

Understanding Live Rugby League Stadium Experience and its Impact on Advertising

The Vodafone Warriors are one of New Zealand's most exciting professional sporting teams, competing in the Australasian NRL (Rugby League) competition. The club is backed by a loyal fan base that spans New Zealand, and boasts an extensive list of long-term sponsorship deals with brands such as Vodafone, Canterbury of New Zealand, Mazda and ANZsahi Beverages (Woodstock) - organizations that want to be part of the trials and tribulations of the team.

But what is it like to be a game-day supporter at the Vodafone Warriors' home ground - Mt Smart Stadium? And what does this mean for sponsors? To answer these questions, it is necessary to monitor people in the stadium through the experience. The Vodafone Warriors partnered with behavioral insights agency NeuroSpot using Shimmer Research's NeuroLynQ system to take a scientific lens to how fans felt watching the Round 24 match against the South Sydney Rabbitohs.

As part of this study, 20 Vodafone Warriors fans were asked to watch the game from a media box at Mt Smart Stadium. Throughout the game, NeuroSpot was able to measure second-by-second fluctuations in fan emotion – and identify what caused it. Figure 2 shows the view from the media box. Prior to the game, the audience was shown a sports-talk TV show that talked about the team and the game to establish a baseline. They were also shown a series of advertisements from both non-sponsors and sponsors of stadium advertisements to create a baseline for advertising response.

Results

People talk about the excitement of watching a live sports match, and this came through clearly in people's emotional responses with a 38% uplift in heightened emotion vs baseline. The most exciting moment of the game was in the 37th minute, when Ken Maumalo scored the Vodafone Warriors' second try – with heightened emotion levels spiking 44% compared to baseline. This came off the back of the home side's first try, scored two minutes earlier by Adam Pompey, with a boost in heightened emotion of 20% compared to baseline.

Excitement levels continued to peak when the Rabbitohs scored their tries – with a 25% jump off the back of a breakaway try to Dane Gagai. What does this mean? The excitement from a live sports event doesn't just come from your team scoring – people respond

Approach

In this study, NeuroSpot made use of Shimmer Research's NeuroLynQ biometric measurement system to measure changes in galvanic skin response – subtle changes in the skin's response caused by changes in emotional response – throughout the game. By wearing two small sensors on their fingers, groups of fans can have physiological changes in excitement recorded – without them having to tell us how they're feeling. (See Figure 1.)



Figure 1



Figure 2

to the excitement from both teams competing, and the crowd response around them. A big question for sponsors such as Vodafone and Mazda is how does this partnership impact their brand? Are Vodafone Warriors fans taking that emotion across to sponsor brands, and potentially changing long-term brand associations? To find out, fans were shown a series of sponsors adverts before the game started, and during the half-time break to see how responses differed.

The key finding was that emotional responses to the same adverts increased 21% at half-time vs before the game – an emotional uplift that can be associated with sponsor brands. What’s interesting is that we’ve seen this uplift from a sponsor advert, but with the sponsor logos being highly visible throughout the stadium and on player uniforms, there are multiple opportunities to embed these associations, (See Figure 3 below).

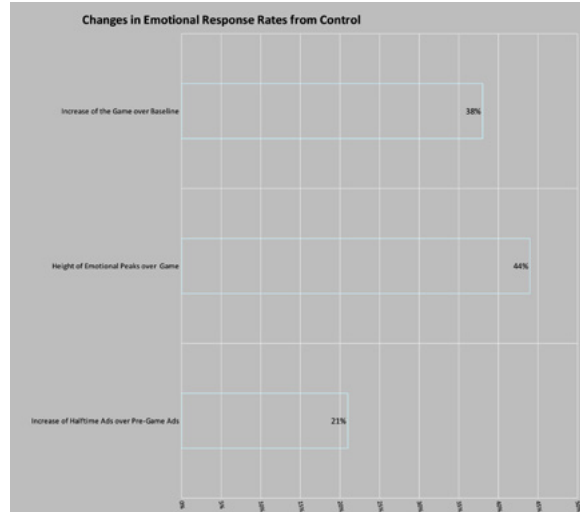


Figure 3:
 Increase of Halftime Ads over Pre-Game Ads 21%
 Height of Emotional Peaks over Game 44%
 Increase of the Game over Baseline 38%

Conclusions

Attending a live Vodafone Warriors game at their home ground of Mt Smart Stadium (Auckland, NZ) results in high levels of emotional response amongst fans – on average 38% greater compared to baseline. Emotional peaks occurred at multiple times during the game, both when the home-side scored (up to 44% higher vs baseline), but also when the opposition scored.

Importantly for team sponsors, this emotional uplift carried through to sponsor advertising, with a 21% greater emotional response to adverts shown at halftime vs the same adverts shown pre-game. This illustrates the value to sponsors of being associated with such events.

Final thoughts

Our belief is that more and more neuromarketing work will need to be performed in real-world environments with passive data collection to capture the true response of participants. Biometrics, particularly GSR and heart rate, are well suited to real world data collection. It is not that there are no challenges with these measures, but there are fewer challenges than with other technologies. In fact, hundreds of millions of people are having these metrics monitored today with consumer fitness trackers and smart-watches. This study is one of many demonstrating the ability of these measures to capture interesting and meaningful data in a real-world environment.

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