

Negative effects of multiple sponsoring and ambushing of mega sports events: The case of FIFA Soccer World Cup 2006 and UEFA Euro 2008

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Numerous companies use mega sports events like FIFA Soccer World Cup or Olympic Games to reach their objectives through event sponsorship and ambush marketing. By applying different leveraging techniques to promote their event engagement, these companies create a cluttered environment (Cornwell, Relyea, Irwin & Maignan, 2000; Séguin & O'Reilly, 2008). This again may result in confusion of the target groups concerning the companies' association to the event and thus, can have negative effects on the success of sport-marketing communication (Sandler & Shani, 1989). Drawing on Turnbull et al. (Turnbull, Leek & Ying; 2000), we define consumer confusion as interfered information processing which impedes consumers' ability to select and interpret relevant stimuli. However, the major limitation of previous definitions and conceptualisations is that this 'core' of consumer confusion and the sources of its emergence are intertwined (Mitchell & Papavassiliou, 1997; Mitchell, Walsh & Yamin, 2005). Deploying conditions for establishing causality (Edwards & Bagozzi, 2000), we argue that the construct should be separated from the following antecedents:

- Perceived stimuli overload (PSO) results from the accumulated effects of many messages by a large number of sponsors and ambushers during an event.
- Perceived stimuli similarity (PSS) evolves from sponsors' and ambushers' similar communication content and formal similarity (e.g., slogan, pictures), especially in situations of high similarity of the advertised products.
- Perceived stimuli ambiguity (PSA) as ambiguous, misleading, inadequate, and conflicting information reflects a typical side effect in information rich environments (e.g., different sponsor categories during mega sports events).

We add knowledge to sport-sponsorship research by developing a model that relates PSO, PSS, and PSA – caused by event sponsorship and ambush marketing – to consumer confusion. Furthermore, we address relationships of confusion to other sponsorship-relevant concepts. Since sponsorship aims at influencing brand awareness, we test the hypothesis that confusion impairs the aided recall of sponsors. Moreover, research shows that consumers feel annoyed by confusion (Dalakas, Madrigal & Burton, 2004), which may lead to reactance (Brehm & Brehm, 1981). Since reactance can have mental and behavioural effects (Brehm, 1972), we claim that confusion might negatively influence the attitude toward the company's sponsorship activities. Another reactant reaction could be opposite buying behaviour to punish companies using the event for their communication (i.e., reactant behavioural intention) (Séguin & O'Reilly, 2008), which is our final hypothesis.

Research design and data analysis

We conducted two studies to test our model. Using data collected during the FIFA Soccer World Cup 2006 in Germany ($n = 1,626$, $M = 25.8$ years, 46.8% female) and the UEFA EURO 2008 ($n = 465$, $M = 25.4$ years, 44.3% female), in total 2,091 Germans participated in an online survey. We analyse the data applying structural equation modelling (LISREL 8.7). The measurement models show high reliabilities (AVE_{FIFA} ranging from .59 to .71; AVE_{UEFA} from .61 to .83) as well as convergent and discriminant validity in both studies (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Good overall fit of the structural path model suggests that the model fits the data well (FIFA: $RMSEA = .062$, $CFI = .96$, $NNFI = .95$; UEFA: $RMSEA = .057$, $CFI = .97$, $NNFI = .96$) (Hu & Bentler, 1998).

Results

The results of both studies provide evidence of negative effects induced by cluttered environments (i.e., PSO, PSS, PSA) that result from multiple sponsorship and ambush marketing. PSO is connected upstream with PSS and PSA which, in turn, both lead to consumer confusion. Thus, it is the combination of multiple sponsorships and ambusher activities that confuses consumers during mega sports events. Furthermore, the analyses show that confused consumers have less memory of sponsors and are more likely to perceive ambushers as official sponsors. Therefore, ambushers seem to reach one of their objectives which is to confuse consumers concerning sponsors' linkage to the event (Shani & Sandler, 1998). Moreover, confusion negatively impacts on the attitude toward the company's sponsorship activities and enhances reactant behavioural intentions. Since consumers have difficulties distinguishing sponsors from ambushers, these negative effects are not limited to either of them.

Discussion and conclusion

In conclusion, from the sponsors' perspective PSA, PSS, PSA and confusion exert a primarily negative impact: a weak recall as sponsor of the event, a worsened attitude toward their activity as a sponsor, and reactant behavioural intentions. The ambushers' perspective implies a differentiated view. They increase the PSO by participating in an event and thereby, the PSS and PSA of communication activities. This leads to consumer confusion and weakens the sponsors' advantage over their competitors. But, this runs the risk of hampering themselves since consumers are not able to distinguish between sponsors and ambushers anymore. Thus, we argue that both the worsened attitude toward sponsorship and the reactant behavioural intentions were not only limited to the sponsors, but also influence the ambushers. Ironically, this effect particularly impacts ambushers which were successful in linking their companies or brands to the event.

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