

Assessing attitudes of ING New York City Marathon participants toward the practice of ambush marketing

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Aim of paper and research questions

The topic of ambush marketing has generated numerous academic studies aimed at assessing knowledge of and attitudes toward the practice from the perspective of “consumers” (sport spectators or viewers). The authors’ research aim was to assess the extent to which the knowledge of and attitudes toward ambush marketing by *participants* in a major international sporting event differs from those of “consumers” in the prior studies. A longitudinal study, with surveys conducted following both the 2005 and 2008 ING New York Marathons, was conducted in an attempt to answer this research question.

Literature review

The majority of research has focused on the efficacy of ambush marketing campaigns in terms of spectators’ levels of recall and recognition of official sponsors versus non-official sponsors (McDaniel & Kinney, 1996; Sandler & Shani, 1989, 1992); and consumer confusion regarding the classification, recognition and recall of sponsors; (Lyberger & McCarthy, 2001; McDaniel & Kinney, 1998; Sandler & Shani, 1989; 1993; Shani & Sandler, 1998). Studies have found that significant lack of consumer opposition to the practice of ambush marketing (Sandler & Shani, 1998), “a general acceptance of the practice” (Lyberger & McCarthy, 2001: 137); and strong support among consumers that ambush marketing is neither unfair nor unethical (Meenaghan, 1998).

A more recent multi-national study based on the 2000 Olympic Games study found that consumers were “slightly opposed to the practice” of ambush marketing (Seguin et al., 2005: 224). The findings in this study, many of which contradict those in prior studies, might be attributable to the heightened publicity and attention that the Olympic organisation devotes to the practice of ambush marketing.

Only two prior studies have focused on *participants* attitudes toward the practice of ambush marketing. The first was a pen-and-paper survey conducted with participants in the 1990 NYC Marathon (Sandler & Shani, 1992). The second was an on-line survey of ING NYC Marathon participants in 2005 (Sandler & McKelvey, 2006). The researchers followed up their 2005 study with an identical study of participants in the 2008 ING New York City Marathon.

Research design and data analysis

Several meetings were held with the NYC Marathon event organisers to develop the survey instrument, which was modeled after the one utilised by Shani and Sandler (1998). Demographic information was collected at the end of the survey. Survey Monkey was utilised for the online data collection. Similar to the 2005 survey, the event organisers emailed a brief

letter with a link to the survey to 5,000 participants one week following the Marathon. Data was analysed using SPSS.

Results

1743 Marathon participants responded for a 34% response rate. Questions regarding knowledge of and attitudes toward practice of ambush marketing required responses on a 1-7 Likert scale (1=strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). The table below shows sampling of top-line results for the 2008 survey.

Question (paraphrased/condensed to also include ambush marketing context)	Response Average	% - Cum of 6-7
STRONG AGREEMENT		
Official NYC Marathon logo may be used only by Official Sponsors Note: highest percentage (44%) answered "7"	5.73	63%
NYC Marathon sponsors are industry leaders	4.79	33%
My opinion of ambush marketing companies is lowered	4.70	35%
More likely to buy products from NYC Marathon sponsors	4.54	19%
Ambush marketing is unethical	4.50	32%
MILD AGREEMENT		
Able to distinguish difference between official sponsors and non-sponsors	4.37	26%
Will make effort to purchase products of sponsors	4.36	21%
Annoyed by non-sponsor companies associating with NYC Marathon	4.22	22%
STRONG DISAGREEMENT		
It is fair for companies to ambush market	2.96	6%
Companies that ambush market are clever Note: highest percentage (26%) answered "1"	2.90	6%

Discussion and conclusion

In this longitudinal study, the results from both the 2005 and 2008 on line surveys of ING NYC Marathon participants were remarkably similar. In both studies, participants evidenced a remarkably high level of knowledge of sponsorship rights. Also, when compared to the prior studies of "consumers" (spectators/viewers), respondents in this longitudinal survey demonstrated significantly more negative attitudes toward the practice of ambush marketing generally, and toward companies that engage in ambush marketing tactics. For instance, they were much more likely to find the practice of ambush marketing to be unethical and unfair. Interestingly, respondents felt less strongly with respect to issues of purchase intent. This presentation will also discuss the impact that various demographics and levels of participant experience have on knowledge of and attitudes toward ambush marketing, as well as the implications of these findings for event organisers seeking to combat ambush marketing.

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