

CONSUMER INTEREST, AWARENESS, AND INTENT TO PURCHASE: A THREE COUNTRY STUDY OF OLYMPIC SPONSORSHIP

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Context

As large, global properties such as the World Cup, the Super Bowl, and the Olympic Games become central elements of an emerging culture (Wise & Miles, 1997), sponsorship programmes of these major international events offer optimal positioning tools for corporations seeking to communicate global messages (Farely & Quester, 1997). Sponsorship in the context of these global properties, or 'mega-events', involves multi-million dollar investments by corporations in return for official association with the event and direct access to very large samples of their target markets. Of all mega-events, the Olympics are widely known to be a vehicle for launching new and innovative global marketing tactics, and, as such, provide an interesting context for assessing sponsorship (Newell, Henderson & Wu, 2001). In a cluttered media market sponsorship may be a superior choice to advertising, while sponsorship theory suggests that mega event sponsorship can lead to increased interest, awareness, and intent to purchase sponsors' products (Meenaghan, 1991).

Consumer Interest

Most research has reported that while consumers may have high level of interest in properties such as the Olympic Games, the impact on intent to purchase remains relatively small (Seguin et al., 2001). It is other factors that drive purchase, although a basic level of interest is necessary for sponsorship to be successful. Consumer support of Super Bowl sponsors, and those who advertise during the telecast, declined between 1998 and 2000. Further, corporations who advertised were found to be less likely to be regarded as industry leaders in 2000 than in 1998 (Lyberger & McCarthy, 2002).

Awareness

The literature on sponsorship is consistent in reporting that increased awareness is an important objective of companies sponsoring sporting mega-events (IEG, 2005). Increased level of awareness has taken significant importance in light of ambush marketing and studies showing that consumers with relatively low levels of awareness of Olympic sponsors are easy to mislead (Lyberger & McCarthy, 2002). The IEG 2005 sponsorship survey reports that there was a significant improvement on the sponsors' concern for awareness of their sponsorship. Seguin et al. (2001) revealed that consumers were aware of sponsorship, and, in general did recognize the value it brought to the Olympic Games while Meenaghan (1998) suggests that strong consumer identification of sponsorship requires both knowledge of the event and an emotional link to the activity/event or sponsor.

Intent to Purchase

The IOC (1997) reported that all factors being equal, 22% of consumers, (nine-country mean) would be more likely to buy a sponsor's product. A nationwide survey conducted by the Canadian Olympic Association (Charlton Group, 1998) during the Nagano Olympics found that 41% of those surveyed were more likely to consider a Canadian Olympic Team sponsor than non-sponsors, while Seguin et al. (2001) in a four country study during the 2000 Olympics found that 36% would be more likely to support a corporation that is an Olympic sponsor than one which is not. However, few have examined whether those feelings impact purchase intention or behavior. Intent to purchase was found to be less among respondents in a study undertaken around the 2000 Super Bowl than among respondents to a survey undertaken around the 1998 Super Bowl (Lyberger & McCarthy, 2002).

Method

The Consumer Perception Index (CPI) was used to measure consumer interest, awareness, and consumers' intent to purchase in 3 countries (Germany, Canada, USA) during the 2004 Olympic Games. The CPI is a five-part questionnaire which is designed measure consumer opinions of advertising, commercialization, sponsorship, ambushing, levels of interest, knowledge, volume consumption, purchase behavior, and demographics as they relate to sponsored sport events. One-way ANOVAs were carried out to identify significant differences between groups culture. In addition, follow-up measures, i.e. Tukey, Scheffe', Kuder-Richardson procedures were used to define significant differences, to establish simultaneous confidence intervals and to measure homogeneity. A

total of 1,845 valid surveys were collected, via the mall intercept technique – Germany 900, Canada 504, and USA 441

Results

Data revealed that of German respondents 39.2% were female; of Canadian 41.5%, and of the USA 46.7%. Significant between-group differences in levels of interest in the Olympic Games were found. Significant differences existed between German ($m=3.76$) and US respondents ($m=3.21$), and between Canadian (3.64) and US respondents. Measures of awareness consisted of 5 absolute measures and 2 Likert scale measures. Results revealed that there were significant differences between groups on all 7 measures. Between-group differences were found in three measures between the USA and both Canada and Germany; in two measures between Germany and both Canada and the USA; and in one measure between Canada and both Germany and the USA. Only one measure identified significant differences between all groups. A complete analysis of these results along with items specific to intent to purchase, appropriate f-values and statistics will be presented.

Discussion

The level of interest in the Olympics was lowest in the US among the three groups. This corresponds with previous research and might be explained by its sport market being dominated by professional rather than amateur sport. On the basis of individual questions related to awareness of sponsorship, it is interesting to note that despite a higher level of interest in the Olympic Games among German respondents, they were least aware of levels of sponsorship. This result contradicts previous work, notably by Meenaghan (1998), and suggests that the interest-sponsorship relationship should be investigated further. With regard to intent to purchase, German respondents were least likely to purchase products which were either advertised during the Games or were the products of official sponsors of the Games. In each case US respondents were most likely to purchase, suggesting that US respondents are more effected by advertising and sponsorship of sport mega-events. Previous research suggests that the impact of culture on sport is significant, and results from this study may be further evidence of this. Further research in the form of longitudinal studies of the impact of sponsorship of mega sport events would appear appropriate.

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