

2018 Sport Marketing Association Conference (SMA XVI)

Ambush Marketing During the 2018 Commonwealth Games on Twitter and Instagram

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50-minute poster presentation

The purpose of this research is to undertake a cross-cultural, multinational exploration of ambush marketing on social media during a global mega-event to be held in 2018 in Australia: the Commonwealth Games. While the concept of ambush marketing is nothing new, this global mega-event allows for a discussion of the issues involved when organizations attempt to utilize ambush marketing, also known as guerilla marketing, parasitic marketing, or simply the unofficial games. In sum, ambush marketing is a strategic attempt by an advertiser to associate itself with an event though above and beyond the commercial rights of association secured by the brand (Chadwick & Burton, 2011). Thus, the organization is not an official sponsor of an event though through advertising a consumer might believe that it is. Examples of ambush marketing events often include the Olympic Games, the Commonwealth Games, the Super Bowl, and the FIFA World Cup.

One area that has received scant research is understanding how ambush marketing occurs on social media. Initial studies into social ambushing have emphasized the need for further study into ambushing in the digital realm (Chavanat & Desbordes, 2014), yet to date little examination of the strategic initiatives taken by online ambushers exists. Likewise, the marketing media employed by ambushers, and the methods used, whilst a subject of considerable study in traditional marketing and advertising media (e.g., Burton & Chadwick, 2018; Chadwick & Burton, 2011), remain areas in need of greater study in a new-media context. Indeed, the rise in use and popularity of the Internet has dramatically changed the way organizations communicate with their stakeholders (Pedersen, Miloch, & Laucella, 2007), necessitating further study into the implications and ramifications for sponsorship, ambush marketing, and event commercial rights management.

Social media (SM) platforms such as Twitter and Instagram provide a central location for social engagement and a means for organizations to disseminate their messages directly to mass audiences (Pegoraro, 2010, Pegoraro, Scott, & Burch, 2017). SM use by organizations is largely driven by two key factors: the relatively inexpensive cost of SM when compared to traditional marketing tools and the ability to connect with millions with ease (Dittmore & McCarthy, 2014). SM allows for interaction, providing a unique channel of communication that shifts communication from one-way (e.g., television advertisements) to a more interactive method. SM is a cost-effective tool for building brand relationships through interactive dialogue between sport organizations and fans (Williams & Chinn, 2010).

This study therefore seeks to uncover how official sponsors of the Canadian and Australia Commonwealth Games teams are ambushed by unaffiliated companies on two social media platforms: Twitter and Instagram. To conduct these multi-national looks into ambush marketing in two different countries, a content analysis will be conducted on the tweets and Instagram posts of all official team sponsors and their competitors to uncover how unaffiliated companies seek to use the games as a means of promotion of their products and services. In terms of mega-event consumption online, Twitter revealed that as many as 82% of Twitter users looked at information related to the Olympic Games (Hutchinson, 2016), so Olympics audiences' enthusiasm for searching out information provides brands with an opportunity to market to these consumers online.

This study fulfills two gaps in the literature that were identified by Filo et al. (2015) and Abeza et al. (2016) in their reviews of sport and social media research. First, this study has its focus on two nations that have not been extensively studied and the reviews noted that much of the sport and social media scholarship was very American-centric in nature with limited cross-cultural analyses and, two, social media has a natural appeal as an activation tool of both sponsorships and ambushing opportunities. Resulting from its instant global reach, ease of networking, and

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ease of collaboration, social media has become a powerful marketing tool particularly for those seeking to market in multiple countries. Social media has a natural appeal for activation of messages.

The 2018 Commonwealth Games will be held in Gold Coast from 4 to 15 April 2018. Commonwealth Games Australia has three levels of official sponsors: official partners (6), official supporters (17), and official suppliers (3), while Commonwealth Games Canada has two levels of sponsors: official partners (5) and official suppliers (3). All Australian and Canadian official partners, supporters and suppliers' social media messages (including both tweets and Instagram pictures) and their major competitors will be examined during the 11 days of competition to see how key ambusher marketers in both Australia and Canada are using this opportunity to increase their brand awareness.

To develop a codebook, an initial sample of 100 tweets/100 Instagram posts will be selected by one researcher. Then, two researchers will independently code all of these social media posts and categories will emerge from interrogation of the data using a grounded theory approach. Once completed, the researchers will discuss key themes and group them together based on similarity to ensure that all of the key themes are coded and analyzed. Any tweets/Instagram posts not felt to fit one of the categories will be put aside and being discussed later. Based on Landis and Koch (1977)'s suggestion, the intercoder reliability (Cohen's κ) needs to be reach to 0.7. The researchers of the study will attempt to see how many categories of sponsorship-related tweets could be identified after the inductive content analysis. In addition, the study will also attempt to compare how ambushing marketers in both nations strategically promote themselves during the games.

Results of this study will help to inform how non-official sponsors use major international sporting events as the opportunity to market their products and services on social media platforms. Furthermore, the results of the study may assist the official sponsors learn how they are able to protect their rights and interests after investing significant amount of dollars on sponsoring sport entities. Results of this study will be presented at the SMA conference.