsberg font and stack of glasses. The creative featured

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the headline “Probably the best poster in the world” (see photo 3). Although this original activation was not linked directly to sports, it is a perfect example of how a simple idea can turn into a world known phenomenon with the power of the internet and social media. The outcome from this one day campaign resulted in outstanding metrics. According to FOLD7 agency’s report after the event, “Probably the best poster in the world,” 1,400 glasses of Carlsberg were sampled, 60 million consumers were reached globally through earned public relations with coverage from publications such as the Guardian, the Telegraph, the Huffington Post, the Sun Online, the Metro, internet’s phenomenon BuzzFeed, the LAD Bible, The US weekly news magazine TIME and many more. From a social media standpoint the impact of the hashtag **#probablythebest** generated over three million Twitter impressions and 1,300 Twitter retweets in one day (Newey, FOLD7, 2015).

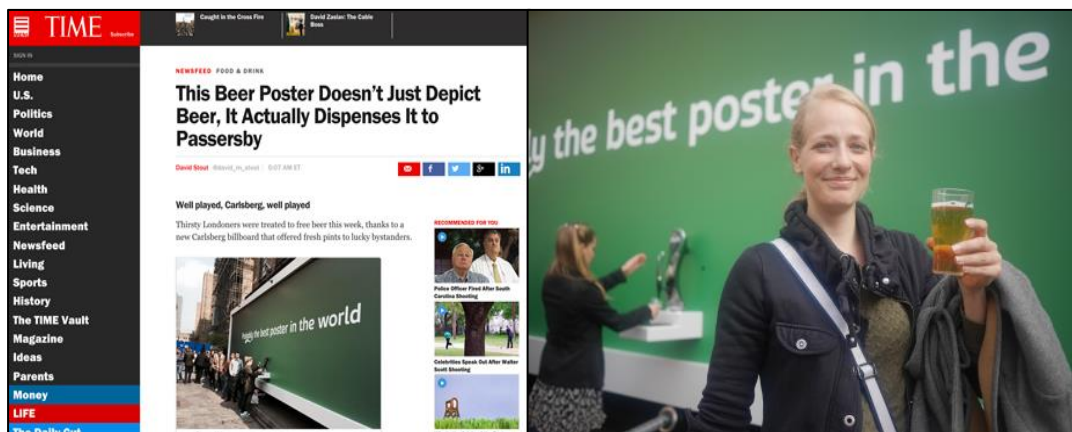


Photo 3: Probably the best poster in the world campaign by Carlsberg marketing agency (FOLD7, 2015)

To say the least, this print campaign was successful, not only because it attracted many people walking nearby, but because it solicited new mediums of communication such as social media to reach other beer consumers from all over the

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world. Print media may be seen as “old media,” but it has, in other ways, kept its relevance by combining strategies with modern media technologies. Sports sponsorship allows brands to create similar campaigns by activating inside or outside sporting venues with whom the brand may be partnered. Anheuser-Busch is a great showcase of how their sponsorship with the NFL has significantly impacted their brand recognition through various campaigns across NFL properties (IEG, 2015).

The benefits of print are still there, however, what is important is that print combined with new technology, viral trends, digital and social media, make print an effective and efficient pairing in the distribution of communication. Print alone is no longer enough.

### **New Media: Digital And Social Media: What Is Relevant?**

Relevance is the key factor in evaluating the effectiveness of the communications distribution network. What is most relevant today? We have discussed above how print is now effective when combined with modern media. Weeks et al. (2008) describe how through the advancements of the digital and social media world, sports teams and sponsors now communicate to sports fans through their websites, and online social networks. One of the most readily accessible means for sponsors to activate sponsorships outside of the stadium is to incorporate event-related information or themes in their brand and corporate websites to engage event-interested consumers (Weeks, Cornwell, Drennan, 2008). In less than ten years, social media has penetrated nearly every facet the entertainment culture in the United States, including professional and collegiate sports landscapes (Clavio, 2011). Facebook,

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Twitter and Instagram are the top three communication mediums in the social media environment where sports teams and companies have found creative ways to integrate the team and brand identities. GlobalWebIndex polled 170,000 internet users about their internet habits and found that the average usage times for social media sites rose from 1.66 hours per day in 2013 to 1.72 hours per day in 2014 (Bennett, 2015).

From a digital perspective, advertisements are now able to circulate on busy website pages and engage with users by creating hyperlinks that send the fan to the brand's website. Most recently, companies are now investing in consumer trend tracking by tracing how each web user is reacting to pop up ads on the internet that remind the consumer what they may want to purchase. Digital and social components have become key elements of the sponsorship package because brands want to reach as many fans as they can but also target certain demographics. The mobile world is where human behavior is focused. In 2014, the average person spent 4.7 hours per day on their mobile devices (Chang, 2015) and six hours online (Bennett, 2015). It is evident that sports marketers find it effective to communicate their brand affiliations with athletes, teams and sport organizations to grow that awareness and loyalty.

### **Digital**

Waters et al. (2011) explain that sports fans actively seek consumer information about their favorite teams and from players on the team's official websites. Fans view these sites as more trusted and reliable than other communication channels. The dedication and loyalty exhibited by sports fans exceeds that of the general public for almost every type of organization (Waters et al., 2011). Sponsors

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upon agreement with the team can include digital advertisements on the team's sites to increase their digital impressions throughout the year. Sport marketers help brands connect with these devoted individuals because they are generally more invested in the organization's public relationship than the average consumer. The sports team they follow has already created that long lasting loyalty connection that brands want to achieve (Waters et al., 2011). Today, sports venues use the low cost of video production to extend their events into digital media, whether building mobile apps or live web streaming through channels such as YouTube (Foley, 2013).

In 2012, Quicken Loans decided to become a team sponsor in NASCAR to test the effectiveness of sponsorship marketing. According to Foley (2013), the company quickly found the brand association justified doubling down on its investment in the sport and pulling all its digital content assets to a dedicated destination site. Quicken Loans Chief of Marketing, Jay Farmer, explained how they found that NASCAR fans are tremendously passionate and loyal to the brands that help drive their sport. Videos, games and online prize draws were extremely successful for Quicken Loans NASCAR campaign (Foley, 2013).

It is evident that more and more sports fan audiences tend to spend more time online with websites such as YouTube watching video channels and sharing on social media. In conjunction with these results, many team and athlete sponsors are now creating co-branded content experiences for their fans to watch on the team or athletes' websites and social pages (Foley, 2013). The goals are to capture the fans loyalty to the athlete or team whilst increasing the brand's recognition through high impressions and engagement on these sites.

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As fans consume more digital content, sponsors need high-tech strategies that don't neglect traditional supporters (Bacon, 2015). Virtual reality is the new found technology that provides fans with the ultimate imaginative experience. In the summer of 2015, large British telecom O2 allowed fans attending the Rugby World Cup at Twickenham Stadium, an opportunity to wear special eye gear to immerse themselves into a virtual training session with the England Rugby team (Bacon, 2015). Many investors are now looking into early stage technology and media companies that focus on sports. Courtside Ventures is a recent example of a capital fund that was established by businessman and owner of the Cleveland Cavaliers, Dan Gilbert, and George Pyner, CEO of Bruin Sports Capital. This capital fund has a specific purpose of investing millions of dollars in these types of technologies (Heitner, 2016). Heitner's interview with Pyne recollects that: "Technology is changing the way media is consumed, products are consumed, and data is consumed. Sport engages consumers around their passion points in ways that other things don't" (Heitner, 2016). These digital virtual reality platforms are new opportunities for brands to connect with a team by giving fans the ability to capture their imagination.



Photo 3: virtual reality goggles for fans to experience behind the scene experiences (marketingweek.com, 2015)

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### Social Media

Since the creation of Facebook in 2004 and Twitter in 2006, to this day, social media has provided new ways for individuals, athletes, coaches, schools, and organizations to communicate information (Clavio, 2011). In the collegiate sports world, coaches use Twitter and Facebook to connect with fans, impress recruits and promote their programs (Watson, 2009). Similarly, in the sports sponsorship environment, social media is another way for teams, to help brands connect with their fan base. Each of these social networking sites has different attributes that benefit different types of campaigns. Twitter gives sport fans the ability to connect with other fans as they read and discuss tweets provided by their sports, teams, and athletes. Twitter also allows them to create personalized spaces where they can express support for their favorites and discuss sports (Hambriek et al. 2010). Social-media consultants and strategic communication firms have promoted the use of social media by organizations because of their supposed advantages for developing relationships and online communities around the brand (Waters et al., 2011). Sponsors can associate themselves with a team's campaign by simply adding their logo to a post that is recurring.



Photo 4: season long social media campaign First Energy Photo of the Game (Cleveland Cavaliers, twitter page - @cavs, 2016).



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Photo 4 is an example from the Cleveland Cavaliers Twitter channel where a company called FirstEnergy has a logo placement on the “photo of the game”. This post speaks directly to Cavaliers fans that might be searching for information about a game after it is over. For the brand, the goal is to get as many impressions by being wed by numerous fans. Another great way for sponsors to create a connection with the sports fans is to post a video of a special activation that had occurred over the course of an event. For example, United Emirates recently showcased their cabin crew in front of a full stadium where they showed their football skills during a safety demonstration (The Sponsorship Space, 2016). It created great surprise in the stadium amongst fans when ten women dressed as flight attendants entered the pitch. The stir was caught on camera, and fans reactions were priceless. This video has now gone viral through social media outlets and is a great showcase of a co-branded integrated activation between a sports team and the company’s brand identity.

Engaging with sports fans on team’s social media outlets is the key to growing the reach of these platforms. By learning how to harness the passion, teams and athletes social handles have become important means for brands to associate themselves for added exposure. Below are some methods that sports teams and companies have been using because it creates high engagement and fan loyalty (Hootsuite, 2015). By humanizing and personalizing athletes and teams, fans end up interacting with the organization’s page and with each other. Putting the script aside and speaking from the heart is what fans want to read about.

According to Hootsuite (2015), adding a level of humanity to your social networking posts will help gain followers. It is important to understand the nature of rivalries, wins and losses and how it affects fans’ engagement. Although as the athlete

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or team you have to try and stay ethically correct, it is important for fans to see after a loss that “we have the next one” or “we’ll get them next time”. Sports content is shareable because it is emotional. It has become even more so impactful for a brand to be able to connect with players as fans dream of interacting with their favorite athletes. From discovering what video games they play and shows they watch, to seeing the charities they contribute to, these interactions can make a major impact on fans. In extreme cases, tweets have even lead athletes to join pickup games and go on fun dates! The more relatable the athlete, it seems, the greater the chance that a fan feels a personal connection with them (Hootsuite, 2015).

Whether they are team-organized Q&A sessions or spontaneous discussions, these social media conversations have brought fans closer than ever to sports teams’ professional athletes. The contribution this has made to fan loyalty is evident in the follower count of athletes or teams’ pages. A second way to increase fans’ loyalties is by offering unprecedented access. Social media has changed that. Many teams now offer “behind-the-scenes” content on social channels. Instagram photos, YouTube clips and other resources are being used by these organizations to offer exclusives to their followers. In doing so, they have managed to attract dedicated followings that keep coming back for more unique content (Sherk, 2011).

The success of a sports organization’s social channels is often dependent on them offering unique content that is not available anywhere else. This can come in the form of traditional content, contests for social followers, or real-time updates during games for those who are unable to watch or listen live. One example of unique social content comes in the form of a second screen for sporting events. Organizers of the Super Bowl XLVII in New Orleans created a customized social media command

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center to highlight the social media interactions of fans around the big game (Hootsuite, 2015).

One of the most engaging types of campaigns, called sweepstakes, are contests which allow fans to enter to win a specific prize. These sweepstakes can increase their number of entries by turning them into social media contests and asking fans to share their experience about something related to the actual brand. For example, the Cleveland Cavaliers social media team has partnered with Jeep to connect with Cavs fans in different cities and share their experiences on road trips aligned with the teams' away games. Fans are encouraged to share a photo with a specific hashtag to enter to win a free road trip with a borrowed Jeep car, hotel and tickets to a future away Cavs game, courtesy of Jeep (see below photos for examples of this campaign).

Photo 6



Photo 5

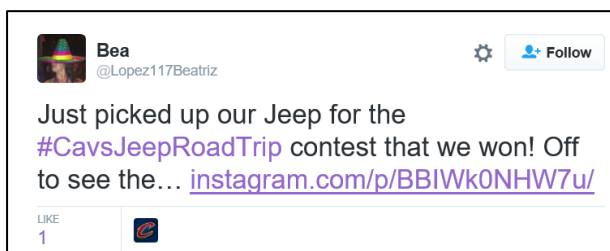


Photo 5: Post from a contestant winner of #CavsJeepRoadTrip campaign.

Photo 6: Post from a fan showcasing their willingness to enter a chance to win.

Finally, the third way to increase fan loyalty on social media is by making fans contributors to the team and give a sense of unity. Brands can co-align with teams' campaigns by encouraging fans to post photos (similar to the #CavsJeepRoadTrip

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campaign), or comments, share videos, and give suggestions. The idea of co-creation has major implications on how involved fans feel in their teams (Hootsuite, 2015). Many professional leagues such as the MLB and the NBA have for the past few seasons asked their fans to vote for their favorite players that they want to see on the All-Star teams. In this way, fans know that they've had a direct impact on the selection of players. Other examples include voting for "the play of the year" or the league's "fan favorite" player. The inclusion of the fan on such a basic level can have a significant impact on their loyalty. Hootsuite's research (2015) concludes by offering exclusive content, being honest and human and involving fans in the organization on social media channels, sports teams, athletes and leagues of all levels can increase fan loyalty and have a lasting impact on their sponsors' success.

### **Visible Signage**

Another key component for brands to multiply their media visibility is key television signage during sporting events. By partnering with the right leagues or teams who have high television ratings, the brand has the opportunity to place their logo and or message in areas that will instantly get high media value and impressions. Media backdrops, field painted signs, digital rotational signs, jersey or equipment placement, basketball pole pads and so on, are just a few on the inventory list that can provide this visibility. The direct causal effect for the brand to be seen by millions of viewers and sports fans during a nationally or internationally televised game is simply brand association with their favorite athletes. Indeed, fans will correlate that the Heineken sign on the side of the soccer field is a beer partner of that team.

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For the purpose of this paper, the writer will look at the value behind jersey sponsorships in the English Premier League and how over the years the investment levels have immensely increased for brands to own that space. CNN reporter Sweetman, recently reported that the English Premier League ultimately surpasses every other sport league in the world when it comes to highest revenue generating from front of t-shirt sponsorship. The Premier league brought in a mind-blowing \$370 million USD for the 2015-16 season, which was a thirty five percent increase from the previous season (Sweetman, 2016). The reason for this high increase is because the front of the shirt placement is what gets most visibility on television, but also on all other media channels posting photos about the team or athlete whilst wearing the team's official gear. For a brand the reason to partner with teams from the Premier League is simply because it is the biggest, most visible and most watched sporting competition throughout the world. It attracts the largest television media agreements and the largest audiences. The other reason is that fans purchase this jersey and will wear it every time the team plays, and potentially share photos wearing it. Interestingly enough, fourteen of the twenty Premier League teams have foreign investors on their shirts (TotalSportek2, 2016). This goes to prove the global influence the Premier league has. Announced by many media outlets including the Wall Street Journal, in February 2016, KIA Motors became the jersey sponsor for the National Basketball Association All Star game (Germano, 2015). This was a first in the league's history, although the logo placement was pretty small and discrete in comparison to where the Premier League has it. American traditional sports, who a long time refused to add sponsors to their sports gear, is now starting to look at the value not only for the brand but also the revenue generating possibilities.

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Photo 7



Photo 8



Photo 7: Jersey sponsorship examples in the English Premier league soccer (TotalSportek2, 2016)

Photo 8: Jersey sponsorship for the first time in the NBA (Gettyimages, 2016)

Benefits of visible signage are that it is immediate; it is like throwing a fireworks display on television on New Year's Eve: everybody sees it and it is particularly covered by mainstream media. Brands want to use recognizable logos, such as Pepsi uses for the Super Bowl. They seek static or moving digital signage elements that are television visible space on the side of soccer pitches in Premier league matches, or in front of the team's benches in the National Basketball Association. Other key positioning that is captured on television can be recognizable logos on sports shirts, logos on golf caps and so on. Top brands are attracted to this because it can provide them with a reasonable return on their sponsorship budget when top level teams are involved. A Manchester United game is not only screened in most Western world countries but virtually around the world and particularly India and China with a joint population surpassing two billion. The same applies to Real Madrid, Barcelona FC and others. In a single deal with one of these clubs your brand has immediate exposure to billions of people at a reasonable price. A brand campaign to obtain the same coverage would cost hundreds of millions on mainstream direct

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advertising. The return on investments on this type of sponsorship is several hundred to one.

The pitfall here could be that if that team has a long lapse of bad results, your brand value could also suffer. For example, Manchester United, at this moment in time, are not having a good season and have not been getting much coverage in the European Champions league. Yet some of this team's sponsors have invested in stadium, shirt and side pitch signage placement for the long term.

### **Experiential Marketing**

Pathak (2014) defines experiential marketing as messaging you can touch, feel or view in a physical space. It is a trend on the rise in recent years as marketers of everything from cars to movies aim to make their brands a tangible presence in consumers' lives either in person or digitally through YouTube videos, tweets and Instagrams. Sport organizations are also looking to create more unique experiential activities for their fans in alignment with sponsorship programs (Pathak, 2014). Ad Age columnist Pathak (2014) explains how marketers are spending more on experiential forms even though return on investment measures are not explicit. The author also reports that according to the Event Marketing Institute's EventTrack study, marketers spent an estimated 4.7% more in 2014 on event and experiential marketing.

When consumers experience these types of events they develop a long lasting memory and connection with the brand. In return, it creates positive associations and long lasting relationships that are born from fan interaction and personal experience (Factory360, 2014). Marketing experts believe that experiential marketing is what gets fans participating and interacting with the brands. In other words it is an

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“interactive advertising” platform to engage consumers with an amusing, seamless manner (Pathak, 2014). Social media has allowed experiential marketing to justify an investment in an experience knowing that it will pay dividends when people share it through the different channels. Experiential marketing has the capability of going viral and reaching mass audiences with the right campaign, similar to Carlsberg billboard example cited previously.

Some of the most successful captivating contests and promotions that drive brand awareness during sporting events are the ones with mega prizes at the end. Whether it be the ten thousand dollar half-court shot provided by a partner, to winning a car from an online contest through the team’s website, the ultimate goal is to capture the fan experience and “aww moment” that will make other fans want to share this moment as well. As mentioned before, experiential marketing has the power to create good memories in the minds of loyal fans.

The benefit of experiential marketing is to build customer relationship in the long term but also increase sales in the short term. According to Jack Morton’s international marketing agency, it allows the brands to build relationships, raise awareness, increase loyalty, establish relevance, encourage product trial, create memories, develop word of mouth, change the mind of consumers, create product desire, verify the target audience and most importantly, increase the return on marketing investment (Morton, 2016). On the other hand, the pitfall of this type of marketing is it cannot generate brand awareness on a larger scale unless it has a social media viral form, which is unpredictable. Also, it does not provide less intrusive marketing that some people may prefer. Nevertheless, when experiential marketing



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works at its best it has the power to influence many sports fans and spread the message the brand is trying to portray.

### **Importance Of Tying Sponsorship Activity To The Community**

It has become more and more important for corporate sponsors as well as athletes and teams to keep building ties they create within the community. Many organizations believe in the importance of returning something to the community is an important part of building brand loyalty (Shank and Lyberger, 2015). Many sports organizations have created charitable groups that help certain aspects of what they stand for. For example, NBA Cares & NFL Play 60, are two campaigns that these entities push towards all the teams in the league to develop community relations in their respective cities. Community relations programs are an important aspect of building brand image. Shank and Lyberger (2015), believe that it is crucial for a sponsor to associate themselves to these programs to generate a positive image in the communities. Finding congruence between an event held by the team's community program and a sponsor is preferable for fans to gain a better understanding of what the brand is. For example, waste management companies would be a perfect fit for green initiatives of which teams may take part. Most importantly, community work builds longevity and loyalty. As cited above, a team's bad results can lead to disinterest from the masses and it is vital that the primary group of the supporting fans follow the club in spite of the hill facing their team.

### **Importance Of Marketing Activations**

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The role of activation is to bring sponsorships to life. According to Carrillat et al. (2015), researchers and practitioners long have recognized the critical role played by actions to assure the success of sponsorship programs. Sponsorship efforts that are consistent with respect to the brand's focus and scope are easier for targeted audiences to process and remember. In turn, the enhanced "processability" leads to developing a positive response toward the sponsor (Carrillat et al., 2015). Weeks, Cornwell and Drennan (2008) describe these activations as the act of using collateral marketing communications to exploit the commercial potential of the association between a sponsee and sponsor. These last three authors further go on to say that sponsorship programs such as "leveraging activities" can take different forms such as: product sampling, coupons, new packaging, new products, co-branding, website and social media campaigns, and in game live promotions.

Overall, these very creative initiatives can have a massive impact and the benefits flow as did the beer in the Carlsberg ads. One danger is that they must be witty and intelligent campaigns or they face the danger of being classed as "gimmicks" and can backfire.

### **Giveaways Equals Long Lasting Fan Memorabilia**

Another solution to engaging sports fans is to provide nice giveaway items during sporting events. The keyword here is engaging, because at this moment in time the attention is on the event and nothing else. Intriguing fans during the game is far more effective than handing out a coupon or a sticker, as it generally ends up in the nearest trash can outside the stadium. Coming up with creative items will, in the long run, be beneficial to the image of the company but also the sports team. The last thing

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teams want are fans complaining about the poor quality and taste of a giveaway they received and another thousand comments on social media agreeing. Spending extra money on these giveaways will help them become long lasting memorabilia for fans in attendance. Providing such gift to fans enhances their overall experience and loyalty towards the team and by association the brand as well.

Best practices for giveaways at sporting events are t-shirts, hats, mini balls, and bobble heads. The partners can associate themselves with all the media that is tied towards promoting the giveaway night, and also have logo presence on the actual item. Creativity is key when coming up with these promotional items as the goal is to create the buzz around it. The item ideally is one that can be worn over a long period of time, or can be displayed in someone's house and or office. Fans then become "free" ambassadors by wearing the item or having it on display as a talking piece in their homes. Another great way to increase engagement is to have loyal fans choose or design an item to be given, by creating a contest or survey for them to participate. The brand can associate them to this and give the fans a sense of empowerment.

The benefits of giveaway items are that they contribute to the engagement and building of brand loyalty; however when not given enough thought or care, they can quickly turn into a boring promotion that fans do not like.

### **Major Pitfalls**

#### **Athlete Or Sports Entity Endorsements**

We have seen already many examples of athlete endorsements that have been very positive for certain brands. Classic successes are the 'Big Three': Palmer, Player and Nicklaus in golf. These individuals represented excellence to their generation and

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generally delivered excellence to the brands that sponsored them. The mutual ROI was great. Each country has several of these players and occasionally they become global. Many others have become global brand ambassadors for companies. Just a mention of their surname conjures brand recognition. Nike was one of the first manufacturers to recognize and exploit the real equity brand value of this. However, probably Mark McCormack founder of IMG was the first to realize the business value of this phenomenon with the Big Three. These were success stories and idols for the younger generations

Retail organizations for certain brands quickly identified the actual value of being linked to these players as well as the enhancement of the prestige and equity value of that brand. Again Nike and various others, such Adidas, Head, Puma, Wilson, and Slazenger, spotted this through the years for their athletic gear products. Equally, brands have invested heavily in sports organizations or events. Consulting companies such as Accenture invested heavily into Golf Match play tournaments, VISA, Coca Cola and McDonald's are major sponsors of FIFA Soccer and many other events such as the Olympics (Bacon, 2016). The question is, are all these sure things? Are there risks associated with them?

There can be serious risks to a brand if an athlete slips off track. The scandals surrounding Tiger Woods in 2009 led to immediate cancellation of several of his sponsorships. AT&T, Gatorade, Accenture immediately recognized that being associated to "Damaged Woods," would in fact, tarnish their image by association. Having invested millions in becoming a prestige brand, they could not allow themselves to be associated with scandal. In the winter of 2016, Maria Sharapova's revelations about using unlisted performance improvement substances for 11 years

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have led to a cancellation or suspension of sponsorships such as Nike, Porsche, and Tag Heuer. There are so many examples, Lance Armstrong and UPS which wanted their funds returned; Barry Bonds and so on. When a crash of this type occurs it is a no win for all parties. Financial losses take place immediately for both parties but ultimately the brand must be protected (Bacon, 2016).

It is not just individuals' organizations or ruling bodies of sports entities are also sponsored and have often been caught in wrongdoing. The most popular sport in the world in terms of numbers and countries is soccer. FIFA, the governing body of the sport, an organization moving billions and billions of dollars of revenue has been found to be corrupt at many levels and is currently under investigation by the FBI and other international federal agencies. It took the power of its major sponsors to finally begin the shake up to remove the officials of the organization by threatening to pull their sponsorships. VISA, Coca Cola, McDonald's, Emirates, Sony, and Budweiser insisted that FIFA make changes which led to the resignation of its president. The Daily Telegraph (Frasier, 2015) quoted Chief executive of Brand Finance David Haigh: "Sponsors have partnered with FIFA in order to build their brands, not have their reputations tarnished. The kind of activities that are alleged to have been going on could destroy billions of dollars of brand value."

### **Evaluation Of Old Media (TV, Radio, Print) Vs. New Media (Digital And Social)**

In the world of sport sponsorship it is inevitable for sports marketers and brands to keep up with the pace of change with technological advancements. It is important for both parties to evaluate the strength and weaknesses associated with all the different assets that a sponsorship agreement may offer to enhance the brand's

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identity. Mainstream media, such as print, radio and television, can be seen as old school, sluggish and expensive, but it also has the capability of reaching targeted and or mass audiences depending on time of day and sporting event being covered. Some televised sporting events have the highest viewings and can sometimes reach international viewers. On the other side, new media outlets such as the internet with blogs, sports websites, and social media pages can be more affordable, expansive, and immediate and have a global reach. As mentioned previously, more and more people spend a lot of time on their mobile devices searching for the information they need. Sports marketers have to find creative ways to keep attracting sports fans to these sites to keep impressions and views high for the team and sponsors associated with it.

### **Old Vs New Media And The Return On Investment**

Jessop (2014), explains when it comes to how sponsors are willing to spend their sports-related dollars, one trend is certain: Digital and social elements win the day. Over eighty five percent of respondents to a sports administration professor at Ohio University, survey in 2012; Michael Pfahl's results informed that respondents were increasing spending on digital and social media advertising (Jessop, 2014). This is in contrast to the just over thirty eight percent who said they were increasing spending on television advertising. Furthermore, forty-seven percent of respondents in 2012 said that they intended to decrease their spending on print advertising. According to Jessop (2014), what is driving these decisions is the return on investment. After the 2008 financial crisis, many corporations were still willing to sponsor sports, but they wanted more out of their investment. Nowadays, a lot of what sponsors want from that investment is digital. They want the marketing programs

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to be creative, unique and touch a lot of segments of a team's fan base. Pfahl's survey results also demonstrated that fifty one percent of the respondents said that social media integration was an extremely important element of a sponsorship package behind the use of logo marks and having industry category exclusivity.

As explained previously, experiential marketing campaigns are the new up and coming trend in the world of sports sponsorships. Brands want to connect with fans by creating physical and immersive experiences. Based on the annual EventTrack research study from the Event Marketing Institute, Factory360, an experiential marketing company, has come up with valid reasons as to why brands should invest in this type of marketing through sports. Studies show great return on investment as well as excellent return on engagement for event marketing campaigns done right. Statistically, 98% of respondents from the EventTrack survey in 2015 acknowledged they were thinking of purchasing a product after seeing or trying it at an experiential marketing event. 65% of respondents actually purchased the product or service at the experiential marketing event location. Participants in the survey explained that one of the reasons they end up purchasing the service or product is because they are given a good discount or simply really liked it.

### **Conclusion**

From mainstream to new media, experiential marketing to jersey sponsorships, many different ways of communication are established in the world of sports sponsorships for brands to identify themselves with sports fans and vice versa. Some are more effective than others because of their capabilities of attracting mass audiences and high television ratings. What matters most is whether the message

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stuck with the sports fans enough to create awareness of the brand. Emotion once again is the solution to modern marketing techniques. It has the power of changing fans minds in a way to make them purchase or find out more about the product or service. US Weekly Magazine TIME blogger, Gary Belsky, talks about the psychological phenomenon the “association principle” and how it applies in the world of sports sponsorship (Belsky, 2012). This principle simply iterates that humans associate themselves with items that they have seen being used by people they know and or trust. For sports sponsorship it works similarly, when a fan sees his favorite athlete drinking Gatorade and performing well, he or she will more than likely want to purchase that product as well.

Throughout this essay many ideas have justified the reasons for brands to engage in sponsorship agreements for the benefit of growing their identity and loyalty amongst sports consumers. Benefits mostly overcome pitfalls from each asset especially when justified by the amount of reach a promotional campaign can have for the brand. At the end of the day, the brand has to evaluate what identity it wants to convey, how it wants to portray its image, with which media outlets, and who will they be associated with and why. If all of these questions are answered, the brand’s goal will be completed.

As mentioned earlier, consumers are becoming immune to advertising. They choose to fast forward through TV commercials using their hard disc recorders, blocking or ignoring internet banner advertising, and failing to hear the constant bombardment of marketing messages they encounter throughout their daily lives. Experiential marketing by its very nature is a dialogue that consumers cannot ignore, not because they are being forced into it, but because it engages with them on a



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personal level. However, whichever mix of media is used, as difficult as it may seem, you have to try and measure the results. The ROI has to be there. No promotional activity should be put into place without some evaluation and reporting of success.

An important factor that cannot be ignored is the power of relevancy in the world of media and sponsorship marketing. Old media has been able to keep its significance by integrating newer technologies in favor of keeping sponsors at the front of high rated sporting events during prime time television. But will these new ways of marketing still be relevant in five years from now? Will social media still be at the forefront of gathering and sharing quick sports information? That story remains untold as of now. The point is that in order for brands to integrate their identity through sports sponsorships, sports marketers must stay on top and relevant to the changes in technologies, generational mindsets and other important factors that determine why and how consumers react to different sport marketing tactics.

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