

Sport Participant Attitudes Toward Ambush Marketing: An Exploratory Study of ING New York City Marathon Runners

Steve McKelvey, Dennis Sandler, and Kevin Snyder

Steve McKelvey, JD, is an associate professor and graduate program director in the Mark H. McCormack Department of Sport Management at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. His research interests include legal issues in sport marketing and sport sponsorship, ambush marketing, and sport sponsorship and consumer attitudes.

Dennis Sandler, PhD, is an associate professor of marketing at Pace University. His research interests include advertising, sport marketing, sponsorship, and cross-cultural marketing.

Kevin Snyder is a doctoral student at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. His research interests include sport strategy and innovation.

Ambush Marketing

Abstract

Prior academic research studies have examined the practice of ambush marketing from the perspective of sporting event non-participants (e.g., spectators, viewers and general sport consumers). This exploratory study furthers the line of research into ambush marketing by assessing the attitudes of participants in a major sporting event toward the practice of ambush marketing. Specifically, the researchers surveyed a random sampling of runners who participated in the 2005 and the 2008 ING New York City Marathons. In contrast to the findings in prior studies of sporting event non-participants, this study found that survey respondents reported substantially more negative attitudes toward the practice of ambush marketing. This paper contributes to the sponsorship literature by providing implications for managers of participatory-based sporting events seeking to understand the impact and ramifications of ambush marketing.

Introduction

According to IEG's annual industry forecast, North American sport sponsorship spending was projected to be \$12.38 billion in 2011, a dramatic increase from the \$8.31 billion spent in 2005 (IEG, 2011). Corporations continue to invest millions of dollars to secure official sponsorship rights to major sporting events. For instance, official sponsors of the FIFA World Cup invested an estimated total of \$1.6 billion during the 2007-2010 quadrennial, up from \$584 million in the 1999-2002 period (FIFA secures, 2010). For the four-year Olympiad encompassing the 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver and the 2012 Summer Games in London, multinational corporations reportedly paid between \$80 million and \$100 million to secure the top-tier sponsorship rights (Cendrowski, 2010). United States-based annual mega-events such as the Super Bowl, World Series and NCAA Men's Final Four, also attract corporations willing to invest millions of dollars

for the rights to associate themselves with these premier events.

Particularly relevant to this study is the increase in corporate dollars being invested in marathon running events. For instance, in 2003 the ING Group, a global financial services corporation, made a substantial investment in the sport of marathon running, signing agreements for entitlement rights to several high profile marathons. Among these was the New York City Marathon, which ING twice renewed at an annual sponsorship fee believed to be in the range of \$2 to \$3 million per year (Lefton, 2009).

Over the past decade, marathon running has seen a surge in corporate sponsorship support. The ING New York City Marathon, by far the biggest race of the year as measured by revenue, increased its sponsorship roster in 2009 from 27 to 31 companies with the addition of official sponsors Hospital for Special Surgery, T-Mobile, Grana Padano Cheese and Philips (Kaplan, 2009). Both participation numbers and sponsorship

income have grown at events nationwide, including the 2009 ING New York City Marathon which generated a reported \$30 million (Kaplan, 2009). Competitor Group Inc., which in 2009 owned and operated 13 marathons and half-marathons under the title of Rock N Roll Marathon Series (Kaplan, 2009), had by 2011 grown its series to over 23 such marathon events (<http://www.runrocknroll.competitor.com>).

Sponsorship has been defined as “a cash and/or in-kind fee paid to a property (typically a sports, entertainment, non-profit event or organization) in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with the property” (Ukman, 1995, p. 1). The property and sponsor enter into a contract that:

involves a commercial transaction to transfer defined rights, either exclusively or jointly, to a purchaser. As in any contract, the vendor’s [property’s] ownership of the rights, the freedom to transfer these rights, and the ability to effect the transfer may all be at issue. In a typical sponsorship package, the sponsor may buy various rights including event title or category rights (e.g., official soft drink), signage rights, rights to specific designated emblems and logos, rights to use the word “official,” rights to specific event advertising, promotions, and publication inclusions, and certain first-option rights. The specific rights vary according to the size and nature of the event and the specifics of the contract. In major global events, the rights issue is often complex (Meenaghan, 1996, p. 105).

However, the continued growth and popularity of sport sponsorship as a viable marketing strategy presents potential consequences for sport properties and official sponsors: “The practice of ambush marketing by certain corporations is now recognized as common practice in the sport industry as it has become an alternative strategy to purchasing the rights to official sponsorship status” (Seguin & O’Reilly, 2008, p. 66). The on-going debate and concern over the practice of ambush marketing is fueled by three concurrent pressures. First is the continued escalation of sponsorship fees, which has compelled increasing demand for internal demonstration and evaluation of return-on-investment (ROI) or return-on-objectives (ROO). Second is the property’s contractual promise of exclusivity, which has fueled a more aggressive approach by properties seeking to protect the investments of its official sponsors. Third, as sponsorship categories become less available or simply over-priced, non-sponsor companies seek alternative strategies for gaining an unauthorized yet legal association with premier sporting events.

Current Perspectives on Ambush Marketing

Over the past decade, perceptions of and perspectives on ambush marketing have evolved as a result of dialogue amongst both scholars and practitioners. While the earliest definitions of ambush marketing used pejorative terms to describe an “immoral” practice, more recent thinking acknowledges the considerable vagueness that surrounds the concept and also provides a conceptual framework of ambush marketing that more accurately reflects the balancing of sponsors’ contractual rights against the rights of non-sponsors to maintain a market presence during an event through legal and competitive business activities (Crow & Hoek, 2003). Hence, while at one extreme end of the ambush marketing conceptual debate we have what the Olympics Movement continues to publicly refer to as “parasite marketing” (Payne, 1993), at the other end are much more neutral terms such as “parallel marketing” (Glengarry, 2007).

Historically, the term “ambush marketing” has been defined from the perspective of the sport property. The review of the academic literature illustrates the challenges in conceptualizing “ambush marketing,” the term that was coined during the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games to describe the marketing activities of non-sponsors such as Kodak, which utilized a variety of tactics to “ambush” official sponsor Fuji (Sandler & Shani, 1989). The earliest definitions of ambush marketing were pejorative, implying unethical business conduct laden with the evil intent (thus supporting the perspective of event organizers and official sponsors). For instance, the term was initially defined as “a company’s intentional efforts to weaken—or ambush—its competitor’s ‘official sponsorship.’ It does this by engaging in promotions and advertising that trade off the event or property’s goodwill and reputation, and that seek to confuse the buying public as to which companies really hold official sponsorship rights” (McKelvey, 1994, p. 20). Townley, Harrington and Couchman (1998) later stressed the concept of “unauthorized association” in defining ambush marketing, stating that the practice:

consists in the sports context of the unauthorised association by businesses of their names, brands, products or services with a sports event or competition through any one of a wide range of marketing activities; unauthorized in the sense that the controller of the commercial rights in such events, usually the relevant governing body, has neither sanctioned nor licensed the association, either itself or through commercial agents (p. 1).

In this context, ambush marketing has been viewed as not only those activities that are aimed specifically at

undermining a competitor's official sponsorship of an event, but also those activities that seek to associate a non-sponsor with the sporting event itself. Additional literature on ambush marketing has suggested that, in contrast to the pejorative definition, ambush marketing can be more broadly defined to describe "a whole variety of wholly legitimate and morally correct methods of intruding upon public consciousness surrounding an event" (Meenaghan, 1994, p. 79).

More recent scholarly research on the topic of ambush marketing has suggested that the term "ambush marketing" is often utilized inappropriately (Hoek & Gendall, 2002; Crow & Hoek, 2003). For instance, the term "ambush marketing" presents a number of grey areas. For instance, should an activity be deemed "ambush marketing" if the non-sponsor's activity is in fact legal? What if there is no purposeful intent to confuse consumers as to a non-sponsor's association with an event? If a company is legitimately sponsoring a team within a league (or a National Governing Body within the IOC), and within the league's sponsorship guidelines, is it still ambush marketing? Is it ambush marketing solely because the event organizer says it is?

While the practice of ambush marketing has been widely debated, the answer as to whether it is an "immoral or imaginative practice...may well lie in the eye of the beholder" (Meenaghan, 1994, p. 85). For instance, event organizers and their official sponsors typically denounce as ambush marketing *any* activity by a non-sponsor that wittingly or unwittingly intrudes upon the property's and/or official sponsors' rights, thus potentially detracting from the sponsor's "exclusive" association with the sport property. Utilizing this definition, for instance, even a company that purchases advertising within the telecast of a sport special event could be construed by the event organizer and official sponsor as an ambush marketer regardless of that company's business motives, ethical perspective or legal rights.

On the other hand, such activity engaged in by non-sponsors can also be perceived and defended as nothing more than a part of the "normal 'cut and thrust' of business activity based on a strong economic justification" (Meenaghan, 1994, p. 85). Further illustrating the ambiguities surrounding the concept of ambush marketing, researchers have argued that it is unrealistic to expect non-sponsors to make decisions regarding sponsorship differently than they would with regard to other promotional techniques designed to compete in the marketplace (Shani & Sandler, 1998). Recent research has also found that even executives of top-level Olympic sponsors not only anticipate that their competitors may likely attempt to associate with the

Olympic Games, but also have less concerns over the practice of ambush marketing than they do over the issue of sponsorship clutter (Seguin & O'Reilly, 2008). Interviews with senior level executives of TOP sponsors suggested:

...from a consumer point of view, the issue was perceived to be a business one. As one TOP sponsor pointed out, the general public views it as two big corporations fighting it out and they do not see or identify with ambushing: "They just see that as everyday businessthe bottom line is that many consumers just do not care" (p. 70).

Perspectives on and attitudes toward the practice of ambush marketing are largely influenced by one's role in the sponsorship equation: sport properties and official sponsors will typically hold a much different viewpoint than non-sponsors. While it is proper to refrain from unilaterally labeling ambush marketing as illegal, immoral or unethical, it is nonetheless important to recognize that sport properties may have legitimate concerns about the viability and integrity of their sponsorship programs if unable to prevent unfettered ambush marketing.

Review of Prior Studies of Non-Participants

The effectiveness and efficacy of ambush marketing has been the topic of numerous academic studies, given the potential negative consequences that ambush marketing programs can have on the official sponsorship programs of established sport properties ranging from the international (e.g., Olympic Movement) to the national (e.g., Super Bowl) to the local level (e.g., Falmouth Road Race).

Much of the prior research into ambush marketing has examined the first-level effects on consumers through recall and recognition studies (Crimmins & Horn, 1996; Kinney & McDaniel, 1996; McDaniel & Kinney, 1998; Sandler & Shani, 1989; Shani & Sandler, 1993, 1998). Research studies have also focused on the ability of ambush marketing campaigns to confuse consumers as to who are the official sponsors. For instance, longitudinal studies by Sandler and Shani (1989, 1993) and Shani and Sandler (1998) consistently found that the level of consumer confusion is high and that companies that actively engaged in ambush marketing typically perform better than companies that choose not to implement such strategies. While it should be noted that other researchers, including Crompton (2004), have questioned the effectiveness of recall and recognition studies, suggesting that a brand's popularity rather than its associations is most likely to be recalled, prior studies have indicated that consumers have difficulty distinguishing sponsors from non-sponsors (Pitts & Slattery, 2004; Sandler & Shani,

1993; Seguin et al., 2005; Shani & Sandler, 1998). Studies have also found that most consumers are not aware of the practice of ambush marketing (Seguin et al., 2005; Shani & Sandler, 1998), and that confusion exists in consumers' minds about the classification, identification and recognition of sponsors (Lyberger & McCarthy, 2001; McDaniel & Kinney, 1998; Seguin et al., 2005; Shani & Sandler, 1998; Stotlar, 1993).

Several prior studies have included an effort to ascertain attitudes toward the practice of ambush marketing. To date, these studies have focused on non-participant sport consumers (Sandler & Shani, 1993; Shani & Sandler, 1998; Lyberger & McCarthy, 2001; Moorman & Greenwell, 2005; Seguin, Lyberger, O'Reilly and McCarthy, 2005). This focus on non-participant sport consumers makes sense, given that the sporting events that most often attract ambush marketers do so precisely because of their large spectating and viewing audience. Generally, all of these studies have found, as described by Lyberger & McCarthy (2001) in their particular study of Super Bowl consumers, "a considerable level of respondent apathy toward the practice of ambush marketing" (p. 135).

Although these non-participant studies have found a high degree of indifference toward the practice of ambush marketing, involvement frameworks suggest a theoretical rationale for why the attitudes of sport participants may differ. Prior studies have looked at the role of involvement theory to sport participants without assessing attitudes on ambush marketing (Beaton et al., 2011; Beaton & Funk, 2008; Funk & James, 2001). For instance, Beaton et al. (2011) noted the behavior changes in marathon runners as involvement increases. As marathon runners become involved and move along the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM), they are more likely to increase their running related activities and develop social connections related to the sport (Beaton et al., 2011; Funk & James, 2001). Further, Beaton and Funk (2008) discuss a Theory of Participation (TOP) in physically active leisure, based on the Psychological Continuum Model (Funk & James, 2001), consisting of stages of Awareness, Attraction, Attachment and Allegiance, where individuals move through the stages as they progress in the sport.

However, the construct of involvement can be conceptualized in many other ways. For example, enduring involvement has been described as an "unobservable state of motivation, arousal or interest toward a recreational activity or associated product, evoked by a particular stimulus or situation, and which has drive properties" (Havitz & Mannell, 2005, p. 153). Behavioral involvement, defined as the "time and/or intensity of effort expended in pursuing a particular

activity," is captured in the categorization of runner levels by the NYRR (Stone, 1984, p. 210). For these runners, the training and dedication required to complete a marathon suggests that participants are involved at many different levels, including physically, psychologically, and emotionally. Runners who have taken on this challenge repeatedly and who can compete at the highest levels can be described as highly involved in all facets.

In addition to impacting participant behaviors, involvement has also been considered in a number of studies on event sponsorship (Bennett et al., 2009). As further suggested by Humphreys et al. (2010), who reported on two experiments that examined the effects of counter-ambushing communications, "personal involvement with an event or sport has been shown to significantly influence sponsorship outcomes... Individuals with high felt involvement for a sport or event may feel more resentment toward ambushers or be more likely to seek out or attend to information regarding ambushing activities" (p. 107).

Hedonic and symbolic attributes can also be included in the construct of involvement, with past research noting that these aspects become more important to sport participants as involvement increases (Beaton et al., 2011). Given that marathon participants derive higher levels of pleasure from the activity and use the sport's symbols to define themselves, sponsors have recognized an opportunity to engage this willing audience. At large running events, such as marathons, these partners play a central role in delivering a gratifying running competition and providing a forum for runners to express their identity. By targeting these highly involved runners, sponsors hope to tap into the centrality of the sport to these individuals. Therefore, the connection between increases in involvement and increases in hedonic and symbolic properties is also a driving factor in sponsorship activities (Beaton et al., 2011). Similar to other sponsorship objectives, marathon partners hope that these actions are reciprocated by runners in the form of higher product awareness, greater purchase intentions, and opposition to ambush attempts.

While prior research has found involvement to be a factor in participants and non-participants, this study proposes that differences exist in each group's response to marketing messages. This paper seeks to contribute to the involvement and ambush marketing literature by noting the differences in behavior of involved participants. Given these prior research studies, the overarching question sought to be examined by this exploratory multi-year study was whether the attitudes of sport participants toward the practice of ambush marketing differed in any substantive way from that of

non-participants (e.g., spectators, viewers and general consumers).

Method

To conduct this study, surveys were used to collect a random sample of participants in both the 2005 and 2008 ING New York Marathons. Running events were selected as they are among the most popular participatory sports that typically involve significant levels of sponsorship activity, with the ING New York Marathon being among the largest with over 40,000 runners annually (<http://www.NYRR.org>). The study was first conducted in 2005 after the researchers were granted access to participants through the New York Road Runners (NYRR), the marathon's organizing body. Verification of the findings in the 2005 survey was sought by re-conducting the survey in 2008, the next opportunity where access was available through the NYRR. In both years, an online survey was used to collect data to assess the participants' attitudes towards the practice of ambush marketing. The survey was distributed to 5000 participants through the NYRR and SPSS 18.0 was used to analyze the results.

Instrumentation

Using SurveyMonkey, the questionnaire was designed to collect data on running patterns, past marathon experiences, involvement in running, aided and unaided awareness of sponsors, and attitudes toward the practice of ambush marketing. To allow for comparisons across both 2005 and 2008, the same survey instrument was used in both years. The only differences were slight changes to the sponsorship categories (based on NYRR designation) and the updating of categories whose sponsor had changed. To assess the level of involvement, runners were asked to self-report their average number of miles run per week, number of NYC Marathons run, total number of marathons run, and their "level of competition" (beginner, intermediate, competitive and professional). These levels, tied to running speeds and goals, were created by the NYRR and are provided to the runners in advance of the race as a means of determining start times (see Appendix A). This information provided a basis of comparison between groups.

Given that the levels of competition, as defined by the NYRR, take running ability, dedication, and goals into account, the use of "level of competition" represents a more holistic proxy for involvement in marathon running. For additional support, past marathon experiences and miles run per week were compared to the NYRR "level of competition" variable. Based on high correlations of these variables and the NYRR defini-

tions, the "levels of competition" were deemed to be suitable for differentiating segments of runners.

While the primary purpose of the study was to assess participants' attitudes toward the practice of ambush marketing, prior research has consistently suggested that the measurement of sponsorship recall and recognition is an important antecedent and component to measuring attitudes toward ambush marketing (Lyberger & McCarthy, 2001; McDaniel & Kinney, 1998; Sandler & Shani, 1989; Sandler & Shani, 1993; Seguin, et al., 2005; Stotlar, 1993). Hence, the survey included a section on aided recall and recognition of official ING NYC Marathon sponsors. For the former, respondents were provided with seven sponsorship categories and asked to name the official sponsor in each category (categories were those in which official sponsors had the highest level of financial commitment to the ING NYC Marathon). For the latter, respondents were provided a list of 10 sponsorship categories accompanied by four brands within each category (only one of which was the correct official sponsor), and asked to select the official sponsor within each category. Prior research studies on ambush marketing have also suggested that the validity of the measurement of attitudes toward ambush marketing depends in part on the respondents' knowledge of the concept of sponsorship in general. Hence, while not a primary focus of this particular study, the researchers included several questions to gauge the level of respondents' knowledge about sponsorship in the context of the marathon.

The researchers next sought to measure the participants' attitudes toward the practice of ambush marketing. The researchers adapted the survey instrument developed and previously utilized by Sandler and Shani (1989), asking respondents to rank responses to a series of 19 statements on a Likert scale (1 = low, 7 = high). Sandler and Shani's (1989) scale has been found to be accurate in measuring attitudes towards ambush marketing and is a reliable tool that can be used repeatedly. The minimal modifications in the survey were done to reflect its applicability to participants instead of spectators.

Finally, demographic information was collected on participants, including age, gender, marital status, income, and level of education. Several questions were also included to assess overall impressions of the marathon and familiarity with the race organizers and winners.

Procedure

The researchers contacted 5,000 participants via e-mail within five business days following both the 2005 and 2008 New York City Marathons. The participants were randomly chosen from the NYRR database of

Table 1.
Ambush Marketing Attitudes

Item	2005 Mean/ StdDev	2008 Mean/ StdDev	Level of agreement with statement (% of 5-7 responses on Likert Scale)	(2005/2008) T-Stat (with mean compared to 4.0)	Sig
It is fair for companies to associate themselves with the NYC Marathon without being official sponsors (Reverse Coded)	2.90/1.47	2.97/1.46	66/66%	91.66	.000
Companies that try to associate themselves with the NYC Marathon without paying for this right are clever (Reverse Coded)	2.88/1.61	2.90/1.56	66/65%	83.85	.000
If I see a company that is not a sponsor trying to pretend that it is supporting the NYC Marathon, my opinion of that company is lowered	4.93/1.71	4.69/1.74	65/60%	138.64	.000
Companies that associate themselves with the NYC Marathon without being an official sponsor are being unethical	4.64/1.73	4.51/1.72	55/52%	128.67	.000
I am annoyed by companies trying to associate themselves with the NYC Marathon without being official sponsors	4.37/1.69	4.22/1.70	46/43%	120.86	.000
If a company tries to associate itself with the NYC Marathon without being an official sponsor, I will be less likely to want to purchase their product or service in the future	4.05/1.52	3.90/1.54	36/32%	122.10	.000
Companies that are not official sponsors try to mislead the public into believing that they are official sponsors	3.81/1.37	3.75/1.40	26/24%	125.04	.000

marathon entrants, and contacted approximately one week after the conclusion of the race. The email consisted of a brief cover letter from the NYRR's chief marketing officer, indicating that the survey was being

conducted in partnership with a university-based research initiative. The cover letter included a direct link to the survey instrument and indicated that approximately 12-15 minutes would be needed to

complete the survey. Respondents were given two weeks to complete the survey and no follow-up reminder was provided. For 2005 and 2008, the researchers received 1,743 and 1,670 usable responses for a response rate of 35% and 33%, respectively. A variety of analytical methods, including ANOVA, exploratory factor analysis and descriptive statistics, were then used to assess the participants' ability to identify sponsors, as well as their perceptions of and attitudes toward ambush marketing.

Results

Demographically, runners were relatively evenly distributed between men and women (54% male), as well as among age groups (the 30-39 age group was the most common group at 33%). Respondents were well-educated (93% reported having either an undergraduate or graduate college degree), with high annual household income (65% reported annual HH incomes of \$100,000+). To assess the similarity between the population of runners in 2005 and 2008, a chi-square test was performed. Statistically significant differences were found between the two groups with the runners in 2008 identifying more official sponsors. Since some sponsors changed and activation plans evolved, thereby potentially altering ambush marketing impressions, the runners' experience in 2008 was slightly different than one from 2005. Considering this along with the statistical difference in populations, each year was analyzed separately.

Attitudes Toward the Practice of Ambush Marketing

The results from both the 2005 and 2008 surveys strongly indicated that participants hold negative attitudes toward the practice of ambush marketers. What is especially remarkable, in examining the data in Table 1, is the similarity in responses in the two surveys, not only in terms of levels of agreement/disagreement with the statements, but also their percentages of agreement/disagreement. For example, in 2008 approximately two-thirds (66%) of respondents disagreed with the statement "it is fair for companies to associate themselves with the NYC Marathon without being official sponsors" ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 1.46$); in 2005, 66% of respondents disagreed with this statement ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 1.47$). Further of note, in the 2008 survey, nearly two thirds of the respondents (60%) indicated their opinion of non-official sponsor companies "trying to pretend that it is supporting the NYC ... is lowered" ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 1.74$); in 2005, 65% of respondents agreed with this statement ($M = 4.93$, $SD = 1.71$). Finally, in both 2005 and 2008, more than half of the respondents agreed with the proposition that ambush marketing was "unethical" (52% agreement in

2008; 55% agreement in 2005). Participants also scored well on questions testing their knowledge of sponsorship rights. In both years, over 80% of respondents correctly stated that the ING NYC Marathon logo could only be used by official sponsors. Further, approximately two-thirds of the runners who responded correctly noted that any company, whether a sponsor or not, could advertise during the television broadcast.

With the use of a 7-point Likert scale, a response of 4 suggests "no opinion" on the statement. Thus, answering 4 represents the minimum value and can be used for comparison to mean responses. Mean scores of each attitudinal question from both years were compared to the neutral score of 4.0 to determine statistical significance. T-statistics indicate significant agreement/disagreement for each attitudinal question in both 2005 and 2008. This suggests that the group of runners holds definitive opinions on the topics in question. Further detail can be found in Table 1.

ANOVA and chi-square analyses were conducted on the participants' perceptions of and attitudes toward ambush marketing to determine if there were any significant differences based upon the respondents' self-reported "level of competition." While each population differed slightly, the analysis found no statistical difference between the groups, and furthermore, each group was largely opposed to the practice of ambush marketing. Beginner-level runners demonstrated attitudes toward the practice of ambush marketing that were statistically similar to those participants at the competitive level.

Aided Recall and Recognition

After noting the participants' strong opposition to ambush marketing, analysis was performed on sponsor identification questions to determine if the runners might be able to separate official sponsors from non-sponsors. The respondents' exceptional ability to recall and recognize official sponsors, combined with negative attitudes toward the practice of ambush marketing, suggests a level of engagement with event supporters that differs dramatically from that found in prior the academic studies. However, resistance toward the practice of ambush marketing is largely irrelevant if the audience cannot identify the actual official sponsors.

As the results were tabulated, respondents' level of success on the aided recall and recognition questions were scored for comparison with their reported level of competition. Table 2 illustrates that NYC Marathon participants demonstrated a substantially high level of proficiency in the aided recall and recognition of the event's official sponsors. In both years, runners were able to correctly identify the majority of official spon-

Table 2.
2008 Aided Recall

Product Category	Years as Sponsor	Total No. of responses	No. of correct ID'sOf sponsors	No. of DNK's	% Correct
Financial Institution	6	1502	1461	208	97.3%
Energy Bar	14	1365	1320	345	96.7%
Water	14	1391	1267	319	91.1%
Footwear/Running Shoe	19	1390	1109	320	79.8%
Pasta	4	1148	908	562	79.1%
Airline	15	895	694	845	77.5%
Rental Car	7	476	286	1234	60.1%
<i>2008 Aided Recognition</i>					
Sports Drink	18	1503	1353	59	90%
Healthy Snack	1	1351	1094	162	81%
Breakfast and Coffee	3	1340	1072	298	80%
Delivery Service	14	1317	1040	217	79%
Media Outlet	12	1312	1036	312	79%
GPS	2	1220	891	431	73%
Timekeeper	1	908	490	697	54%
Athletic Retailer	9	684	280	282	41%
Car	2	605	218	934	36%
Beer	4	514	159	974	31%
<i>2005 Aided Recall</i>					
Financial Institution	3	1511	1466	232	97.0%
Water	11	1467	1445	276	98.5%
Footwear/Running Shoe	16	1261	1030	482	82.5%
Pasta	1	1148	1069	595	93.0%
Airline	12	939	828	804	88.0%
Pharmacy	1	601	391	1142	67.2%
Rental Car	4	530	379	1213	71.5%
<i>2005 Aided Recognition</i>					
Pain Reliever	4	1643	1610	21	98%
Sports Drink	15	1547	1423	51	92%
Delivery Service	11	1489	1325	96	89%
Energy Bar	11	1466	1275	158	87%
Media Outlet	9	1201	865	429	72%
Electronics Store	6	1110	733	497	66%
Yogurt	10	801	384	719	48%
Athletic Retailer	6	777	357	310	46%
Beer	1	745	328	768	44%
Car	3	208	25	1261	12%

sors. By comparison, in the prior consumer-oriented surveys involving other major sporting events (discussed above), respondents have generally struggled to correctly identify official sponsors.

While companies with a long history of sponsoring the NYC Marathon might have been expected to fare better in the survey, there was, as illustrated in Table 2,

no statistically significant correlation between the number of years that a company had sponsored the marathon and the respondents' ability to correctly recall or recognize that company. This suggests that any advantage more competitive runners would have from participating in the prior races would be negated. However, what may explain this discrepancy in aided

Table 3.
2008 Aided Recall

Level	2005 Average Sponsors Identified (17 total sponsors)	2008 Average Sponsors Identified (17 total sponsors)
Beginner	9.93	9.95*
Intermediate	9.96	10.40*
Competitive	10.26	10.74*
Total (Average)	9.99	10.37

* Denotes statistically significant difference between groups at .05, ($p < .05$)

recall rates is the level or extent of sponsorship activation by each particular sponsor. As illustrated in Table 2, the highest percentage of correct responses in both aided recall and recognition were found for companies whose products were used by runners in the course of the race and/or were more indigenous to the sport of running, i.e. there was a good “fit” between sponsor and running (Note: although ING is not such a product, one would naturally expect an extraordinary level of recall for the race’s title sponsor). For example, in 2008, first-year sponsor Emerald Nuts (Healthy Snack sponsor) received the second-highest level of aided recognition, perhaps explained by the fact that the product was distributed to runners towards the end of the race as an energy boost to propel them to the finish (Greenberg, 2008). Conversely, products and services less endemic to the sport of running, and hence not consumed by the runners during the race, received significantly lower levels of recall and recognition.

To further illuminate the sponsor identification findings, participants were segmented into their self-reported levels of competition (beginner, intermediate, or competitive) (Note: A professional category was provided in the survey but not analyzed in the study due to the low number of respondents who fell in this classification). As illustrated in Table 3, the differences in sponsor identification rates between these groups were, as determined by ANOVA, statistically significant (2008: F-statistic = 5.865, $p < 0.00$; 2005 F-statistic = .719). Chi-square, Bonferroni correction and Fisher’s least significant difference post-hoc tests were run to support the ANOVA results. Statistical analysis confirmed significant differences in one’s ability to identify sponsors as involvement levels increase. Variations were statistically significant between the beginner and competitive levels in each of the tests. In total, the statistical analyses illustrate targeted consumers, the participants, with a greater sense of sponsor support and opposition to ambush marketing. As involvement increases from beginning to competitive, runners are better able to identify correct sponsors while develop-

ing adverse views towards those companies who engage in ambush marketing tactics.

Discussion

During the 2003 Boston Marathon, Reebok engaged in a highly publicized ambush marketing campaign by providing participants and spectators with Reebok-logo’d temporary tattoos designed to be worn on foreheads. In response to this campaign, one industry executive commented: “I think [Reebok’s tactic] is aggressive and I think it’s clever, but I don’t think it’s in any way authentic or effective. I would love to see the opinions of the 25,000 Boston runners, the opinion leaders. Most of them don’t wear adidas, but I think they appreciate adidas for helping them have the experience they’re having” (Lieberman, 2003).

This exploratory study sought to begin to address the issues raised by this practitioner, at least as it relates to the sport of marathon running. The study, conducted across two separate years, found results that were substantially different from those reported in prior studies involving non-participants (e.g., spectators, viewers, and general consumers). What was particularly interesting was the similarity in the runners’ strong negative attitudes toward the practice of ambush marketing, despite their being surveyed three years apart. This was most strongly illustrated in the responses to two of the most important attitudinal questions, the first dealing with “fairness” and the second dealing with whether their opinion of ambush marketers is “lowered.” For both questions, and in both 2005 and 2008, essentially two-thirds (66%) of the respondents voiced negative attitudes. The responses to these questions are in stark contrast to those found in the prior study of non-participants. Additionally, although there was not as strong an agreement on the ethical question of ambush marketing, it is still worth noting that the percentage of respondents who agreed with the proposition that ambush marketing was “unethical” was over 50% in both years. The large number of respondents, coupled with the consistency in their responses for both 2005

and 2008, provides ample verification for the premise that New York City Marathon runners generally hold negative attitudes toward the practice of ambush marketing.

There are several theoretical frameworks that might help explain the results of this exploratory study, each with its own set of implications for sport managers. Future research of sport event participants should seek to further explore the application of these. The first is grounded in sponsorship literature; the second is grounded in involvement theory.

Shani & Sandler (1998) and Meenaghan (1998), among others, have suggested that a strong identification with sponsorship by the consumer requires not only a knowledge of the event, but also an emotional link with the activity and/or the sponsor. Along this line of reasoning, it could be argued that the runners in the New York City Marathon simply know more about sponsorship generally and about specific sponsors than do non-participants. It is counter-intuitive that participants could be against ambush marketing if they did not have some pre-existing knowledge about how sponsorship works. Hence, it is important and relevant that in both surveys the respondents demonstrated both solid knowledge of sponsorship and high levels of sponsor recall and recognition. It has been anecdotally reported that participants in events like marathons are much more attuned to the important financial role that sponsors play in helping to make the event happen (Abel, 2007). Conversely, non-participants generally know little about how sponsorship works (e.g., Lyberger & McCarthy, 2001); nor do they believe that the event that they are attending or viewing (e.g., the Super Bowl or Olympics) would not occur without the financial support and involvement of sponsors.

While Crompton (2004) has raised issues regarding the effectiveness of recall and recognition studies (specifically suggesting that results may tie more appropriately to brand popularity), this study suggests that successful integration of the sponsor brand may help explain the relatively high levels of recall and recognition amongst respondents. Hence, if participants appreciate the important role that sponsors play in making the event happen, and additionally are made well aware of the sponsors through high levels of product/service integration, it becomes more readily understood why they may harbor negative attitudes toward ambush marketing.

Sponsors at participatory events like marathons are unique in their ability to integrate product usage into the event itself. As illustrated in Table 2, endemic sponsor products most utilized by the runners in the course of the event achieved by far the highest levels of

recall and recognition. For instance, as the official sports drink (Gatorade), official water (Poland Springs) and official snack (Emerald Nuts) not only have prominence along the race route in terms of signage, but product samples are also liberally distributed to runners throughout the race (hence, providing runners with free value-added benefits). Each year, Barilla (pasta) sponsors the runners pre-race carbohydrate-loading dinner, while Dunkin Donuts has prominent involvement by providing the runners with free coffee and donuts prior to the start of the race. Activities such as these, in which sponsors are “woven into the DNA of the event” (Abel, 2007, p. 21), enhance the opportunities not only for sponsors to become further entrenched in the minds of the participants, but also to build good-will with the participants. It is this sponsor knowledge and goodwill which arguably explains why participants would have a negative attitude toward ambush marketers.

The concept of involvement provides a second lens through which to view the findings in this exploratory study. As has been suggested by Humphreys et al. (2010), “personal involvement with an event or sport has been shown to significantly influence sponsorship outcomes... Individuals with high involvement for a sport or event may feel more resentment toward ambushers or be more likely to seek out or attend to information regarding ambushing activities” (p. 107). As Table 3 suggests, the ability to correctly identify official sponsors appears to increase with the participants’ level of competition. One possible explanation is that those runners in the higher levels of competition are more emotionally and behaviorally involved in running and the sponsors who support running events. They would be moving along the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) (Beaton et al., 2011). The data suggests that as runners improve their times and shift goals towards becoming stronger runners, they may become more attached to the sport and seek to relate to those companies and organizations that are supportive of running. Beginner-level runners may seek a connection to sponsors in an attempt to align themselves with their sport, and to achieve legitimacy that their so-called level of competition precludes. Further research is necessary to determine how these psychological connections are made. The findings do suggest, however, that participation at any level of competition appears to create both goodwill towards official sponsors and negative feelings toward and suspicion of ambush marketers.

The findings of this study provide several benefits to the managers of the NYC Marathon and can be applied to similarly-situated participatory-based sport events. First, information gleaned from this study

strengthens the ability of the NYRR to renew its sponsors by citing the extremely high levels of sponsor identification that can be achieved through product/service immersion into the event coupled with creative sponsor activation to the extent that participants and the target of sponsorship is participants. The findings also provide evidence that the more that a sponsor can be effectively integrated into the event itself, the more likely that sponsor is able to be recalled or recognized by the participants. Perhaps most importantly, within the context of this study, the findings in terms of attitudes toward the practice of ambush marketing provide a valuable tool for sport managers. By publicly communicating the key findings of this study—that a strong majority of participants think more negatively toward ambush marketers—the NYRR can potentially dissuade companies from engaging in ambush marketing activity. It becomes much more unlikely that non-sponsor companies will elect to engage in ambush marketing if they know that the participants are more likely to think negatively of them.

Study Limitations and Future Research

This exploratory study has a number of limitations. First, because the focus of this study was on one sporting event, the findings may thus be representative only of a specific group of participants (e.g., NYC Marathon runners). Hence, the results are not generalizable to other major marathons contested throughout the country and the world, or to other participatory-based sporting events such as cycling and triathlon events. Second, although the primary purpose was to better understand the attitudes of participants toward the practice of ambush marketing, this study did not provide for direct comparison to the attitudes on-site spectators toward the practice of ambush marketing. Hence, to the extent that the researchers discuss a comparison of attitudes toward the practice of ambush marketing between sport participants and non-participants, the researchers rely solely on prior studies unrelated to marathon running. Despite these limitations, however, this research provides a foundation for future studies that can directly compare participants and spectators at the same participatory-based event. Further research should also be undertaken with respect to other participatory-based events where the sponsors' primary target audience is the participants themselves (e.g., other marathons, triathlons, cycling, youth sports leagues).

This exploratory study provides the basis for additional research to help better explain the basis of participants' negative attitudes toward the practice of ambush marketing. Specifically, research should aim to better understand how knowledge of sponsorship gen-

erally, ability to correctly identify sponsors, and the participants' appreciation of sponsorship's role in helping to make the event happen, impacts attitudes toward ambush marketing. Future research should also seek to assess the impact of involvement theory, including but not limited to the extent to which the involvement is with the sport (in this case, running) as opposed to the event and its sponsors (NYC Marathon). Furthermore, future research should endeavor to obtain better demographic, psychographics and behavioral profiles that can then be compared to sponsorship objectives. Finally, while this study was based solely on quantitative methodology, qualitative interviews with runners could provide more explanation and insight as to why participants appear to more strongly oppose ambush marketing than spectators. In sum, a number of future research initiatives could illuminate the transferability of the instant findings to a broader array of participatory-based sport events.

Conclusion

The extent to which participants in the New York City Marathon held negative attitudes toward the practice of ambush marketing—particularly given the findings in prior studies involving non-participant sport consumers—presents some ground-breaking research within this discipline. Granted, not all participatory-based sport events have the potential to be detrimentally impacted by ambush marketing. However, certainly events like major marathons, triathlons and cycling events—sometimes featuring tens of thousands of participants—are the types of event that could further benefit from this line of research. Spectators have little or no emotional attachment or connection to the official sponsors of spectator-based events such as the Super Bowl or the Olympics; furthermore, these types of events are going to happen with or without the support of official sponsors. Conversely, one can intuitively make the argument that those involved in participatory-based events (e.g., marathons) are more likely to understand and appreciate the importance of official sponsors in underwriting their event. Furthermore, participants much more often actively “engage” with official sponsors during the course of an event, particularly with sponsors whose products are endemic to the event itself. This exploratory study should set the stage for future research into the factors that influence negative attitudes toward the practice of ambush marketing.

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