

International Sponsorship and Sponsorship Awareness: Evaluating Chinese Advertisements prior to the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games

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Abstract

Aim of the Paper

In March 2008, the international press claimed that the Beijing Olympic Games' sponsors would be dragged into the dirt due to the Chinese government's view on Tibet, thus adding a further dimension to sponsoring a mega-sporting event in Asia (Dolles & Soderman 2008). The focus of this exploratory research paper is to identify and describe the factors of importance concerning international sponsorship activities in the seven years preceding the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. In this pursuit we will be paying more attention to the strategic role played by sponsorship (Soderman & Dolles, 2008).

Theoretical Background

Sponsorship evaluation still remains a challenge with 75% of sponsors showing very limited in evaluation (Crompton, 2004). This limited interest may be the reason for the lack of publicly available metrics. While inclusion of certain measures is critical for future research, evaluation of sponsorship must determine its effectiveness in achieving sponsors' objectives and its relative effectiveness (O'Reilly et al., 2007). The fact that sponsors rarely pursue a single sponsoring objective presents further difficulties when determining its value. In our approach sponsoring is supposed to be closely related to co-branding and is linked to the event. Both aspects are incorporated in a six factors' "means-objectives model": (1) Co-sponsoring, (2) revenue streams and (3) new customers are means factors. Objective factors are (4) product, (5) corporation and (6) region.

Methodology and Data Analysis

Data sampling was done twice in China. The 2006 measurement consists of 200 randomly collected excerpts from clippings: 120 Chinese national newspaper articles, press releases, advertisements and 80 Chinese Web articles and advertisements from Beijing 2008 sponsors and Beijing Olympic activities. Data gathering covered four weeks between June and July 2006. We also searched on the internet using keywords in Chinese and English related to the Olympics. The advertisement clippings covered the January to July 2006 period. A second measurement followed in 2007 using the same design. This time we collected 292 excerpts and advertisements clippings from

44 newspapers and magazines. The investigated number of officially announced BOCOG sponsors numbered 26 in 2006 and grew to 45 in 2007.

The matching of excerpts with questions is made by applying a qualitative content analysis following Creswell (2003) suggestion by analysing indications as codes. Here all 492 excerpts were carefully examined and codified based on a set of questions attached to the six factors in our proposed model.

Results, Discussions, Implications

The result reveals six types of mean-objective combinations patterns and a time dimension. One pattern emerges in 2001-2003, three patterns in 2004-2006 and two patterns in 2007-2008. The "co-branding" is the main factor according to our examined excerpts during the preparatory stage. The three patterns represent three different marketing strategies. For an international brand like Coca-Cola, it prefers to put itself down into the Chinese market by constructing a solid foundation that combines customers and products. For a national brand like China Mobile, an eye is kept on both revenue and product image at the same time to enforce its strength in the local market. And for a second tier national brand like HengYuanXiang, focus is placed on improving its corporation image on the international stage. The two latter patterns show that sponsoring companies are shifting their interest to "revenue generation" and strengthening their "product image".

The empirical conclusions constitute an outsider's view on actual objectives and on assumed corporate means and objectives. It is assumed that advertisements from Chinese sources form a picture of Chinese sponsorship awareness and actual decision making at sponsoring firms. One of our key factors is "brand equity". Some sponsoring firms, however, do not seem to have started any strengthening action of their brand equity yet.

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