The 2008 Beijing Olympics began a string of several global sporting events being held in developing countries including South Africa (2010 World Cup), Brazil (2014 World Cup, 2016 Olympics) and Russia (2014 Winter Olympics, 2018 World Cup). These events have attracted significant attention from opportunistic corporate sponsors as well as critics who bemoan the “pacification” of citizens and enormous financial costs (Watts, 2013). Political opposition to these events is frequently quelled by those who have a financial interest in hosting the games (Watts, 2013). Nowhere is this phenomenon better captured than in Brazil where citizens protested spending $13B on facilities for the Confederations and World Cup (Watts, 2013) demonstrating skepticism that legacy promises will be fulfilled (Cardoso, Fleury, & Malaia 2013). We assess the political and financial concerns in this two part study of Brazilian political attitudes towards hosting the World Cup and their view of FIFA’s corporate sponsors.

Literature Review

Companies may sponsor international sport governing bodies to enhance their brand image (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999), build strategic alliances (Farrelly & Quester, 2005), and increase stock returns (Cornwell, Pruitt, & Clark, 2005). Further, governing bodies have frequently pressed for additional legislation to criminalize ambush marketing opportunities (Scassa, 2011). Despite these efforts, experiences at the Beijing Olympics suggest that ambush marketing remains rampant due to financial opportunities and companies being unable to enforce rights associated with the event.

As business and political desires have merged, global sporting events have taken a role as political-commercial organizations. Mega-events are typically organized through national governments and international governing bodies and are justified by development potential (Sack & Johnson, 1996), political influence (Cornelissen & Swart, 2006; Roche, 2000), and strengthening international reputations (Rowe, 2012). While a growing body of literature suggests an inability of a sporting event to deliver on these promises (Matheson, 2006; Szymanski, 2002), developing countries continue to pin hopes on economic benefits from the World Cup and Olympics. Governments may seek to bid on mega-events in order to achieve foreign policy goals and demonstrate relevance on an international stage (Cornelissen & Swart, 2006; Nauright & Schimmel, 2005). Campaigns built towards these objectives derive their legitimacy through the power of rhetoric and symbolic achievements (Cornelissen & Swart).

The combination of political and commercial interests, particularly in developing countries, has significant influence on marketing activities. Potential consumers in the host country may associate the financial and political challenges with the sponsoring companies. While the event may be seen as successful, firms may face short and long term challenges communicating within the market due to residual animosity from the political difficulties.

Methodology

To examine Brazilian’s political and commercial attitudes towards hosting the World Cup, we conducted two studies, with the first building on a nationalism scale developed by Kosterman and Feshbach (1989) and the second developed based on an ambush marketing scale created by Sandler and Shani (1989). These scales were selected based on their citation history and contribution to the core disciplines of political science and marketing. All analysis was conducted in SPSS using varimax rotation.

In study 1, our survey consisted of 51 questions using a scale of 1-100 to assess the respondents’ attitudes towards nationalism and the political environment surrounding the World Cup. The survey was distributed through social media using a rolling sample on Twitter initiated by the authors. We received 735 usable surveys and conducted an exploratory factor analysis resulting in 11 unique factors. The Cronbach’s alphas for the nationalism and political
environment scales were 0.742 and 0.615. KMO’s were 0.902 and 0.895 respectively and Bartlett’s test figures were significant for each scale.

In study 2, we asked respondents to identify sponsors in 9 key product categories and complete a 19 item questionnaire on ambush marketing. The 873 usable surveys were broken into 5 factors through an exploratory factor analysis. The Cronbach’s alpha was 0.744 and KMO and Bartlett’s test figures were significant.

Results

Results indicate that Brazilians are skeptical of government and FIFA efforts to bring the World Cup to their country. On the nationalism scale, respondents had strong love of their country (Mean = 80.25) and derive a large part of their identity from being Brazilian (Mean = 74.98). Brazilians also felt comfortable criticizing their government (Mean = 75.78) and committed to their country, despite potential disagreements with the government (Mean = 74.18). In total, responses suggest a strong affinity for their country, its institutions, and history.

The impact of recent protests can be seen in the respondents’ attitudes towards the political environment. Most felt that money spent on the World Cup will leave the country with a large debt (Mean = 70.95). Corruption was also identified as a major problem (Mean = 90.92) and most respondents’ desired private financing to fund the World Cup (Mean = 78.40). Despite these assessments, most respondents planned on watching the forthcoming World Cup (Mean = 78.90) and recognize the World Cup as one of their favorite sporting events (Mean = 76.41).

Respondents view the commercial environment with similar skepticism, believing that most sponsors are involved to boost profits, rather than for a love of soccer (Mean = 80.50). Additionally, few Brazilians claimed to be more likely to purchase a product from a World Cup sponsor (Mean = 23.71) nor from a company sponsoring an athlete (Mean = 17.38). Attitudes towards ambush marketers were indifferent as few respondents felt that they would be less likely to purchase a product from an ambushing company (Mean = 26.94). In total, attitudes towards nationalism and the political environment can be used as predictors of attitudes towards the political and commercial objectives of the World Cup.

Discussion and Conclusion

As the 2014 World Cup approaches, Brazilians remain skeptical of the benefits promised by local politicians. This skepticism may impact the potential benefits realized by World Cup sponsors. We contribute to the literature on mega-events and international marketing by integrating political and marketing theories within a developing country. We link political views towards the local government with those towards the governing body to suggest potential problems for companies seeking to profit from the 2014 World Cup. These findings have implications for global sporting events as consumers become more attuned to the financial and political requirements for hosting the events.