Sports Marketing and the Psychology of Marketing Communication

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SPORTS MARKETING AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF MARKETING COMMUNICATION

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Foreword

Those of us who do sport marketing or who study sport marketing are often asked by other marketers, "What makes sport marketing special?" After all, it seems reasonable to expect that marketing sport should be like marketing any other service. For decades marketers have amassed an array of strategies, tactics, and principles that, it is claimed, can be applied as needed to any particular product or service. Surely, then, the challenge is to apply our knowledge about marketing to the task of marketing sport. There should be no need to claim any special status for sport marketing.

Yet events of the past two decades would seem to belie that assumption. Two journals have been founded that focus explicitly on sport marketing (*Sport Marketing Quarterly* and *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*). Graduate and undergraduate courses in sport marketing have appeared, as have texts on the subject. Half the contributions to the annual North American Society for Sport Management conference and to its journal (*Journal of Sport Management*) are about sport marketing. The American Marketing Association has a special interest group in sport marketing, and a new Sport Marketing Association was recently formed. Does all this interest and activity represent the mere application of marketing to sport, or have those who study sport marketing suddenly discovered that there is something special going on?

Actually, the phrase "sport marketing" refers to three very different marketing objectives. One is marketing intended to sell sport as an entertainment. Here the objective is to nurture a fan base and to create audiences for sport. The second marketing objective is concerned with building sport participation—motivating people to engage in sport activities, join a sport club, or take part as competitors in sport events. The third marketing objective has to do with using sport to sell non-sport products or services. Each of these three marketing objectives is represented in this book, and each needs to be considered separately.

Many reasons have been argued over the years for the claim that unique concerns need to be taken into account when marketing sport as an entertainment. The product life cycle curve for sports teams and mega sport events seems to be longer than that for most other products and services. In fact, for many teams and events, it is not clear that the curve is even diatonic, because the popularity of many seems to have grown unabated, with fanship and interest being transmitted from one generation to the next. Several arguments have been advanced to account for this phenomenon. It has been argued that athletes and teams engender a level of personal identification that is not found with other products or services. Nor, it is argued, do other products or services typically stand as iconographic representations of their community, as sport does. Many fans do seem to develop a deep emotional attachment to the athletes and teams of which they are fans, and teams and athletes are often symbols of their home communities or even the country from which they come. How this attachment occurs, the best means to foster it, and the tactics by which to capitalize on it are significant realms of inquiry in sport marketing. This, of course, begs the question of whether sport is somehow unique—a matter to which we shall return.

It has similarly been argued that marketing for sport participation requires that unique factors be considered when formulating marketing strategy. Most sports entail physical activity. Increasing physical activity has been a key objective of public health and anti-obesity campaigns. This is one reason that social marketing campaigns to increase sport participation are found throughout the world. However, as social settings, sports have their own subcultures. One of the consequent marketing challenges is to find means to socialize participants into the sport organization and into the beliefs and values associated with participation in a particular sport subculture. How to foster a social climate that encourages sport participation, and how to recruit and then build commitment among those who participate in sport are therefore vital realms of sport marketing inquiry. It is not clear, however, whether these aspects of marketing sport are in any way different from marketing to promote other leisure behaviors.

Marketing non-sport products through sport builds on the foundation established by marketing to promote audiences and participation. The attention and attachment that sport obtains from fans and participants makes sport an attractive medium for sponsorship. Although sponsorship has been a marketing tactic for more than a century, it has been most intensively studied in recent years and in the context of sport. This is reflected in the contents of this book, in which more than half the chapters are devoted to matters having

to do with sponsorship. The largest section (comprised of five chapters) is devoted to the consequences of sponsorship; another section (three chapters) considers athlete endorsements; the section on marketing strategy includes two chapters on sponsorship-related topics—a review of licensing and an examination of ambush marketing.

The emphasis on sponsorship in the book's contents is certainly consistent with the emphasis on sponsorship in the academic study of sport marketing. Yet it is an aspect of sport marketing that is clearly not unique in character or content. Sponsorship has long been a core element of the entertainment industry, enjoying substantial prominence in print media, radio, and television throughout the 20th century. Nevertheless, sponsorship did not become a significant realm of academic study until sport marketing became a popular context for research.

It is somewhat surprising that sponsorship (including licensing and endorsements) has come to dominate academic work on sport marketing in the way that it has. Sponsorship first requires that an audience or a participation base has been obtained, thus it would seem that marketing to foster fanship or participation should be deemed more fundamental. Certainly, more work is needed that considers fan and participant development. More work is also needed that examines the trajectories of sport involvement so that the interactions among fanship, participation, and the choice to consume (or not to consume) sponsored, endorsed, or licensed products can be better understood.

Perhaps one reason that sponsorship has dominated sport marketing research to date is that it can be readily studied using familiar theories and methods from advertising and consumer behavior, fields that are congenial to most marketing researchers. One of the distinct challenges of research in sport marketing is that there has been a great deal of research into sport, but nearly all of that work has been undertaken by non-marketers. The bases for participation and fanship have been studied for several decades by sport sociologists and sport psychologists. Although that work has paid scant attention to its own marketing implications, it could just as easily have been called "sport consumer behavior" (in lieu of "sport sociology" or "sport psychology"). The requisite foundation for theoretically informed research into marketing aimed at fostering fanship or building participation exists in the sport sociology and sport psychology literatures, but it has yet to be married to marketing insight.

Explanations for the lack of cross-dialogue between sport studies and sport marketing can be found in the insularity of academic disciplines and disparities

in their prestige. The study of sport has long been relegated to the undervalued academic departments that specialize in sport and exercise (variously called "kinesiology," "human performance," "physical education," and so on). These departments have historically enjoyed low prestige at our universities, which means that any effort by marketing researchers to mine their discourse has been looked down upon.

In fact, sport is commonly separated as a social category. It not only has separate (but unequal) academic departments but also has its own section of the newspaper, its own magazines, its own television network, its own radio network, and its own segment on the evening news show. These might seem to be signals of sport's importance, but what is relevant here is not the ubiquitous presence of sport but rather sport's overt separation. Consider, for example, that although there have been sport businesses for over a century, sport is rarely represented in the business section of our newspapers and business is rarely represented on the sports pages. Sport falls under the rubric of "play" in popular discourse, and play is associated with childishness and triviality. It is no wonder, then, that sport is treated as a separate realm, and that those who study it risk relegation to depressed academic status.

However, the separation of sport from other elements of the economy misrepresents the economic impact of sport, and thereby underestimates the challenges of sport marketing. Sport has become a significant driver of tourism and, consequently, a vital component in place marketing. Sport has become an essential concern when developing property as sport amenities play a significant role in determining (and maintaining) property values. Sport has catalyzed the development of new technologies, many of which are then marketed for non-sport use.

This takes us back to the concern with which we began. If sport links to other things that we market (e.g., places, homes, technologies), then how different can it be? If sport is not as separate as our treatment of it pretends, then how can marketing it require special theories or tactics?

In fact, the academic study of sport marketing represents a new direction for marketing research. Traditionally, we have studied marketing by seeking to identify core strategies and processes. The objective has been to create a body of knowledge with general application. In contrast, the study of sport marketing places its industry (sport) at the center of study and asks how strategies or processes need to be adapted (or even created) in order for it to be marketed well. Research begins by taking seriously the possibility that the industry does, indeed, make a difference when formulating the marketing strategies and tactics that would most effectively be used. Whether those

strategies and tactics (or the processes of their formulation) are specific to sport or have potential application elsewhere is itself an empirical question. Appropriately devised, the study of sport marketing both informs and is informed by other work in marketing. The chapters in this book make a distinctive contribution to that endeavor.

Laurence Chalip
University of Texas at Austin

Preface

Sports marketing is one of the fastest growing areas of marketing communication. It provides a different type of vehicle for communicating with consumers that does not necessarily follow all of the rules of other types of marketing communication (Burnett & Menon, 1993; Jones, Bee, Burton, & Kahle, 2004). Sport has (1) unique combinations of characteristics that (2) lead to unique patterns of psychological responses that therefore (3) demand out of the ordinary attention to a variety of marketing tactics. As Chalip articulated so well in the Foreword, sports marketing means different things to different people. We touch on most of those definitions during the course of this book.

Consider the unique characteristics of sports. None of these characteristics exists only in sports, but the combination of all of the phenomena in one place give sports a special situation in society. Sports provide real-time drama, often connected to a place or institution, which emphasizes strategy and skill, beauty and talent, competition and teamwork, winners and losers. Most sports appeal to the most basic human understanding, making sports a popular subject for media coverage and fundamental social interaction (Kahle, Elton, & Kambara, 1997). Special consumption communities arise surrounding sport (Chapters 1 and 14; Shoham & Kahle, 1996; Shoham, Rose, Kropp, & Kahle, 1997).

Because of these unique aspects of sports, as well as because of other aspects, several psychological characteristics are connected with sport marketing. Examples include basking in reflected glory (Chapter 3; Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, & Sloan, 1976), consumption communities (Chapter 1), fanaticism (Chapter 2), special target markets (Chapter 14), identification (Hirt, Zillman, Erickson, & Kennedy, 1992; Kahle, Kambara, & Rose, 1996), heroism (Chapters 5, 6, and 7; Kahle & Homer, 1985), patriotism, eroticism, fear, bonding, symbolism (Branscrombe & Wann, 1992), values (Kahle, Duncan, Dalakas, & Aiken, 2001; Sukhdial, Aiken, & Kahle, 2002), child rearing, and risk taking (Chapter 4; Shoham, Rose, & Kahle, 1998, 2000).

The marketer therefore approaches sports marketing differently than other types of marketing. Sponsorship is the giant in the arena (Dean, 1999), and several chapters explore it (Chapters 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12), but do not overlook unique approaches to segmentation (Chapter 14), licensing (Chapter 13), ambush marketing (Chapter 15), hospitality, and atmospherics (Kahle, Aiken, Dalakas, & Duncan, 2003). Media function differently in sport (Chapters 5, 15, and 19; Kahle, Madrigal, Melone, & Szymanski, 1999; Kahle & Meeske, 1999).

The purpose of this book is to advance the understanding of sports marketing. It presents chapters that deal with topics in sports marketing in a scholarly and comprehensive way. It covers most of the major topics of discussion in sports marketing and the psychology of communication. Several new, innovative topics are introduced (SportNEST, consumption communities). Many classic topics are brought up to date (sponsorship, ambush marketing, identification, endorsements, basking in reflected glory, licensing), and many of the topics that seem to center around sports show up as well, such as sneakers (Chapters 9 and 19), ethics (Chapters 16, 17, 18, and 19; Kahle, Boush, & Phelps, 2000), risky behavior (Chapter 4), and even investments (Chapter 11). We hope this book focuses attention on the state of knowledge in sports marketing. Carefully examined ideas are the ones most likely to improve dialectically, and this book should serve as a challenge for this field to advance. After reading this book, you should develop a new appreciation for what someone in Oregon means when he or she says, "Go Ducks."

Lynn R. Kahle
Chris Riley
Oregon, May 2003

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