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How have the Olympic ideals been embedded in official and non-official PR and advertising campaigns?

PR Conference paper

Abstract

The Olympics is the biggest platform for the global media and all companies want to take advantage of this opportunity. This paper will examine how companies are embedding Olympic ideals into their public relations and advertising campaigns in order to capitalise of the biggest sporting event in the world. The Olympic committee have strict guidelines to protect their brand however the public interest and day to day communication has been seen to promote the event using ideologies and their brand identity. I will draw on Stakeholder theory and Game theory to discuss the affect on the official and unofficial sponsors of the London 2012 Games and how this could be a benefit for the companies involved. I will compare and contrast two case studies the official sponsors Procter & Gamble's 'Thank you Mum' juxtaposed to unofficial associates Virgin Media's 'Keep up' campaign.

Keywords: *PR Hijacking, Olympic ideals, Game theory, Stakeholder Theory, Halo effect, Ambush marketing, Advertising, Public relations*

The Olympic Games is the largest sporting event in the world and as it acts as a huge window for the world's media. The Olympic ideals, used to promote the games, and establish a brand identity have been embedded all throughout the promotion in the run up to this event. These concepts of 'creating a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example, social responsibility and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles' (International Olympic committee 2011a) is encouraged throughout in many official and non-official public relations and advertising campaigns. The Olympic Charter states that any official sponsors need to comply with these Olympic ideals however other companies are using these aims and objectives within their advertising and public relations. **Is the corporate world simply being opportunist, drawing from the public interest at the time or is this Olympic ambush marketing that could discredit the media relations conducted by the Olympic committee? Or are they just jumping on the Olympic 'brand wagon'? (Hartland & Williams-Burnett, 2012).**

As tourism in London will increase, and the publicity of the Games will flood the media platforms and the consumer market will use any relations possible to reap the benefits of this super event. The awareness of the event is global and well established so the Olympic committee through sponsorships, will be focusing on creating a positive response to the brand and their ideology.

The official 'Olympic family' sponsors have paid to protect the brand and ensure that any association with the Olympic Games promotes the movement and the event. The IOC is extremely strict with the compliance with the Olympic charter signed by the host country. I am going to look at how companies are using the brand values and identity of the Olympics to benefit their organisation, as members of the Olympic family, and unofficially.

I am also going to look at how the Olympic ideals are embedded in every day communication, as a part of their public relations campaign and through the paid space of advertising. By looking at the case studies of the official sponsors Procter & Gamble and their international advertising and public relations campaign 'Thank you mum' and the methods and techniques they use instilling the Olympic ideals. Juxtaposed to Virgin media's 'Keep up' advertising and social media campaign that has been linked to the brand through the use of Usain Bolt as their celebrity endorsement and sporting association.

There is a distinct difference between the advertising and the public relations that are put in place to promote the Olympics and the event. As the Olympics are a capitalist company their sponsors ensure the 'independent financial stability of the Olympic Movement, and thereby to assist in the worldwide promotion of Olympism' (International Olympic committee 2011b). Advertising differs from public relations through 'credibility, control and cost' (Donnelly, 2012). As the official sponsors they 'help define a brand personality through its inferred association with the sport property (Musante, Milne, & McDonald, 1999) for example Procter & Gamble use tentative links through their products to associate themselves with *Olympism*. Their message is conveyed through the bought space and controlled by the organisation. The Olympic ideals that are communicated through every day and sponsorship life have more credibility and the nationalism that comes through in this campaign ultimately promotes the Olympics as a profit generating company and brand.

By looking at the case study of P&G's 'Thank you Mum by P&G' campaign; that focuses on how the brands within P&G label have helped mothers nurture the athletes. This

advertising and PR campaign uses social media and celebrity endorsement. They embed the Olympic ideals through the sport association, celebrity ambassador, the image of health and competition through the images of winners. They play on the universal relationship of the mother figure to relate to a wide global audience and to tie in with their domestic products. The public relations around this campaign are branding this as a family event targeting all age ranges through the chronological advertisement they are also paying for some mother's travels costs to see this once in a lifetime opportunity that creates the event as being the epitome of their career. As L'Etang discusses 'the cultural significance shaped by a range of PR and media sources that set agendas, create or promote ideologies, shape myths and icons, promote goods create international reference points and touchstones'(2006). The official worldwide partners also engage with international PR. Releasing a global campaign that embeds the ideals of solidarity and unity and McLuhan's concept of a 'global village that connects people despite geographic distance' (1964). This opens up for a wider consumer market as the worldwide mega event can globally use public relations to promote their ideals and brand identity along with the consumer culture that western countries embody, to appeal to the aspirational countries and profitable 'Olympic ideals'.

P&G have also used other PR techniques such as social media and physical gestures to allow children and athletes to thank their mothers on a Facebook page. They have also embedded the idea of a global community and reaching potential by being involved with the Mayor of London's 'Clean-up Campaign' that will clean the streets of London. This furthers the association with London 2012 and by using their products to bring the best out of the city this has been constructed to encourage pride. They have met their objectives through community acts of corporate social responsibility and promoting the Olympic ideals.

Unofficial partners and supporters are also using these ideals. This is positive for the public relations of the Olympic Games as it shows their brand values are being used through communication on a daily basis. However does this breach the contract and step into ambush marketing and 'consumer confusion [which in turn will] deny the legitimate sponsor clear recognition for its sponsorship role' (Meenaghan, 1996)? By looking at another case study ,Virgin media's advertising campaign 'Keep up' that have used Usain Bolt the gold medallist and world record sprinter to front their campaign. There is no mention of his sporting accolades or the Olympic brand however his association with the athletic world, his puma sports kit and the timing of the campaign has 'reinforce(d) the public's perception of a product' (Getz, 1997) as being associated with the sporting mega event and the Olympic brand. Bolt also appears in Visa advertising, and Visa are worldwide Olympic partners. He uses this opportunity to trademark his 'To Di World gesture that he did when breaking his record. The blurring of the adverting industry has benefited Virgin's position. Through other methods of their PR campaign and as Duncan and Caywood (1996) described the connection with other communication functions like integrated marketing communications, Virgin have also sponsored the London Marathon blurring the lines of British sport. Through social media campaigns and hash tag #IamRBranson Usain Bolt has continues the associated between the two.

The discussion about speed associates the brand with sporting events and competition. The advertising slogan of 'Keep up' embeds the Olympic ideals of sustainability and competition through sport. By this indirect association and breaking no direct regulations are Virgin just capitalising on public interest and has this affected the PR of the Olympics and the 'Stakeholders' of the brand (Freeman, 1984). However this advertising

campaign lacks the credibility that comes with the cost (Donnelly, 2012) the lack of control by the Olympic committee is dangerous however by raising awareness of the ideas this could be classed as successful PR for embedding the ideals into everyday communication.

Freeman describes a Stakeholder as 'Any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the activities of an organisation' (1984). Can the PR hijacking and ambush marketing have a direct result to the Stakeholders of the Olympic brand?

As the sponsors are using the resources and relationships framed to benefit the stakeholders such as the consumer could affect the success of the Olympics by tarnishing the brand. The Stakeholder with the power and as Frooman describes that 'the nature of the relationship – that is, who is dependent on whom and how much – determines who has power'' (Frooman, 1999, p. 196) it is the sponsors who need to protect their exclusivity and opportunities for media coverage that comes with the association of the Olympic Games. Rowley and Moldoveanu (2003) argue that stakeholders are mobilised into action not only by interest-driven organisational behaviour, but also by the desire to express an identity. So if the Olympic ideals are embedded in non official sponsorships it is seen as good PR for the Olympics as it has been categorised as public interest of the nation and the world due to its history and size. However it could jeopardise the relationship with the International Olympic Committee and official sponsors who have invested a lot of money.

The cross section of advertising for the Olympic Games both unofficially and officially could be view as a 'non zero-sum situation' (Edwards 2009) as all of the organisations Virgin and P&G and the Olympic brand get positive coverage and greater awareness about the competitive and sporting ideals. Grunig developed the Game theory discussed by Harrison (2000) by revisiting the communication model discussing how organisations follow each of

their own aims and objectives in the light of the interests of other parties (2001) to mutually benefit their companies. Even though P&G have paid for the control and exclusivity, if the unofficial parties are complying by promoting positive Olympic ideals it can be a win-win situation for all. Cutlip et al (2000) describes this as PR viewing itself as an open system by reviewing the relevant environmental influences and adapting their strategies to gain as much coverage and association as possible.

This relationship could also form a halo effect around the sponsorship as Fombrun and Van Riel have argued that the Halo could work as a shield (2003). This overlap in sponsorship could be view as a crisis and the halo of the Olympic ideals focus on the positive aspects of Virgin and ignore the breach in benefitting financially from the Games as part of the negative information surrounding Virgin. The Olympic public relations could use this as a positive form of coverage and maybe a compliment of their lifting of Olympic ideals.

Virgin Media have not breached any regulations however it has utilised its company as an unofficial sponsor. There is no mention of the name London2012 in the campaign and no direct use of the logo or brand within the advertising but by embedding the Olympic ideals they are indirectly reflecting the public relations and advertising of the official sponsors and therefore benefitting themselves from the super event. It can be viewed that they are also jeopardising the role of the official sponsors of the Games. By looking at the regulations as a Stakeholder for example the markets or publics by sitting under the umbrella of this global event it can be seen as a success by the public relations of the Olympics as it is now seen as public interest. By confusing the public and the motives of their advertising they are competing with BT as the communications sponsor of the Games. Overall in I feel that the companies are trying to make money through this event as they

media will be so highly broadcasting on this event. Along with the Queen's Jubilee in 2012 I feel that companies are using brand identities and ideals to avoid breaching rules and regulations. So attitude like nationalism and competitiveness will subliminally reach out to the consumers changing behaviour and opinions. Also by association and relationships formed this will benefit both the Olympic committee and allow it to continue be so strict on advertising that the host country has adhered to due to the economic impact it will create.

However as technology advances the impact this will have on the Public Relations industry will be incontrollable as the use of social media and user generated content is extremely hard to illuminate without censorship. The strict guidelines around the Olympics will be irrelevant however the money needed from the sponsorships to create the event will still be vital. The Public relations industry will need to positively use social media. I feel this isn't ambush marketing or PR hijacking this is being opportunist and I feel that the Olympic committee should welcome capitalist companies embedding their ideals as it is a positive method, that will be instil their brand values universally in everyday life.

Can one company ever solely own, and therefore be subject to hacking, the public interest of the global media?

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