An investigation into motorsport sponsorship: a comparative analysis of two and four wheeled sponsorship


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Abstract

The prime objective of the research is to establish why commercial sponsors use motor sport as an element of their marketing communications. A comparison has been undertaken between car and bike racing, as represented by Formula One and MotoGP, to establish any differences in approach. The initial historical element of the research revealed that motor sport had been sponsored by vehicle manufacturers since the origins of the petrol combustion engine in the late 19th century. Any suggestion that sponsorship of motor sport is a recent, late 20th century science has been dispelled. The investigation found that the sponsors of top level car racing place major importance on achieving awareness for their brands through media exposure, particularly television. This aim is shared by motorcycle racing sponsors too and a common model is identified. Where motor cycle racing is specifically concerned the research established that there is an almost identical approach to the usage and application of sponsorship to that in car racing. The only difference being that the wider commercialisation of F1, in which brands outside those intimately involved with automotive industries have made use of motor sport sponsorship, has been around for longer than that in motorcycle racing. The motorcycle sponsors have therefore taken slightly longer to reach the same level of marketing sophistication in a sport which is recognized as having less money overall. The research reveals that the most important element of the business plan for both types of motor sport relies largely on a business model linked to global television audiences. Such audiences are seen as vital in generating awareness of sponsors and their products. Such plans provide an entirely relevant platform for the initial steps of the AIDA theory (Awareness; Interest; Desire; Action) of product adoption. The research also identifies that this commonality of approach is not entirely accidental as similar promoters have been involved at the top level of both sports. The research advises that the future of motor sport should continue to involve the application of the latest technologies appropriate to passenger vehicles if it is to continue unhindered. It is suggested that motor sport should become the definitive technological test bed for vehicle propulsion systems that are sustainable and kind to the environment.

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