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Citation:

Green, A (2012) High Definition or Standard Definition TV broadcasting – can this impact on levels of sponsorship brand recall? In: Conference of the North American Society for Sport Management, May 22-26, 2012, Seattle, USA.

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**High Definition or Standard Definition TV Broadcasting – Can This Impact on Levels of Sponsorship Brand Recall?**

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**Marketing  
Abstract 2012-072**

**Thursday, May 24, 2012  
1:10 PM**

**Poster  
(Madison Ballroom)**

Sport sponsorship in the UK is a multi million pound industry that was valued at £874 million in 2010 (Mintel 2011). In recent years the industry has witnessed accelerated growth, and it is perhaps because of this, a plethora of empirical studies exploring the effectiveness of sponsorship have ensued. Previous researchers have used evaluation methodologies that have had a propensity to focus on measuring levels of brand awareness, recall and exposure. Research has suggested that recall rates increase where the exposure to a brand is high (Drees 1987). Many scholars have examined the recall of perimeter board hoardings at sports events (Arthur, Dolan and Cole 1998, and Olivier and Kraak 1997). These studies have found that the brands that are located at the centre of the sports action often have higher levels of recall. Other researchers have found that previous awareness of a sponsor can have a positive impact on recall rates (Quester 1997 and Pham and Johar 1999). Message length and design can further impact on recall, with messages that are clear, and short being recalled more readily (Drees 1987, Shah 2009). It is clear that whilst many studies have focused on recall rates at events, few have explored the phenomena through the television audience. Given that many sports fans consume sport through television, it was felt that more research was needed in this field.

In the lead up to the 2010 World Cup soccer tournament, the UK witnessed a significant increase in TV sales (Mintel 2011b). In many instances consumers were looking to upgrade their existing TV in order to adopt the latest equipment and products on the market, including High Definition TV sets and 3D televisions. At present there appears to be no research into the way these new technologies may, or may not impact on the way the TV sports consumer can recall sponsorship brands. Consequently it was decided that this research should focus on the television spectator.

The aim of the first stage of the research was therefore to examine the levels of sponsorship brand recall during an FA Cup match (Soccer) in the UK. The research compared the levels of brand recall between those participants that viewed the match through a standard definition (SD) television broadcast and those that viewed it through a high definition (HD) television broadcast. In addition, the study also explored the difference between traditional field sponsorship such as perimeter and score board advertising, to that of broadcast sponsorship where the sponsor associates its brand with the TV programme or its promotion.

High definition television was first broadcast in 1998 in the USA and 2006 in the UK. Whilst it has been widely used in the USA and Japan, Europe has been very slow to integrate high definition broadcasting. However, Mintel (2011) suggests penetration of high definition televisions has now reached 65% of all UK households. The push for high definition in Europe, came with the 2006 FIFA World Cup (Cianci, 2007). Football and HD content have been linked for some time. The FA Cup was first broadcast in High Definition in 2007.

Television is broadcast in lines. The more lines the more detailed the picture becomes. SD in the UK is projected in 576 lines with HD projected in 1080 lines. This means that HD television is almost twice as detailed as SD Television (Poynton, 2003).

The study used a survey design to address the research question. The study recruited undergraduate students who were studying a sports related course at University level. The students were separated into two groups of 20 ensuring that there was an equal divide and control for gender, level of football fandom, experience of HD broadcast, and level of support for the playing teams in each group. Group 1 were required to watch the FA Cup game between Manchester United and Crawley Town on Saturday 19th February 2011 in Standard Definition television broadcast. Group two were asked to watch the same match but this time in High Definition broadcast quality. Upon completion of the match both groups were individually asked to complete a short questionnaire. The participants were given 10 minutes to complete the task and discussion with others was not allowed. Participants were asked to list all the brands they had seen and where they had seen them (unaided recall). A score of 1 was given to each sponsor that

## **2012 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2012)**

was correctly given. A record was made of those that were field and broadcast sponsors.

The results suggest that high definition broadcasting can lead to improved brand recall. The average number of brands recalled in HD was 9.6 compared to 6.9 in SD. When broadcast sponsorship was examined there was a significant difference in the levels of recall with 50% in HD and 15% in SD. When field sponsorship was investigated it was found that the levels of recall were lower than for broadcast sponsorship. However a notable difference was seen between the level of recall for HD and SD. HD achieved recall rates of 36% with SD only achieving a rate of 27%. Brands that appeared only on perimeter hoardings were recalled twenty-seven times when viewed in High Definition as opposed to fourteen times when viewed in Standard Definition. Given that the only variable was the broadcast style it can be assumed that High Definition television does aid brand recall of brands on perimeter hoardings. The difference in recall numbers is almost twofold.

It can be seen that HD broadcasting does lead to an enhanced level of brand recall when compared to SD broadcasting. Broadcast sponsorship has been found to be a more successful way of getting a brand recalled when compared to field sponsorship unless the field sponsors is in a ubiquitous domain like those on football shirts.

This research has therefore demonstrated that whilst brand recall may be due to a range of complex factors, it is clear that when the only variable is broadcasting quality, fans are almost twice as likely to be able to recall field sponsors when viewed in HD compared to SD television. This has significant implications for the sports sponsorship industry and in particular the rights holders of sport properties. It is apparent that sport events that are broadcast in HD more attractive to potential field and broadcast sponsors given that the sport consumer is more likely to recall the sponsor's brands. This could ultimately lead to differential pricing strategies being charged for rights and games or events that are available to the consumer in different broadcast formats.