National Identity and Sport Consumerism: Consumer Behaviour and the Toronto 2015 Pan Am & Parapan American Games

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Marketing
Friday, June 3, 2016
Abstract 2016-212
3:20 PM
60-minute symposium, roundtable, or workshop (Forum East 4)

This study examines consumer interest, motivation, and behaviour, as well as the potential legacy and impact of the Toronto 2015 Pan Am & Parapan American Games (2015 Pan Am Games) for Toronto and the host communities throughout the Golden Horseshoe region (hereafter referred to as the Greater Toronto Area (GTA)), through the lens of local, community development and support. The research investigates the lasting impact of the event on sport consumers and non-sport consumers alike, and extends an ongoing line of research exploring sport consumer behaviour within the context of national identity and the evolving Canadian sport consumer landscape.

Major sporting events such as the Olympic Games, the FIFA World Cup, and the Pan Am Games, provide a unique and important opportunity to explore the specific impact of events on local communities, and represent a valuable means of identifying and exploring sport's impact on socio-cultural place and identity. The research, in taking a marketing focus, examines consumer behaviour throughout the Pan Am Games in an effort to better understand the local consumer impact of the event for the GTA region, and specifically examines in detail the value of sponsorship and event-related marketing realized by organisations and local businesses in and around the 2015 Pan Am Games as drivers of consumer behaviour within a multicultural context.

Theoretical Framework

The 2015 Pan Am Games, hosted by Toronto and featuring events and venues located throughout the Golden Horseshoe region, was projected to provide an influx of economic activity in excess of $3 billion to the local economy, along with 26,000 fulland part-time jobs, as well as bring over a quarter of a million tourists and visitors to Southern Ontario (O'Dette, 2014). While such projected impacts are significantly smaller than those promised by larger international events (e.g., the Olympics, the World Cup), this nevertheless represented a major economic boost for the local communities involved in the staging of the Games.

The study of consumer behavior has received extensive attention in sport marketing research over the past thirty years (e.g., Kim & Trail, 2010; Funk, Mahony & Riding, Sloan, 1989; 2002), with specific interest in identifying those motivating factors behind consumers’ intent to attend sport events (e.g., Funk, Beaston & Alexandris, 2012; Madrigal, 2006; Trail & James, 2001) as well as those constraints which restrict spectator consumption (e.g., Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Trail, Robinson & Kim, 2008; Zhang et al., 1997). Within this literature, a growing body of research into the role team and fan identification play in determining sport consumer behaviour has emerged (e.g., Bodet & Bernache-Assollant, 2011; Kim, Trail & Magnusen, 2013; Trail et al., 2012). However, to date the relevance and potential impact of national identification and sociocultural embeddedness have yet to be examined in any detail within the context of sport fan behaviour and motivations. Intuitively, given the nature of international sporting events such as the FIFA World Cup or the Olympics, national identity and belonging represent key indicators of consumer connection and motivation, particularly for supporters of international teams and competitions. The effects of this identification on behavioural habits and consumption level, however, have largely been overlooked in the extant sport consumer behavior literature.

Moreover, the possible impact and implications of hosting major events for consumers for both spectators and non-spectators, alike, remains an area of consumer behaviour which remains under-researched in sport marketing scholarship. Major, multi-sport events such as the Pan Am and Parapan American Games represent a potentially important research opportunity in better understanding the effects and implications of hosting international sporting events for local communities. Unlike previous or existing examinations of the economic value of tourism around major events, or the physical infrastructure legacy left or created by an event, investigations into the impact of major
events on consumer behaviour may afford an important perspective into the motivations, interests, and awareness of local communities, and serve to better define the direct consumption impact of an event on citizens in the local, regional, and national communities. Given the global scale of events such as the Olympics or the Pan Am Games, and the remarkably cosmopolitan and ethnically diverse make-up of Toronto and the surrounding communities, examining consumer behaviour around an event of this stature will further serve to improve our understanding of ethnographic sport consumption, national identity, and sport attachment.

Intuitively, given the nature of international sporting events such as the FIFA World Cup or the Olympics, national identity and belonging represent key indicators of consumer attachment and motivation. The effects of this identification on behavioural habits and consumption level, however, have largely been overlooked in the extant sport consumer behavior literature. This study therefore represents an important first step towards understanding the potential effects of national identification on sport spectators as a potential motivating factor in consumer behavior, and the subsequent impacts of event-driven consumer habits for marketing. The resultant findings offer a new and unique perspective into the role national identification plays in consumer involvement and motivation, whilst simultaneously contributing to our understanding of the Canadian sport landscape and the development of international sport consumer communities in Canada.

Research Design

The research design and methodology of this study follows a pluralistic, mixed methods design. Upon completion of an exhaustive critical literature review of the extant event management, economic impact, and consumer behaviour literatures, a multi-dimensional survey questionnaire was designed, in order to canvas event attendees, local community stakeholders, and tourists/visitors to the GTA region during the 2015 Pan Am Games, in order to better understand the direct marketing impacts of the event on the local and regional communities. The sample identified and targeted consisted of eight target communities hosting events, providing a cross-sectional perspective of the effects and implications of event hosting across Southern Ontario. In total, 846 respondents completed the survey instrument.

The collected survey data was inputted into SPSS and analyzed by the research team, with specific interest in exploring the motivations and interests of consumers/spectators across demographic and psychographic segments, providing added insight into the consumption habits and sport spectatorship of different target markets.

The findings bear particular significance for sponsors, event marketers, and future event organizers, in better understanding the awareness and interest of local sport consumers (and non consumers) in major events hosted locally (and therefore what value sponsoring or marketing around such events carries for local brands and communities).