

Sponsors can connect with any event, just explain the link

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Advertisers don't need an overt and obvious link to a product or brand to be successful, according to new marketing research. Sponsors with natural links to events, such as an oil company sponsoring a car race, are said to have a natural communication advantages over less likely partnerships, such as a shoemaker sponsoring cancer research.

But University of Queensland researchers have found that consumers will remember sponsors if the sponsorship link is explained and a good feeling is generated during their involvement with the sponsor.

UQ Marketing Professor Bettina Cornwell and UQ Psychology Professor Michael Humphreys teamed up to analyse sponsorship memory.

They tested three groups of students on their recall of sponsors and events after the students had read 12 differently worded media releases on a computer.

Each story varied how the sponsor and event was described and linked.

They found students' recall varied depending on how questions about the sponsor and event were phrased.

Explaining the sponsor-event link with an explanatory sentence improved recall.

“If there's no obvious link between a sponsor and an event or brand, you can help the memory with the link by meaningful articulation —just one sentence saying how these things relate,” Professor Cornwell said.

“Sponsorship creates this weak link and the question from a psychology perspective is, how is the memory being influenced by the sponsorship?”

In some sponsorships, customers don't have to remember the company or brand, just have a good feeling.

“As a marketing manager, if I want people to buy my bottled water, I might not care if they remembered if I sponsored the AFL,” she said.

“I only care that in the store they have some positive feeling about the brand even though they might not be able to tell you why.

“But my bottled water company might want its charity sponsorship to be highly visible to show our good corporate citizenship.”

Professor Cornwell said she wanted to test how the human memory was influenced by sponsorships because she had seen so many unexplained sponsor-product pairings, such as cereal makers sponsoring car racing.

Professor Humphreys said this project was one of the few joint marketing and psychology research projects to examine the effectiveness of sponsorships while also testing basic ideas about human memory.

The UQ research team also included psychology PhD students Angie Maguire and Clinton Weeks and honours student Cassie Tellegan.

Their results will be published in the *Journal of Consumer Research* in December.

Source: University of Queensland

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