Involvement and Emotions of Residents in China as the Host Country of 2008 Olympic Games: Implications for Promoting Mega Sport Events

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With the enormous growth of economy in China and other Asian countries, the potential of the sport market in Asian countries has drawn great attention from global sport marketers (Won & Kitamura, 2007). In particular, the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games generated approximately two billion television or internet viewers including one billion people living outside of China (Dollinger, Li & Mooney, 2009). Domestically, this mega event generated very high involvement of Chinese citizens as a result of large scale campaigns, education programs, and publicity activities initiated by the local government and the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (BOCOG), along with the historical significance of the event itself to China and the Chinese people (Sands, 2008). Extensive promotions of affective and behavioral involvements engendered tremendous emotional responses of the citizens toward this hallmark event, with an effort and expectation to influence their attitude and behaviors to support and contribute to the event. In this process, media played a significant role in generating hype, excitement, pride, joy, and happiness, which are key elements of emotional sentiment.

It has been acknowledged by marketing scholars that emotions are central to the actions of consumers. They influence information processing, mediate attitudes towards marketing stimuli, enact goal-directed behaviors (Baggini, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999), and partially determine customer satisfactions (Oliver, 1993). The rationale of emotional response is essentially sophisticated. Several marketing studies identified involvement as a precedent of emotions (e.g., Martensen et al., 2007). Emotion-related constructs such as emotional attachment and involvement have been the foci of recent sport marketing studies because of the ubiquitous and uniqueness of emotional phenomenon in sport settings (e.g., Funk, Haugtvedt, & Howard, 2000; Funk, Ridinger, & Moorman, 2004; Kerstetter & Kovich, 1997). As such, it is pragmatically important for sport marketers to comprehend how to intrigue positive emotional responses of their spectators, TV viewers, and community residents towards their sport stars, teams, and events, and how to attain positive emotions through educational and marketing programs that are usually aimed at increasing involvement. Very importantly, recent studies (e.g., Christensen, 2006; Hansen, Martensen, & Christensen, 2005) have revealed that emotional response of consumers is of special relevance to event sponsors because of its potentiality in evaluating sponsorship effectiveness. Bagozzi, Wong, and Yi (1998) argued that the bipolarity, independence, and concomitance of positive and negative emotions depend greatly on individual and cultural contexts. Although previous research findings have shed light on understanding the relationships between consumer involvement and their emotions, previous studies were primarily conducted in contexts of western societies. Their direct applicability in studying the consumers of Beijing Olympic Games was uncertain as people of different regions and countries may have different tendencies to react to hosting mega sport events.

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between involvement and emotions of Chinese citizens toward the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. In this study, involvement was measured with the Personal Involvement Inventory revised by Zaichkowsky’s (1994). This measure contains 10 pairs of bipolar adjectives in a 7-point semantic-differential scale, and it measures the motivational state rather than antecedents of involvement, and has been repeatedly used in sport research investigations (Martensen, Gronholdt, Bendtsen, & Jensen, 2007; McDaniel, 1999). Hansen et al.’s (2005, 2006) scale of emotion was chosen to assess emotional responses to the broadcast viewing of Beijing Olympic Games. This measure contains 20 statements in a Likert 5-point scale. A number of recent investigations into issues related to sport event management have applied this scale (Hansen, Halling, & Christensen, 2006; Hansen, Martensen, & Christensen, 2005; Martensen et al., 2007).

Research participants (N = 1,102) were students in Chinese universities. Test administrations were conducted on the campus of two universities representing different geographic locations, urban settings, and community size in China. Because both universities accept students from all over China, a wide range of geographical representations among the respondents were further ensured. Given that university students are a predominant segment of spectators and TV viewers of sporting events in China, studying a student sample for the research questions was deemed relevant.
and appropriate. A total of 1,200 copies of the questionnaire were distributed, and 1,102 copies were fully completed, representing a response rate of 91.8%. A notebook was used as an incentive to complete the questionnaire. Of the respondents, 58.8% were female and 41.2% male. There were 72% undergraduate students and 28% graduate students. A majority of the participants (i.e., 95%) ranged in age between 18 and 28 years old. A structural equation modeling (SEM) was executed to examine the proposed structural relationships among involvement, positive emotion, and negative emotion by adopting the procedures in the Mplus 5.21 (Muthén & Muthén, 2006), which handles non-normal data. The SEM was conducted by following a two-step process: (a) test of an overall measurement model and (b) assessment of the structural model (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Kline, 2005). In the first step, modification indexes suggested that the model fit needed to be improved with respecification. In this process, 11 items were eliminated from the involvement, positive emotion, and negative emotion factors due to their poor indicator loadings. Goodness of fit indexes revealed that the revised measurement model achieved good fit the data. The S-B χ²/df (132/633 = 4.7) and Robust CFI value (.917) was higher than the recommended cut-off ratio (.90; Hu & Bentler, 1999); the RMSEA value (.059) indicated a close fit; and the SRMR (.040) was less than .09, indicating a good fit of model (Kline, 2005). Alpha coefficients for the constructs were .84, .91, and .80, respectively. AVE values ranged from 0.51 to 0.56, indicating good convergent validity. Overall, findings of the measurement model provided strong evidence to proceed with the study. Testing the structural model revealed good fit of the model to the data. With respect to the significance of the path coefficients, the involvement factor had positive effects on positive emotion (β = .45, p < .01) and negative effects on negative emotion (β = -.34, p < .01), with 20% and 12% variance explained, respectively.

The findings of this study suggested that the level of resident involvement in the Olympic Games had considerable influence on their emotions toward hosting mega events in China. Considering that emotions can be a major influence of consumption behaviors (Bagozzi et al., 1999), effectively channeling the involvement level of citizens in the host country would enhance their positive emotions in an effort to attain their attitudinal and behavioral support and commitment to hosting the event. The Beijing Olympic Games promoted positive emotions through such initiatives as education, volunteering, publicity, and media partnership, while avoiding negative emotional responses by establishing rewarding and compensational programs. Hopefully, future Olympic Games and other mega events take note of the successful operation of the Beijing Olympic Games and develop efficient marketing and educational programs to encourage involvement and generate positive emotions.