

# SPONSORSHIP: IMPACT ON BRAND AWARENESS AND BRAND ATTITUDES

PEER  
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## ABSTRACT

Sponsorship is a rapidly growing tool in both commercial and social marketing areas, in Australia and overseas. Australian health promotion foundations distribute substantial funds to arts, sports, and racing organizations for the opportunity to have these organizations' events sponsored by health promoting organizations. However, in spite of substantial commercial and health expenditures, there has been little published systematic evaluation of sponsorship. Recent years have seen far more attention to this area. This article presents the results of a study designed to evaluate sponsorship effectiveness in terms of its two main communication objectives: brand awareness and brand attitude. Two health and four commercial sponsorships were evaluated at two major sporting events. Overall, the data suggest that sponsorship can influence both brand awareness and brand attitude, and that the health sponsorships had more impact than the commercial sponsors studied. These and other data confirm the potential usefulness for greater use of sponsorship in social marketing campaigns.

## INTRODUCTION

Although total sponsorship expenditure in Australia and elsewhere is small relative to total marketing expenditure, the figure is increasing rapidly and is already substantial. It has been estimated that in Australia in 1996-1997, \$466.5 million was spent on sponsorship, of which \$281.9 million was channeled into sports, \$50.4 million into trade shows and conferences, \$37.3 million into education via grants and scholarships, and \$29.2 million into arts and culture (ABS, 1999). It is estimated that in 2001, corporations around the globe will spend more than \$24.6 billion sponsoring sports, arts, entertainment,

causes, and events (International Events Group, 2001). Growth in sponsorship has resulted from increased costs of media and other promotions and the apparent cost-effectiveness of sponsorship, at least in terms of delivering media exposure of the sponsor's message, brand, or logo for a minimal outlay (Abratt & Grobler, 1989).

Sponsorship, particularly of sporting events, received major impetus in Australia when the tobacco companies sought ways to continue to promote their brands following bans on television advertising, and, later, other forms of promotion (Chapman & Lupton, 1994). Given the tobacco companies' apparent success in maintaining brand awareness and image via sponsorship, other companies, led by the major brewery and soft drink marketers, increasingly have included sponsorship as part of their promotional mix. It is likely that a "social proof" effect (Cialdini, 1984) also is operating (perhaps particularly in the health field), in that the highly visible use of sponsorship by "leading" marketers is taken as proof of its effectiveness. The entry of large companies into sponsorship programs has been stimulated also by nonprofit organizations actively promoting themselves as vehicles for sponsorship (e.g., the Australian Institute of Sport and Kellogg's Sustain, the National Heart Foundation's "tick" labeling) (Donovan, Corti, Holman, West, & Pitter, 1993).

In Australia (and elsewhere) in recent years, health promotion professionals have adopted many of the concepts and tools of commercial marketing (Egger, Donovan, & Spark, 1993), and now are enthusiastically embracing sponsorship, both as sponsors (mainly government agencies) and by actively promoting themselves to business as sponsees (nongovernment agencies). A number of factors have facilitated the adoption of sponsorship

by health promoters, including the high cost of media advertising, the fact that small-scale sponsorships at selected events are within the capacity of even small health agencies, and the growing number of health and sporting organizations becoming aware of the "natural" link between their organizations' goals. While most applications of sponsorship in social marketing have been in health promotion, social marketers are becoming more aware of the potential of this marketing tool in other areas (Weinreich, Abbott, & Olson, 1999).

The growth in health sponsorship in Australia has been facilitated primarily by the creation of health promotion foundations in a number of states following the legislative phasing out of tobacco sponsorship (Furlong, 1994). Funded by a tobacco tax, these foundations provide funds for health promotion research and intervention projects, and health sponsorship. Substantial funds are distributed to sports, arts, and racing organizations in return for these organizations' events being sponsored by health-promoting organizations (see Figure 1). (For more information on the Australian health promotion foundations and the use of their funds, see Betts, 1993; Carroll, 1993; Court, 1993; Galbally, 1993; Frizzell, 1993.) The replacement of tobacco sponsorship with health sponsorship occurs elsewhere, for example, in California (Weinreich et al., 1999) and in New Zealand (via the Health Sponsorship Council).

### OBJECTIVES OF SPONSORSHIP

Most commercial sponsorships have both trading objectives and communication objectives (Meenaghan, 1991). Trading objectives mainly refer to securing merchandising rights at events (Gross, Traylor, & Shuman, 1987). For example, Heineken sponsors a number of golf tournaments, and as part of their

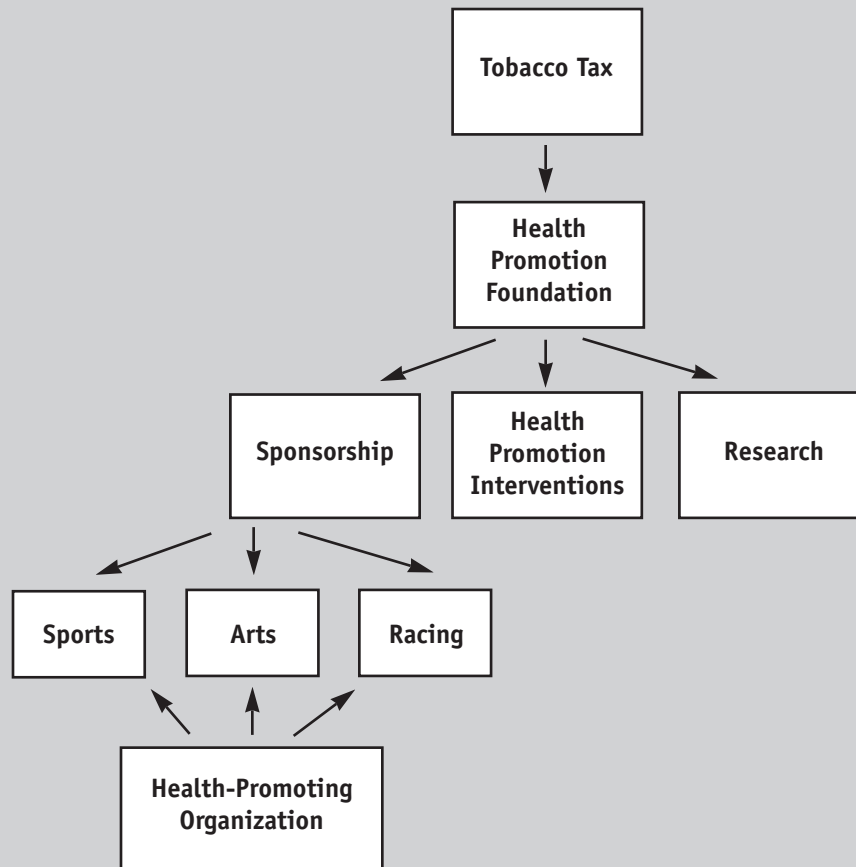
sponsorship arrangement they seek to have exclusive merchandising rights so that only Heineken beer is available at these tournaments. It is hoped that “forced” trial of the product will lead to a more favorable attitude to the product and to repurchase in other situations. Trading objectives equate to structural change objectives for health promotion sponsorships (e.g., smoke-free zone requirements, provision of low-alcohol alternatives as a condition of the sponsorship).

Also, while most commercial and health sponsorships are directed primarily at consumers, they may have direct or indirect positive effects on

other target groups, such as staff, distributors, potential employees, community leaders, politicians, and other relevant stakeholders. This article is concerned only with communication objectives and with sponsorships directed at consumers.

The two main communication objectives for sponsorships are brand (or health issue) awareness and brand (or health issue) attitude. However, most sponsorship evaluation has focused on process evaluation (e.g., amount of exposure in various media), or consumers’ awareness of event sponsors and the influence of this awareness on corporate image or attitude (Cornwell, 1995; Hoek,

**FIGURE 1**  
The Australian Health Promotion Foundation’s Sponsorship Model



1997; Sandler & Shani, 1993; Stipp & Schiavone, 1996).

### **THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE OF HOW SPONSORSHIP WORKS**

Sponsorship is similar to advertising in that both are used to communicate an organization's message and image for a product, brand, or service to the target market. Both advertising and sponsorship aim to increase the salience of the organization or message. However, the process by which advertising and sponsorship achieve these communication objectives may be quite different. Advertising is a paid communication in which the medium and the message are controlled by the advertiser and can be explicitly linked to the relevant organization or brand (Gross et al., 1987; Javalgi, Traylor, Gross, & Lampman, 1994). Advertising is able to communicate complex messages, both in terms of information and imagery (Hastings, 1984). In contrast, sponsorship persuades indirectly by linking the sponsor's message to an event or organization (Pham, 1992) although the sponsor's contract may include advertising at the event.

Commercial sponsors are concerned primarily with brand names, trademarks, or logo symbols, and associating these with the "image" attributes of the sponsee. Hence, most commercial sponsorship objectives require only limited cognitive processing, mainly via "unconscious" associative learning. Since health sponsors promote a "message," health sponsorship objectives require conscious processing, comprehension, and cognitive elaboration to achieve their objectives.

There are a number of ways in which attitude effects of sponsorship may occur:

1) Sheer exposure may lead to feelings of familiarity, and hence positive feelings toward the message or organiza-

tion (Donovan et al., 1993). In this way, sponsorship may reinforce a perception of the social norm or social acceptance of a message. Furthermore, awareness facilitates other promotional activities by sensitizing the individual to such activities (Otker, 1988). For example, health advertising serves to sensitize individuals to more direct health interventions (Donovan, 1991).

2) Sponsorship results in positive affect transfer from the event to the sponsor (Keller, 1993). Positive image or feelings (e.g., fun, enjoyment, excitement) associated with the event are transferred to the message or organization via associative learning or cognitive inferencing.

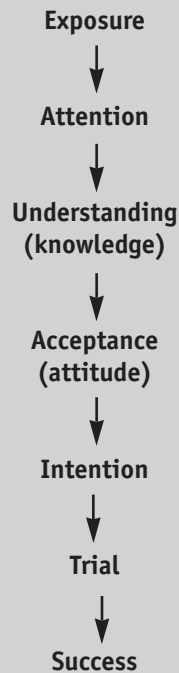
3) Because attitudes are based on a number of beliefs, an expressed attitude toward an organization, brand name, or health message is dependent upon the beliefs most salient at the time (Klapper, 1961). Hence, because sponsorship can increase the salience of a belief (Donovan et al., 1993), sponsorship can influence attitude.

### **EVALUATION OF SPONSORSHIP**

The hierarchical communication model shown in Figure 2 provides a basis for understanding how sponsorship can influence behavior. However, it is not realistic to expect sponsorship or other promotional strategies, in isolation, to have a direct effect on behavior. As with mass media promotions, sponsorship is likely to be more effective in the early stages of this hierarchy, whereas other elements of the marketing strategy and environmental factors are far more influential at the later behavioral stages. Therefore, it is important to measure sponsorship effects in terms of the earlier stages in the hierarchical communication model.

The literature reveals little systematic evaluation of sponsorship.

**FIGURE 2**  
**Steps in a Hierarchical**  
**Communication Model (Donovan**  
**& Owen, 1994)**



Academic papers have focused on topics such as questions of definitions, the role of sponsorship in the total marketing promotions mix, the setting of goals for sponsorship, and the criteria for the selection of events to sponsor (Otker, 1988). Nonacademic writings have focused on the benefits of sponsorship to sponsors and implementation factors (Dwyer, 1997; Percival, 1990).

In an attempt to broaden the parameters of sponsorship evaluation, the Health Promotion Evaluation Unit (HPEU) at the University of Western Australia has undertaken a number of field studies as well as designed a systematic evaluation of all of the Western Australia Health Promotion Foundation's (Healthway) sponsorship activities. HPEU's research program includes sponsorship awareness measures

as well as attempts to assess sponsorship's actual and potential behavioral effects (Corti, Donovan, Holman, Coten, & Jones, 1997; Donovan, Jalleh, Clarkson, & Giles-Corti, 1999; Holman, Donovan, & Corti, 1993, 1994; Holman, Donovan, Corti, Jalleh, Frizzell, & Carroll, 1996). The studies reported here attempted to assess the awareness and attitude effects of sponsorships.

## METHODS

### STUDY DESIGN

A pre-post independent samples design was used to assess sponsorship effectiveness in terms of brand awareness and attitude effects at two events: Australian rules football and motor racing. To allow assessment of both awareness and attitude effects without prior questions contaminating later measures, two independent samples were taken pre- and post-test at each event.

The study assessed one health and two commercial sponsors at each event. At the Australian rules football matches, it assessed the sponsored health message, "Respect Yourself" (an alcohol moderation message), and two commercial sponsors, Holden (a General Motors brand) and ANZ Bank. Only male drinkers aged 18 to 30 years were interviewed at the football match, as they were the major target group for the "Respect Yourself" message. At the motor racing event, the study assessed the sponsored health message, "Quit," and two commercial sponsors, *Coca-Cola* and TVW Channel 7 (one of the three major national television networks in Australia). Only smokers aged 18 years and over were interviewed.

In both venues, each of the evaluated sponsors' major implementation strategy was perimeter and other signage. Each of the sponsors had areas of approximately the same signage and equally prominent placement. However, the Respect Yourself sponsorship also had signage at the bars.

### INTERVIEWING

Intercept interviewing of patrons was carried out face-to-face by professional market research interviewers. Interviewers were assigned to specific locations and were given instructions on the selection of respondents so as to ensure, as far as possible, a random sample of patrons. Pre-interviews were carried out prior to entry to the event. Post-interviews were carried out in the venues from half-time to the end of the event.

A total of 1,507 football and speedway patrons were interviewed. For the attitude study, there were  $n = 204$  pre- and  $n = 196$  post-interviews at the football match, and  $n = 186$  pre- and  $n = 159$  post-interviews at the speedway. For the awareness study, the corresponding numbers were:  $n = 211$  and  $n = 153$  at the football match, and  $n = 198$  and  $n = 200$  at the speedway. The majority of respondents in the attitude and awareness samples at the speedway were males (68% and 79%, respectively).

### QUESTIONNAIRE

Two sets of pre- and post-questionnaires were developed, focusing on awareness and the other on attitude measures.

**Awareness questionnaire:** The brand awareness measure was a cued recall measure: "When you think of...(soft drinks, television channels, cars, banks, smoking, alcohol), what (brands, channels, names, banks, health messages, or slogans)... come to mind?" In both the pre- and post-awareness questionnaires, these questions were asked immediately after the preliminary screening questions.

**Attitude questionnaire:** The brand attitude measure followed that of Donovan et al. (1993). Respondents at the football match, in both pre- and post-conditions, were presented with a set of seven banks (including the sponsor, ANZ Bank) and a set of six

motor vehicle manufacturers (including the sponsor, Holden) and asked: "If you were going to... (open a new bank account, buy a new car), which of these would you be most interested in receiving more information about? And next most? And next?" Respondents at the speedway, in both pre- and post-conditions, were presented with a set of five soft drinks (including the sponsor, *Coca-Cola*) and a set of five TV channels (including the sponsor, TVW Channel 7) and asked: "If you (were going to buy a soft drink, which one would you prefer most?)(could only watch one TV channel next week, which one would you choose?) And next most? And next?"

Respondents at both the football and speedway events were presented with a set of six health behaviors and asked: "If you were interested in becoming more healthy, which of these would you most like more information on? And next most? And next?" The behaviors were: quitting smoking or assisting someone to quit smoking; reducing alcohol consumption; exercising; nutrition; and relaxation methods. Single-item attitude measures have been found to be as good as, if not better than, multiple item measures (Rossiter, 2000).

In both the pre- and post-attitude questionnaires, the attitudes questions were asked immediately after the preliminary screening questions. Other than the above awareness and attitude questions, the pre- and post-questionnaires were the same for both the awareness and attitude questionnaires. Additional questions in the post-questionnaires were: prompted recognition of the sponsors at the venues; cognitive responses for respondents who recognized the health message or selected brand names) (i.e., "When you saw or heard the (sponsor name/message) advertised at today's event, did any thoughts or feelings come to mind?" and if so, "what?"). The questionnaires

also measured brand ownership, and attendance frequency and demographics.

The results presented here focus only on awareness and attitude effects.

## RESULTS

### AWARENESS CHANGE

An attempt was made to ensure that the pre- and post-samples at each venue had a similar age profile. However, because the pre- and post-awareness samples at the football match did differ somewhat, the data were post-weighted by age before analysis. Also, because there were no differences when event brand users were excluded, the results are shown for the total sample.

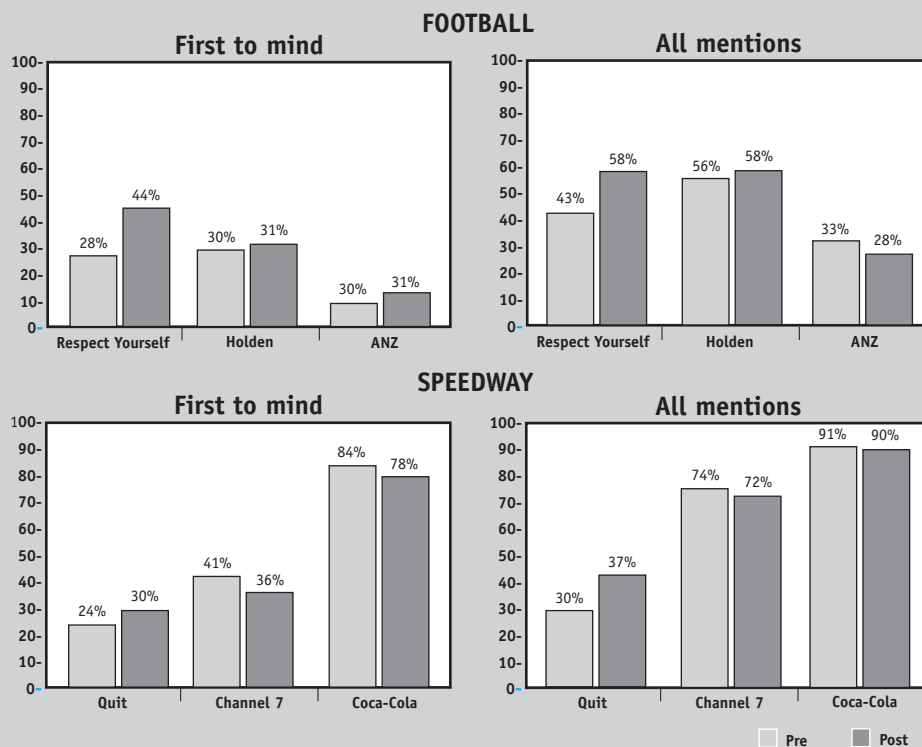
Figure 3 shows no brand awareness impact for the Holden and ANZ Bank

football sponsorships, but a significant impact for the Respect Yourself sponsorship for both first to mind (pre: 28%, post: 44%,  $p = .002$ ) and all mentions (pre: 43%, post: 58%,  $p = .003$ ). At the motor racing event, there was no brand awareness impact for the *Coca-Cola* and Channel 7 sponsorships (*Coca-Cola* already at a very high level), but a near-significant increase for the quit smoking sponsorship for both first to mind (pre: 24%, post: 31%) and all mentions (pre: 30%, post: 37%) (see Figure 3).

### ATTITUDE CHANGE

Figure 4 shows a significant impact for the Respect Yourself football sponsorship for both first preferences (pre: 2%; post: 8%,  $p = .002$ ) and top

**FIGURE 3**  
Pre-test Post-test Awareness for Sponsored Brands and Health Messages at Football and Speedway Events



three preferences (pre: 18%; post: 26%,  $p = .056$ ) (see Figure 4). There was a significant impact for the ANZ football sponsorship in terms of first preferences (pre: 10%; post: 17%,  $p = .027$ ) but no impact on attitude for the Holden sponsorship. At the motor racing event, there was no significant impact on attitude for the quit smoking or commercial sponsorships.

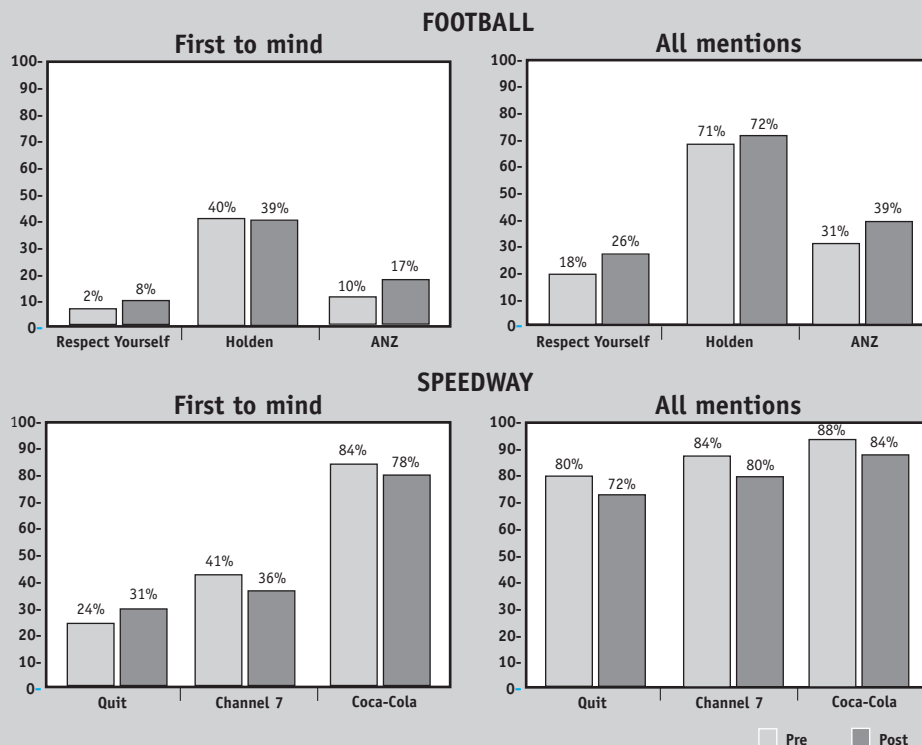
**DISCUSSION**

The four commercial sponsorships evaluated showed no impact on brand awareness, and only one (ANZ bank) showed a significant impact on brand attitude. On the other hand, both health sponsorships showed a significant or near-significant increase on in brand awareness, and one of these (alcohol

moderation) showed a significant impact attitude toward the issue. That is, one of the health sponsorships was consistently superior to all four commercial sponsors, and the other health sponsor was superior to three, but not on all measures.

The apparent superiority of the health sponsorships over the commercial sponsorships is consistent with the attitudinal results of Donovan et al. (1993). There may be a number of reasons for this. First, health sponsorships are relatively rare compared with the number of commercial sponsors, and, hence, may not only be more noticeable but may have more impact when attended to. The cognitive response data (to be reported elsewhere) offered some support for this view in that exposure to

**FIGURE 4**  
Pre-post Preferences for Sponsored Brands and Health Behaviors at Football and Speedway Events



the health messages generated cognitive responses related mainly to the actual messages per se (e.g., exposure to the Quit sponsorship generated responses reflecting mainly acceptance of the message and a desire to quit or cut down on smoking), whereas the brand names generated more generic responses related to their respective product categories (e.g., exposure to the *Coca-Cola* sponsorship generated thirst arousal and recall of alcohol-coke mixes).

Second, the health sponsors are more enthusiastic and leverage the sponsorship more (i.e., distribute merchandise in addition to signage, which occurred with the Respect Yourself sponsorship). We suspect that this is the main reason for the commercial sponsors' lack of impact at these sporting events. That is, none of these sponsors, at least as far as we could determine, engaged in any activities other than signage. On the other hand, as part of the sponsorship agreement, Healthway has negotiated smoke-free areas at the speedway and the supply and prominent display of low-alcohol beer at the football venue bars. Finally, the best performing sponsorship in this study, Respect Yourself, is a sponsor of the Dockers football team in the Australian Football League, hence producing greater synergy in the partnership. While all of the four commercial sponsors have extensive advertising and promotion budgets, none had any specific association with teams in the events. Overall, these results support Quester and Thompson's (2001) findings that sponsorship can have a significant impact on awareness and attitude objectives, but this impact is dependent on how the sponsorship is implemented.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL MARKETING

Social marketers have enthusiastically adopted advertising and other communication elements of the

marketing promotional mix. However, while the use of sponsorship in health is now well established in Australia and some other countries, sponsorship has not been widely used in social marketing. Results such as these should encourage social marketers, both in Australia and elsewhere, to make more use of sponsorship in areas other than health. Unlike mass media advertising, sponsorship can be used by those with small budgets and can be particularly useful for local community events.

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