

## Sporting mega events: towards a framework for managing the threats posed by ambush marketers

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The aim of this paper is to identify the threats posed to sporting mega-events by ambush marketing and, in the context of these threats, to propose a framework that can be used by sport managers seeking to address these threats.

Following questions about the way in which their sponsorship deals were being sold, allied to concerns about value added to contracts with its commercial partners, the IOC introduced the TOP programme at the 1984 Olympic Games (OG). This revolutionised the sale of sponsorships, leading to the bundling of rights packages and the granting of category exclusivity. In the case of the IOC, this resulted in the sale of sponsorship rights to a small number of sponsors, who are protected by legislative measures. Companies that do not have a contract with the IOC therefore have any legal right of association with the OG. This model of selling/managing sponsorship is one that has been copied and is now common to many sporting mega-events. In response, companies with no legal right of association with events such as the OG, have sought to secure the same benefits as official sponsors by engaging in ambush marketing. Chadwick and Burton (2011) have defined ambush marketing as: "The marketing activities of a brand seeking to capitalize on the attention, awareness, fan equity, and goodwill generated by having an association with an event or property, beyond the official or authorized rights of association delivered by that event or property."

Research into ambush marketing has thus far been limited, with only three coherent strands of study: definitional studies; studies addressing the ethical implications of ambushing; and studies exploring legal matters related to ambushing. A major deficiency in the literature is in the area of managing the threats posed by ambush marketers. That is, the way in which sporting mega-event owners and/or official sponsors account for and respond to the way in which rival companies and brands engage in activities that can be deemed as being ambushing. Chadwick and Burton (2010) is a formative study that highlighted significant issues (and related research opportunities in this area), and it is within this context that this abstract is written.

A three-phase methodology was used by this study; during the first phase of the research, a database of

reported cases (n=1870) of ambushing was compiled and analysed. The purpose of this was to understand the nature of ambushing in each case, and the way in which event and sponsorship managers had responded to the threat of ambushing. Observations made were employed as the basis in formulating a set of questions which were used in a series of semi-structured interviews (n=11) during the second phase. Analysis of interview transcripts was carried out using manual coding techniques and appropriate measures of inter-coder agreement. The purpose of this phase was to generate items for interviews conducted during Phase 3 of the study. Phase 3 entailed structured interviews (n=12), which were recorded, transcribed and analysed using NVivo 8.0. The purpose of these interviews was to enable the development of a theoretically grounded and legitimized conceptualization of ambush marketing; the construction of a typology of ambush marketing strategy; and the identification of key managerial responses and future directions in sponsorship. During Phases 2 and 3, interviews were conducted with industrial professionals including sponsorship managers, brand managers, event managers/owners, and members of the legal profession.

The findings of this study are essentially three-fold; firstly, it is clear that, in spite of the efforts of rights holders to protect the marketing landscape around sporting mega-events, ambush marketing remains a real and growing threat to sporting mega-event sponsorship. Secondly, as has been reported elsewhere by the authors of this paper, different types of ambush marketing appear to exist. Thirdly, and most importantly in terms of this paper's aims, a management framework consisting of five key variables has been identified as being central to addressing the threats to sporting mega-events posed by ambush marketing. The five variables are: the strategic management of sponsorship packages by events/sponsors; active relationship management between events/sponsors; the use of sponsorship-linked marketing activities by events/sponsors; the role of enforceable protection measures that can be utilised by events/sponsors; and the way in which legislative means are interpreted and enforced by events/sponsors.

### References

- Chadwick, S., and Burton, N. (2010), 'Ambushed', Sloan Management Review Executive Insight, 22 January, accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2012 from: <http://sloanreview.mit.edu/executive-adviser/2010-1/5212/ambushed/>
- Chadwick, S., and Burton, N. (2011), 'The evolving sophistication of ambush marketing: A typology of strategies: 53: 709-719.