

Marketing with Olympic Symbols and the Anti Ambush Campaign – Does Anyone Care?

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Abstract

Background

The Olympic Games have experienced phenomenal growth over the past thirty years. Hosting the Olympic Games is now a complex and expensive undertaking that needs the support of the private sector:

"Without the support of the business community, without its technology, expertise, people, services, products, telecommunications, its financing – the Olympic Games could not and cannot happen. Without this support, the athletes cannot compete and achieve their very best in the world's best sporting event."[1]

The revenues from broadcasting (TV) rights and other marketing rights (e.g. sponsorship) make up most of the financing sources of Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (OCOG) and National Olympic Committees (NOCs). The International Olympic Committee (IOC) worldwide sponsorship program (TOP) has increased by 900% over a 20 year period (table 1).

Table 1: Evolution of TOP program

| | TOP I 1985– 1988 | TOP II 1989– 1992 | TOP III 1993– 1996 | TOP IV 1997– 2000 | TOP V 2001– 2004 | TOP VI 2005– 2008 |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Number of companies | 9 | 12 | 10 | 11 | 10 | 12 |
| Number of NOCs | 159 | 169 | 197 | 199 | 202 | 202 |
| Revenue generated in US \$million | 96 | 172 | 279 | 579 | 663 | 866 |

This suggests that the Olympics are a powerful brand with the ability to provide commercial partners with much value. Hence, it is not surprising that despite being offered exclusivity worldwide, TOP sponsors are not the only companies seeking to create an association with the Olympic brand. In fact, many non-sponsors feel compelled to use this exclusive marketing platform with the hopes of reaching some cognitive association with the Olympic values.[4] Such attempts are also commonly known as 'ambush marketing'. The main goals of ambush marketing are to gain some

of the benefits of being associated with a mega event (e.g. Olympic Games) while weakening the impact of an official sponsor (i.e. competitor).[3] In other words, the association with a highly emotional and positively perceived event captures the attention of consumers while simultaneously causing "cluttering" due to an increase number of corporations that advertise using an Olympic theme as a platform.[4] Consequently, cluttering causes "noise" in the communication process[5] since a number of companies are fighting for the attention of consumers to specific messages and/or commercial actions. If left uncontrolled, ambush marketing and cluttering may lead to a decrease in the willingness of sponsors (and potential sponsors) to purchase Olympic marketing rights. According to former IOC marketing director Michael Payne "ambush marketing has the potential to destroy sponsorship"[2] and ultimately jeopardize the financing of the Olympic Movement.

The IOC demonstrates that such concerns must be taken seriously. Therefore the marketing department developed a medial offence for the Olympic Winter Games 2006 to protect the official Olympic partners while shaming the ambushers (figure 1).



Figure 1: anti ambush campaign: model of the IOC and illustration of the NOC Germany

This so called anti ambush campaign should educate and sensitize the consumers with the goal to change their reactions and attitudes towards ambush marketing. The advertisement was published before the Games. Until now no independent study researched, if the campaign succeeded respectively if the campaign has the potential to achieve the announced goals.

Aim of Paper

This paper will prove the effects of the anti ambush campaign concerning the reaction and attitudes of consumers.

Research Design

200 students from the Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz are at the researcher's proposal. They will only get the general information that the study researches marketing success. The experimental framework exists of two steps.

While step one the interest in Olympics and the knowledge of the students about Olympic marketing will be tested. Moreover necessary socio demographic information will be recorded via questionnaire. After the analysis the students will be spitted into two groups (experimental group and base group) which will be as homogeneous as possible.

Two weeks later both group will watch some printed advertisement of official sponsors, non-sponsors and ambush marketers. Only the experimental group will also see the advertisement of the anti ambush campaign (stimulus). After this different input both groups have to answer a couple of questions with the following issues:

- Recognition of sponsors, non-sponsors and ambush marketers
- Valuation of the different advertisement
- Attitudes about ambush marketing (ethical, legal, economic, etc.)
- Future consumption behaviour with regard to ambush marketing

Results

The study will show differences of both groups in answering the questions and the effect of the stimulus/anti ambush campaign will be analysed. As the experiment will take place in June 2008 the results can be presented at the EASM Conference 2008.

References

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