

Consumer Responses to On-site Olympic Sponsorship Activation: The Effect of Emotions and Perceived Image Fit on Consumer Attitude towards Sponsorship Activation and Sponsor Brand

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Sport sponsorship is the largest and the fast-growing segment among various categories of cause sponsorship (See "IEG annual industry review" 2011). To leverage a sponsorship agreement, various types of sponsorship activation programs, such as advertising and on-site sponsorship, are executed (Lardinoit & Quester, 2001). In the past, advertising was considered as the most frequently used marketing tool in terms of leveraging sport sponsorship (Polonsky & Speed, 2001). Therefore, previous researchers investigated sport consumer behavior in an Olympic sponsorship context focusing on the effects of sponsorship ads on consumers' attitudes towards event and sponsors (e.g., McDaniel, 1999; Söderman & Dolles, 2010). However, for the recent Olympic Games, on-site sponsorship activation programs have become more prominent in official sponsor plans with the aid of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Olympic sponsors built their brand exhibition site and provide various types of activities during the Games. Some researchers proved that on-site sponsorship generates positive changes in the audiences' attitude towards sponsors (Choi, 2008; Lardinoit & Quester, 2001). Still, few studies have involved the examination of "on-site" sponsorship activation and there is no clear understanding in what constitutes the determinants of attitude towards on-site sponsorship activation.

Walliser (2003) noted that sponsorship, as a marketing communication tool, has something in common with advertising because they both have similar objectives such as enhance awareness, brand image, and sales. Hence, the current study utilized Mackenzie & Lutz's (1989) structural model of attitude towards ad formation to understand impact of the attitude towards on-site Olympic sponsorship activation on attitude towards the sponsor brand. Also, the concept of "fit" influences sponsorship outcomes. Previous research claimed that the more perceived image fit between the brand and the event will generate more positive attitude towards event and eventually, influence attitude towards the brand (Cornwell et al. 2006; Cornwell, Weeks, and Roy 2005; Eaton & Gwinner, 1999; Martensen et al. 2007; Speed and Thompson 2000). However, the marketing and sponsorship literature does not clearly identify the role of image fit between the on-site sponsorship activation and the event. With respect to the differentiated nature of on-site sponsorship activation, which is presented at the event venue, the fit between on-site sponsorship activation and the event might be even more important than the fit between the brand alone and the event. Considering the highly interactive and 'on-the-spot' characteristic of on-site sponsorship activation, capturing emotional response to the on-site sponsorship activation is essential because emotion can arouse quickly at the time of exposure (Zajonc, 1980). Previous researches claimed that emotional response on sport event are positively related to attitude towards event and brand (Bal, Quester, and Plewa, 2010; Christensen, 2006).

The purpose of this study was to understand what drives consumers' attitude towards on-site sponsorship activation and sponsor brand in a mega sport event context. More specifically, this study was designed to examine a) the impact of emotions (pleasure and arousal) on perceived image fit between event and on-site sponsorship, b) the impact of image fit on attitude towards on-site sponsorship activation, and c) the impact attitude towards on-site sponsorship activation on attitude towards sponsor brand. The mediating role of image fit and on-site sponsorship activation in the model was also investigated.

Data were collected from Olympic spectators who attended 2012 London Summer Olympic Games at the Olympic park, in Stratford, London England using a convenience sampling method. As the study focused on consumer response for on-site sponsorship activations and its outcome (positive brand attitude) after being exposed to on-site sponsorship programs, those spectators who had visited at least one sponsor exhibition site around the Olympic venue were intercepted and asked to participate in the survey. To meet this requirement, four data collection spots near the major sponsor exhibition sites were selected prior to the fieldwork. Out of 260 surveys, 203 questionnaires

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were usable for analysis. The average age of the participants was 37 (SD=9.59) ranging from 20~69 years. Out of 203 respondents, 56.5% were male and 43.5% were female. Most of the participants were UK residents (86.7%), followed by people from North America (7.7%) and residents of non UK European countries (3.8%). The survey instrument was adapted from existing scales and slightly modified. The survey instrument included nine items of emotions, which consisted of six items of pleasure (Russell, 1980) and three items of arousal (Bigné et al., 2008), three items of image fit (Gwinner & Bennett, 2008), and three items of attitude (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). Data were analyzed with frequency and descriptive statistics analysis, reliability analysis, and path analysis using SPSS and EQS 6.1.

In order to test the extent to which the proposed variables influenced attitude towards sponsor brand, path analysis was used. For each variable, the mean of items were used to create a new single item for inclusion on the path analysis model. The results of Cronbach's alpha coefficient of all latent variables were greater than .7, indicating that the items of each latent variable were internally consistent (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). All goodness of fit indices supported an excellent fit of the path analysis model to the data: Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.96, Normed Fit Index (NFI) = 0.95, Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) = 0.05. In the tested path model, attitude towards on-site sponsorship activation was predicted by pleasure ($\beta = 0.61$, $p < 0.05$) and event-sponsorship activation image fit ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.05$). Attitude towards on-site sponsorship activation was a significant predictor for attitude towards the sponsor brand ($\beta = 0.66$, $p < 0.05$). Event-sponsorship activation image fit was predicted by pleasure ($\beta = 0.58$, $p < 0.05$) but the path from arousal to event-sponsorship activation image fit was not significant. This result indicated that event-sponsorship activation image fit partially mediated the impact of pleasure on attitude towards on-site sponsorship activation. The impact of event-sponsorship activation image fit on attitude towards sponsor brand was not significant showing that attitude towards on-site sponsorship activation fully mediated the image fit and attitude towards sponsor brand relationship.

This study expands attitude-towards-an-advertisement (Aad) literature by adopting the Aad model to the context of 'on-site' sport sponsorship activation. The study revealed the important role of antecedents, such as pleasure and event-sponsorship activation image fit in predicting attitudes towards sponsorship activation and sponsor brand. The study also offers implications for sport marketers towards better understanding the importance of providing experience which is pleasurable and goes along with Olympic Games when they execute on-site sponsorship programs. Sport marketers could expect more positive attitude on their sponsorship activation.