

Ambush Marketing: Is Confusion To Blame for the Flickering of the Flame?*

David Shani

Kean College of New Jersey

Dennis M. Sandler

Pace University

ABSTRACT

Previous studies about the use of ambush marketing during major global sports events like the Olympics concentrated on the battle between ambush marketers versus official sponsors, and their success or failure to create a high level of recall or recognition. Almost no attention has been paid to the role event organizers are playing in this battle. This article presents the view that the Olympic event organizers are partially to blame for the growing use of ambush marketing, and the indifference that consumers exhibit to the use of ambush marketing. Data collected from a random sample of 1,500 consumers following the conclusion of the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games reveal that consumers exhibit a lack of knowledge and confusion about the rights of official sponsors, the different levels of sponsorship, and the commitment to the event that is associated with each sponsorship level. Furthermore, the results demonstrate consumers' apathy to the use of ambush marketing. Some implications and actions that event organizers should take to improve consumer knowledge about the role of sponsors and to increase consumer public opinion against ambushers are suggested.

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*The authors are listed in a random order and contributed equally to the article.

Sponsorship has undergone a rapid growth in recent years in both the dollars devoted to it and its prominence as a legitimate element of a company's promotional mix. As traditional media have become more expensive and cluttered, sponsorship is viewed as a cost-effective alternative. From a level of about \$500 million in 1982, corporate event sponsorship is projected to reach \$5.9 billion in 1997, of which sports event sponsorship accounts for \$3.84 billion (65%) (Sportfacts 1997). This growth in the use of sponsorship is a worldwide phenomenon. As pointed out by Meenaghan(1994), “. . . given its suitability as a method of global communications, sponsorship now represents a major worldwide industry with 1993 world expenditure estimated at \$10.8 billion . . .” A more recent estimate by the International Events Group (IEG) puts the worldwide expenditure for sponsorship around \$13.5 billion (IEG, 1996).

The staging of the Olympic Games demonstrates in a very vivid way the importance of sponsorship to such a world class event. It is obvious that an event that requires such heavy investments and commitment could not exist without the commercial support of sponsors. At the same time, the value of sponsorship as an effective promotional tool is increasingly being questioned. First, there is a growing concern that the excessive sponsorship-linked marketing activities surrounding the Olympic Games led to overcommercialization of the Olympics (Commercial Olympics, 1996; Ettorre, 1993). Second, the increasing variety of official sponsor designations creates confusion in the minds of consumers, who consequently have difficulties in identifying sponsors (Stotlar, 1993). Third, a growing number of companies without any official designation are finding creative ways to associate themselves with the event and engage in the tactic of “ambush marketing” (Graham, 1997). The final result is a very confused customer who is unable to distinguish between companies and their level of association with the event. Thus, official sponsors or potential sponsors are beginning to question their return on the sponsorship investment (Graham, 1997; Wage, 1996). These concerns are not unique to the Olympic Games. Similar concerns are widespread among sponsors and event organizers across other sport events and cultural and community-based events.

This article argues that the growing use of ambush marketing and the indifference that consumers exhibit to this tactic rests partially on the shoulders of the Olympic Game organizers. The lack of information provided by organizers to consumers, and the overcommercialization of the event in the quest for more revenue, has created an environment of consumer confusion with regard to sponsorship. This high level of consumer confusion is conducive to the practice of ambush marketing. Graham (1997) points to a “very disturbing trend on the part of event owners—claiming willingness to do whatever it takes to protect their sponsors while simultaneously engaging in activities designed to bolster their own financial position at the expense of their sponsors” (p. 12).

This paper tests empirically this state of confusion over sponsorship, and concludes with suggestions for actions that should be taken by event organizers to create an environment that will minimize the use of ambush marketing.

THE EVOLUTION OF OLYMPIC SPONSORSHIP/AMBUSH MARKETING

The evolution of and changes in the Olympic Games has been a main cause for the growth in importance of sponsorship as a legitimate promotional tool and ambush marketing as a tactic used by nonsponsors. It is a misconception to believe that the Olympic Games ever existed without some kind of sponsorship. The first modern Olympics in Athens 1896 was made possible by a gift of one million drachmas from a wealthy architect by the name of Georgios Averoff, as well as the sale of souvenirs (stamps, medals) and advertising in the game program (Kodak was one such advertiser) (Sponsorship, 1996).

In the 1912 Olympic Games, the Olympic Committee went a step further in making sponsorship an important fixture of the Games by allowing companies who paid a certain amount to take photographs of the competition and use it for promotional purposes (Olympic Games, 1997). The Olympic Games in Paris in 1924 was the only time that advertising was allowed inside the Olympic Stadium. Because of the uproar this caused, the IOC banned such a practice. This ban is still in effect, despite the commercialization of almost every other aspect of the Olympic Games. During the 1928 Games in Amsterdam, the IOC allowed the use of on-site stalls to sell products. Coca-Cola was one of the first companies to take advantage of this new avenue to support the Olympic Games and receive commercial benefits.

As the size and popularity of the Olympic Games has increased, so has the cost of staging the Games. The organizing committees of host cities realized that they needed to increase the number of sponsors and other commercial arrangements to pay for the cost of staging the Games. The 1950s and 1960s saw a large increase in the number of Olympic sponsors: from 46 in the 1960 Games in Rome to 628 sponsors in the 1976 Olympic Games in Montreal (Olympic Issues, 1996; Sponsorship, 1996). During this period of growth in the number of sponsors there were no significant efforts to ambush. Olympic Games sponsorship was an open marketplace, and any company that desired to become a sponsor could do it. Thus, there was no incentive to ambush.

The 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles redefined the Olympic sponsorship market. For the first time, the supporters of the Olympic Games were separated into three categories: official sponsors, suppliers, and licensees. Moreover, in each designation the organizing committee created exclusive categories and reduced and limited the number of spon-

sors. The idea was that by increasing the value of sponsorship the organizing committee would be able to negotiate higher fees. From this point of view the strategy was indeed effective. These were the first Olympic Games held without any public money, and even generated a profit of slightly over \$200 million (Graham, Goldblat & Delpy, 1995). However, this new strategy of limiting the number of sponsors and giving them exclusivity in a product category, forced major competitors of an exclusive sponsor to resort to other tactics to be associated with the Olympic Games—ambush marketing was born.

In light of the financial success of the 1984 sponsorship strategy, the IOC went even a step further. In 1985 it created The Olympic Program (TOP). This program further limited the number of major sponsors to about 12 worldwide sponsors by creating product categories tailored to industries with major global corporations with deep pockets. The TOP sponsors, in return for a hefty fee, receive worldwide exclusivity to use almost any conceivable association with the Olympic Games. This includes the use of all Olympic symbols on their products or any promotion activity, exclusive hospitality arrangements at the Games, preferential access to broadcast advertising, and the opportunity for on-site concessions and product showcases (Olympic Issues, 1996).

The 1988 Olympic Games saw the implementation of the TOP program. Although financially it created the revenue stream that the IOC was hoping for, it also opened the ambush marketing Pandora's box. Competing against the TOP sponsors were other global corporations with marketing expertise and equally large financial resources to draw upon. Realizing the growing importance of the Olympic Games as a marketing tool, they were determined to find ways to associate themselves with the Olympics and ambush the official sponsors. The field was set for one of the most competitive events of the Olympic Games: ambush marketing.

Ambush marketing could not be a successful tactic in a well-informed marketplace. Ambush marketing can be a successful tactic only when consumers are not well informed about who are the official sponsors, what are their rights, and what is the role the sponsors play in staging the Olympic Games. Without this knowledge, nonsponsors are enticed to use various tactics to associate themselves with the Olympic Games without directly helping or contributing to the event. Although the organizers have done a terrific job in building the Olympics into the world's premiere sports (and marketing) event, they have not invested in educating and providing consumers with the necessary level of knowledge required to identify and reward the official sponsors. Furthermore, the Olympic organizers fail to educate consumers about the negative and destructive impact ambushers might have on the future of the Olympic Games. Perhaps it was the growing stream of revenues that blinded the organizers from realizing that the most important revenue generators are the consumers. Thus, the organizers should not leave the

sole responsibility of educating and informing consumers about the sponsors to the sponsoring organizations. The Olympic organizers should continuously invest a share of their revenues to investigate and implement effective promotional and educational efforts to build a higher level of knowledge and consequently reduce the level of confusion consumers are facing in each Olympic Games.

WHAT IS AMBUSH MARKETING?

Paralleling the growth in sponsorship was an increase in the practice of ambush marketing. Some considered ambushing as a reactive strategy against competitors to weaken their sponsorship efforts (McKelvey, 1994; Payne, 1993). However, ambushing is more likely prompted by a desire to be associated with the event itself and the attendant benefits that would bring. The extreme case that makes this point would occur if there were no official sponsor in a product category. Would a company in that product category that tried to associate with the event without paying the organizers a fee be guilty of ambushing? Most would agree that it would, in which case the ambush is against the event, not the competitors. An example is Nike's actions during 1996 Games. There was no official shoe sponsor, yet Nike tried to associate with the event and was accused of ambushing the event (though it was a sponsor to various teams and governing bodies). Therefore, any definition of ambushing should not necessarily limit the positioning of ambushing marketing as only a tactic against competitors. A definition offered by Sandler and Shani (1989) focuses on the objective of ambushing: "a planned effort by an organization to associate itself indirectly with an event in order to gain at least some of the recognition and benefits that are associated with being an official sponsor" (p. 11). Similarly, the IEG defines ambushing as "a promotional strategy whereby a nonsponsor attempts to capitalize on the popularity or prestige of a property by giving the false impression that it is a sponsor" (IEG Network, 1997).

Ambushing was first thought to be a somewhat devious, unethical tactic, and an unfair marketing practice. However, recent work has recognized its place as a legitimate marketing strategy. Meenaghan (1996) points out that "many former perceived transgressions are now seen as legitimate sponsorship opportunities" (p. 107). He also says that ambushing is a "continuum of situations," with marketers employing various means of associating with events. Graham (1997) argues that ambush marketers "have become increasingly clever and stealthy in the planning and execution of their activities. Legal boundaries are stretched to their limit while great care is taken to avoid violations" (p. 12). In all of these tactics, a confusion is created in the mind of the consumer as to who is an official sponsor. The Olympic organizers should be taking some of the blame for the confusion in the market. The

organizers continuously have been adding and changing the sponsorship categories and their associated rights, without informing and educating consumers. Also, the Olympic organizers did not engage in any significant effort to directly publicize and inform the consumers about who are the sponsors. This task was left to the sponsoring organizations.

THE ROLE OF EVENT ORGANIZERS

Past research has shown that most sponsorship objectives are consumer related (vs. trade related or employee related) (Polansky et al. 1996). Sponsorship is viewed as part of a firm's communications mix, with objectives related to image, sales, awareness, et cetera. To increase the value of sponsorship, it is vital that consumers have a correct understanding of the role of sponsors and a positive attitude toward their contribution to the event. A well-informed marketplace will increase the value of sponsorship, and thus the potential revenue for event organizers.

However, event organizers seem focused on harvesting as much income from sponsors as possible, with little concern for the consequences regarding consumer confusion over the sponsorship of their events. For example, organizers have developed multiple layers of sponsor categories. We have seen the Olympic organizers create the new category of *partners* for the 1996 Atlanta Games, while retaining the term *sponsor* for other supporters, thus adding to the confusion. As categories proliferate, discipline and control of sponsorship become issues of greater concern. As Meenaghan (1996) points out, many sponsorship layers are not controlled by organizers: (e.g. media sponsors, players' pool, theme advertising etc.). Thus there is an increased potential for sponsor conflict and a higher level of consumer confusion.

Sports Illustrated provided a vivid description of the level of commercialization allowed by the organizers of the Olympic Games: ". . . the Coca-Cola logos being projected onto the subway station floors, the demise of buses, street poles and barricades to make way for Minute Maid buses, Visa Street poles and Powerade barricades . . . McDonald's executives surely kicked up their heels when they realized they could elevate their golden arches just high enough outside the Olympic Stadium that when athletes appeared at the top of an enormous ramp . . . it seemed as if they were marching straight out of the maw of a McDonald's drive-thru window" (Commercial Olympics, 1996). If the organizers are prepared to allow this level of commercialization, they should not expect nonsponsors to treat the Olympics differently than any other commercial battleground with their competitors (sponsors). Moreover, without the information necessary for consumers to appreciate the role of sponsors, organizers should not expect consumers to treat the Olympic Games any differently than any

other promotional effort. Therefore, such a level of commercialization creates an environment among organizations and consumers that is conducive to ambush marketing. Ambush marketing would not exist if consumers understood the role of sponsors and were able to clearly distinguish between official sponsors who are contributing directly to the Olympic Games, and ambushers who are associating themselves with the event without directly contributing to it.

At the same time the IOC was creating a huge commercial success with the Olympic Games, it also created a bidding war for the broadcasting rights to the Games. As a result the network cost increased significantly. NBC agreed to pay about \$4 billion for rights to broadcast the Olympics from 2000 to 2008 (Centennial Olympics, 1996). To justify such high fees the networks have been increasing the number of coverage hours to create more available time for advertising during the broadcast. This increased the supply of advertising time, and opened the door for nonsponsors to use a legal and very effective method of association with the Olympic Games—advertising during the Olympic broadcast. Thus, again the event organizers created indirectly a way for nonsponsors to ambush official sponsors of the event.

This increased level of confusion was not accompanied by any effort by event organizers to provide the necessary information to increase the level of knowledge that consumers possess regarding the role and rights of official sponsors. Perhaps this is because the organizers believe that most of the consumers are well informed, and capable of identifying and rewarding the sponsors. The results of the research outlined in this article suggest that this belief may be unfounded.

FOCUS OF THE STUDY

Previous research about ambush marketing concentrated on the successes or failure of ambush marketers versus official sponsors in terms of creating a high level of recall or recognition (McDaniel & Kinney, 1996; Sandler & Shani, 1989, 1992). Very little attention has been paid to the role of the event organizers in reducing consumer confusion by informing the public as to who is and who is not supporting the Olympic Games and the extent to which different levels and categories of sponsorship require different amounts of support. As there is no onus on consumers to inform themselves, then the question remains as to whose responsibility it becomes to inform the public and how this to be done.

In the past the role of the organizers in creating an environment that is conducive to the growing practice of ambush marketing has not been investigated. The Olympic Games organizers have concentrated on enforcing the law or frightening ambush marketers or potential ambush marketers. The organizers have been treating the ambush marketers as the problem, and fail to recognize that the proliferation of ambush

marketing is just a symptom of the underlying problem of consumer confusion. Any effort to reduce or eliminate the use of ambush marketing must involve dealing with the lack of knowledge consumers have about the role that sponsors play in the staging of the Games, and the privileges they receive from doing so.

To explore the extent to which an environment conducive to ambush marketing exists for the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games, a research study was designed to investigate the following research issues. Specifically the study sought to determine

1. Consumer knowledge regarding the various rights of official sponsors and the existence of ambush marketers
2. Consumer knowledge regarding the level of support received from different categories of sponsorship
3. Consumer attitudes toward the practice of ambushing

RESEARCH DESIGN

To examine the specific research issues listed above, a questionnaire was mailed to a national random sample of 1,500 consumers immediately following the conclusion of the Olympic Games in Atlanta (August 4, 1996). Respondents were instructed to return their completed response within 2 weeks, in the provided prepaid envelopes.

The questionnaire was based on one used by Shani and Sandler (1992), and consisted of four parts. Section 1 sought to determine (a) consumers' involvement with the Olympics, and (b) their knowledge of level of support and rights of the Olympic sponsors. The second section was designed to elicit the attitudes consumers have regarding Olympic sponsors. Recall and recognition questions about official sponsors and ambushers were presented in the third section, and the final section included demographic questions to determine the respondent's demographic profile.

SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

The sample demographics indicate a diverse body of respondents, reflecting the wide appeal of the Olympic Games. The respondents' ages ranged from 17 to 77, with an average age of 47. Over 75% were married and two-thirds were employed in some capacity. Two-thirds of the respondents were female, perhaps reflecting the high level of interest of the Olympics among females. The education and income levels reflect a somewhat upscale group, with an average yearly income over \$60,000 and more than 75% possessing at least some college education.

INVOLVEMENT MEASURES

Two measures, one behavioral and one attitudinal, were used to assess the respondent level of involvement with the Olympic Games. First, the respondents were asked to indicate how many days of the 17 days of the Olympic telecast they had watched: the average for the sample was 11 days. About 30% of the sample indicated that they watched the telecast every day. The respondents also reported that they watched an average of 2.5 hr each day. Thus, the average viewer in the study was exposed to 27.5 hr of Olympic broadcasting. For the purpose of further analysis, the respondents were classified into three groups: light viewers (about 28% of sample) watched 1–6 days, moderate viewers (21% of sample) watched 6–12 days, and heavy viewers (51% of sample) watched 13–17 days. It is interesting to compare this distribution to the viewing patterns reported during the 1988 Winter Olympics (Sandler & Shani, 1989). The same group percentages were 41.4%, 27.2%, and 31.3% respectively. The current sample exhibits a higher level of interest. It may also indicate the higher popularity and broader appeal of the Summer Games compared to the Winter Games. Also, it points to the higher level of involvement that the Olympic Games generate among consumers in the host country.

The attitudinal measure of involvement was assessed by asking respondents to indicate how much they care about the Olympic Games on a scale of 1–7 (1 = “care a great deal,” 7 = “do not care”). The mean score on the scale was 2.5, indicating a high level of involvement, with over 55% of the respondents indicating the two highest levels. Only 7% of the sample indicated the lowest level. For the purposes of further analysis, the respondents were divided into two groups. The high-involvement group consisted of 160 respondents (those indicating 1, 2, or 3 on the 7-point scale) and the low-involvement group contained 43 respondents (those who indicated 5, 6, or 7).

This initial analysis of the sample indicates that the sample is diverse, is highly involved with the Olympic Games, and has a great deal of interest in and exposure to the Olympic Games. Thus, it presents an appropriate sample for investigating consumers’ knowledge about sponsors’ rights and consumer attitudes toward the practice of ambush marketing.

DATA ANALYSIS

Consumer Knowledge about Official Sponsors

As argued before, ambush marketing can be effective only if a significant number of consumers do not possess sufficient knowledge about the rights of official sponsors. To investigate the level of knowledge, the

respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with two basic statements: "The Olympic logo can be used by any company during the Olympic Games," and "Only commercials of Olympic sponsors can be shown during the Olympic telecast." The results appear in the first two rows of Table 1.

It is clear that although there is a high level of knowledge about the right to use the Olympic logo (86.5% answered correctly), there is much more confusion with regards to advertisers during the Olympic telecast. The results indicate that about a third of the respondents believe that whoever advertised during the telecast is an official sponsor. This indicates that the use of advertising during the Olympic telecast is a highly effective ambush tactic.

Consumers Knowledge of Sponsorship Categories

It was earlier argued that a contributing factor to the existence of ambush marketing is a high level of confusion among consumers because of the existence of a variety of sponsorship categories and arrangements. The Olympic organizers exploited sponsorship as a source of revenue by creating layers of sponsorship involvement. For example, in the 1996 Games a new sponsorship category was introduced: Official Partner. This category is at a lower level of support than a worldwide TOP sponsor but at a higher level of support than official sponsor. The introduction of a new layer might generate more revenue but most likely adds to the confusion among consumers.

The last two questions in Table 1 examine this issue. Sixty-three percent of the respondents were wrong in answering that official sponsors

Table 1. Sponsorship Knowledge among Respondents.

Statement	Correct Response (%)	Comments
The Olympic logo can be used by any company During the Olympic Games.	86.5% (N = 202)	"No" is the correct response
Only commercials of Olympic Sponsors can be shown during the Olympic telecast.	67.4% (N = 193)	"No" is the correct response
Companies that are Official Sponsors of the Olympic Games provide a higher level of support than companies that are Official Partners.	37% (N = 187)	"No" is the correct response
Some companies try to present themselves as Official Sponsors without paying the fee to be Official Sponsors.	64.5% (N = 181)	"Yes" is the correct response

have a higher level of commitment than official partners. Also, more than 35% of the sample were not aware of the practice of ambush marketing. To further investigate knowledge about the level of commitment, the respondents were presented with four categories of sponsorship and were asked to indicate which provides the highest level of support. The categories were official sponsor of the games, official sponsor of the U.S. Olympic Team, official partner of the games and official supplier of the U.S. Olympic Team. When faced with this array of sponsorship categories, only 21% of respondents indicated the right answer: official partner. The results clearly indicate that the majority of the consumers cannot distinguish correctly among the different levels of sponsorship of the Olympic Games.

In summary, the four questions in Table 1 indicate that a significant portion of the sample lacked basic knowledge about sponsor rights and of the level of support sponsors provide. This result supports the conclusions arrived by Stotlar (1993) that considerable confusion over the different levels of Olympic sponsorship exists.

Does this lack of knowledge exist only among those with little interest in the Games? To test for this relationship between knowledge and involvement, consumer knowledge was tested across the three levels of consumer involvement, measured by amount of Olympic broadcast viewing: light, moderate, and heavy TV viewers. A knowledge index was created by summing the correct responses to the four questions in Table 1. Thus, the index could take values from 0 (no correct answers) to 4 (all correct answers). Table 2 presents the results of a cross tabulation of these two variables. The chi square of 10.96 (8 degrees of freedom) is not significant (0.203). Therefore, the results indicate that there is no positive relationship between level of viewing and level of knowledge

Table 2. Sponsorship Knowledge by Viewership (Number of Days)* Knowledge Index

Number of Days Watched \ Number of Correct Answers	0	1	2	3	4	Row Total
1-6 days						58
	13.8	12.1	32.8	32.8	8.6	28.0
7-12 days						43
	7.0	9.3	25.6	44.2	14.0	20.8
13-17 days						106
	2.8	15.1	34.9	32.1	15.1	51.2
Column total	14	27	67	72	27	207
	6.8	13.0	32.4	34.8	13.0	100.0

$$\chi^2 = 10.96, df = 6.$$

*The percentage of respondents in a particular level of knowledge in each viewing category.

about sponsorship. Thus, it appears that the lack of knowledge about Olympic sponsors is widespread among all consumers. Moreover, the results indicate that no helpful information is provided during the broadcasting of the Games that will increase the knowledge of consumers about the support and rights of Olympic sponsors.

Consumer Attitudes toward Ambush Marketing

Event organizers should seek to inform the public as to the identity and support provided by sponsors. Moreover, they should increase consumer awareness about the existence and possible impact ambushers might have on the Olympic Games. This will create a negative environment for the practice of ambush marketing. The lack of a strong rejection of the practice among consumers is likely to encourage an increased use of ambush marketing. In the case of the Atlanta Olympics, the organizers had promised a strong enforcement and educational program (Graham, 1997).

The first column of Table 3 presents the mean response to each of four questions that were used to assess the respondents' attitude to ambush marketing. Each of the questions used a Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly agree") to 7 ("strongly disagree"). With the exception of the third statement, it appears that the respondents are indifferent

Table 3. Attitude toward Ambushing

	Mean Score (1-7)	Agree (%) (Checked 1, 2, or 3)	N
The practice of associating with the Olympic Games without being an Official Sponsor is unethical.	3.3	51	206
It is fair for companies to associate themselves with the Olympic Games without being Official Sponsors.	3 (reverse coded)	62	207
Non-Sponsor should not lead consumers to believe that they are Official Sponsors of the Olympic Games.	2.2	79	209
I am annoyed by companies trying to associate themselves with the Olympic Games without being Official Sponsors.	3.5	44	202

1 = "strongly agree," 7 = "strongly disagree."

about ambush marketing. About 50% do not feel strongly that ambush marketing is unethical, about 40% do not feel strongly that the practice is unfair, and over 55% are not annoyed by the fact that companies are practicing ambush marketing. These responses suggest that the educational program used by the Olympic organizers was not very effective. It did not give the consumer sufficient reason to care about ambushing. Ambush marketers are not facing consumers who are hostile toward their ambushing activities.

The only statement that appears to elicit strong agreement is the statement "Non-sponsors should not lead consumers to believe that they are official sponsors of the Olympic Games. The wording "lead consumer to believe" might well contribute to the strong negative response. However, this strong reaction might indicate the approach event organizers should take in creating a more objectionable environment for ambush marketing. Rather than attacking the ambushers and questioning their ethical standards, it might be more effective to concentrate on the consumers and show them they are being misled. Of course, prior to taking such action Olympic organizers should seek further consumer reaction on this issue.

To investigate whether there are any significant differences in the attitudes toward ambush marketing between respondents who indicated a high involvement with the Olympic Games and those who indicated a low level of involvement, a series of *t* tests between the groups was conducted. Table 4 presents the results of the analysis across the four attitudinal statements. With the exception of the third statement there are no significant differences between the groups. The only significant differences appear in the statement "non-sponsors should not lead consumers to believe that they are Official Sponsors of the Olympic Games." The less-involved group felt significantly stronger about this than the highly involved group. These results are in line with the previous discussion about the knowledge level of consumers. The results demonstrate further that, perhaps because of the lack of knowledge about sponsors and ambushers across a wide range of consumers (high and low involvement), the organizers failed to generate any strong negative feelings toward ambushers.

This finding should sound an alarm for Olympic organizers. Not only are there no strong negative feelings against the practice of ambush marketing, but, the consumers who care a great deal about the Games, and thus are the main target of official sponsors, are even more indifferent toward ambush marketing.

The results of this study should be taken with some caution. First, the findings are based on a U.S. sample. The attitude and knowledge about sponsors might vary significantly across other countries and cultures. Future research should evaluate the practice of ambush marketing in other countries, with larger cross-national samples to validate the current findings. Second, although the study argues that a higher

Table 4. Attitude toward Ambushing among High- and Low-Involvement Segments (mean score on 1-7 scale, 1 = "strongly agree," 7 = "strongly disagree")

	High Involvement* (N = 160)	Low Involvement* (N = 43)	T Value
The practice of associating with the Olympic Games without being an Official Sponsor is unethical.	2.375	2.279	1.26
It is fair for companies to associate themselves with the Olympic Games without being Official Sponsors.	3.0	2.72	1.09
Non-Sponsor should not lead consumers to believe that they are Official Sponsors of the Olympic Games.	2.25	2.07	1.75**
I am annoyed by companies trying to associate themselves with the Olympic Games without being Official Sponsors.	3.465	3.14	1.53

*High involvement (1, 2, or 3), low involvement (5, 6, 7) on a 1-7 scale (1 = "I care a great deal," and 7 = "I don't care").

**Significant at $\alpha = 0.05$.

level of confusion will lead to more effective ambush marketing, it did not directly test this premise; rather, it explored issues surrounding this topic. Future research should compare the performance of ambushers across different levels of consumer knowledge. Third, the study used untested scales to measure level of involvement and level of knowledge. More effort is required to develop and validate scales to measure the knowledge of various dimensions of sponsorship.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Meenaghan (1994) recently issued a call for further research into the phenomenon of ambush marketing. More specifically, he suggested that it was important to determine whether an audience can distinguish between the official sponsor and the ambushers and whether members of the event audience perceive the ambushers negatively. The current study takes a step in this direction by pointing out the lack of consumer knowledge and the general apathy consumers have toward the practice of ambush marketing. Also, no relationship was found between amount of viewership of the broadcast and the level of knowledge. Furthermore,

the results point to a general apathy among consumers have toward the practice of ambush marketing.

Event organizers indeed seem apprehensive about ambush marketers. It appears that the Australian Olympic authorities are about to follow a route similar to previous organizers by trying to eliminate ambush marketing through more strict legislation. The suggested list of banned words or expressions includes: Olympic; Olympics; Olympiad; Olympian; 2000 Games; Summer Games; XXVII Olympiad; Sydney Games; share the spirit; Games City; green and gold; millennium; Olympic spirit and sponsor; and gold, silver, and bronze. This list sounds ridiculously long, and even then it covers only a fraction of possibilities to be associated with the Olympic Games in Sydney. Also, the heavy hand of the Organizing Committee coming down on small business proprietors can generate negative publicity and a loss of goodwill for the Games. Companies will always find creative and legal ways to do ambush marketing if they feel they can benefit from it. The Olympic Games organizers, together with the sponsors, must realize that ambush marketing is a symptom of a problem, not the problem. The real problem is the consumer's lack of knowledge and confusion about the sponsors and their contribution to the sponsored event. This confusion will not disappear through the various legal efforts which event organizers have been taking.

Organizers should focus more direct effort on educating and providing information to consumers and less on trying to scare ambush marketers with legal action. The Atlanta Organizing Committee successfully publicized the fact that they reserved \$10 million to hunt and punish ambush marketers, but there appears to have been little effort to educate consumers. Indeed, the organizers' efforts have been reactive rather than proactive. The low level of knowledge about sponsor rights and commitment among consumers found in this study shows the need for such a program.

Event organizers can take several steps to help combat ambush marketing:

- Sponsor categories should be established and consistently maintained, thus reducing the confusion created by new categories. The creation of the Partner classification and the resulting confusion as exhibited by our results typifies this confusion.
- Additional control is needed over issues such as media coverage of events. For example, a large percentage of consumers believed that anyone advertising during the telecast is an official sponsor. The problem is created by the need for the media to run so many commercials to cover their rights fee to the organizers. Perhaps a new arrangement should be developed to limit nonsponsor commercials during event telecasts and/or to explicitly state that the nonsponsor advertisers are not associated with any sponsorship arrangement

of the Olympic games. The World Cup in 1998 might provide an opportunity to link event and broadcast sponsorship by allowing only official sponsors to broadcast commercials during event telecasts.

- An educational program focusing on consumers in a proactive way would also be useful. Messages could be run during the event telecast educating consumers about the sponsor program. Advertising containing sponsor lists and information could be run before and after the event.

Implementing such steps can go a long way toward removing the incentive for companies to use ambush marketing (i.e., consumer confusion) and preventing the problems caused by ambush marketing. Empirically investigating these questions, and the results presented by the current study, should help to convince the Olympic organizers of the importance of taking the necessary steps to raise the level of consumer knowledge and reduce consumer confusion about the sponsors, the sponsors' rights, and the sponsors' level of commitment to the Olympics. Such steps will go a long way toward keeping the Olympic flame burning brightly.

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Correspondence regarding this article should be sent to: D. Sandler, Lubin School of Business, Pace University, One Pace Plaza, New York, NY 10038 (SANDLER@PACEVM.DAC.PACE.EDU).