



Sponsoring the Beijing Olympic Games

Patterns of sponsor advertising

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to identify and describe the key driving forces in international sponsorship during the years preceding the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing.

Design/methodology/approach – A “means-objectives model” is applied, thereby linking sponsorship to brand equity factors and to strategic aims. Co-branding, revenue streams and new customers are identified as means factors. The objective factors are presented in three dimensions: product, corporation and region. The analysis is based on 492 advertisements, articles and press releases collected from Chinese newspapers and Chinese official web pages covering the period 2001-2007.

Findings – Analysis sees seven dominant means-objectives combinations in sponsorship leading to different pattern of sponsor advertising strategies depending on the lead time to the Olympic Games. First, sponsors mainly focus on co-branding marketing efforts. In the second stage, global Olympic sponsors link co-branding with corporation image, Chinese brands are focusing on product/corporation image and new customers. In the third stage global Olympic sponsors focus more on local markets and customers in advertising. Chinese brands tend to keep an activation strategy based on revenue and product. Only a few local sponsors place emphasis on leveraging their sponsorship investment toward creating an international image.

Research limitations/implications – Data collection is limited to a period of altogether three months in 2006 and 2007, focusing on Chinese print media available in Beijing and Shanghai universities’ libraries. Given the size of the Chinese media market the data therefore consist only of a random selection of advertisements. Further, the sample does not cover different marketing channels, like TV, radio etc., which might also be part of the sponsor’s advertising strategy.

Originality/value – In addition to providing further understanding of Olympic sponsor advertising behavior and sponsorship in an emerging market context, this paper provides insights into how the strategic aims related to sponsorship depended on the level of internationalization of the firm.

Keywords Olympic Games, Sponsorship, Advertising, China

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Without the support of the business community, without its technology, expertise, people, services, products, telecommunications, its financing – the Olympic Games could not and cannot happen. Without this support, the athletes cannot compete and achieve their very best (IOC, 2008).

The Olympic Games attract the focus of the media and the attention of the entire world for two weeks every four years. Beyond the sports aspect of this mega event the Olympic Games is also one of the largest international marketing events in the world, reaching billions of people in over 200 countries around the globe (IOC, 2008). The turnover of sponsorship to mega-sporting events is huge and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has concluded that the total revenue of the last four games up to 2004 amounted to about 2 bn EURO (Preuss, 2004). The Olympic brand has recently been analyzed in a number of studies including by Davies (2008), Dolles and Söderman (2008), Giannoulakis



et al. (2008) and Preuss *et al.* (2008). It consists of various product and non-product attributes, which might be labeled a clutter. This includes all of the official names, phrases, trademarks, logos and designs related to the Olympic Games and the Olympic and Paralympic Movements (collectively referred to as the “Games’ Marks”), which are legally protected by a variety of means. But some will label it a clutter.

To raise the necessary revenue, sponsors receive an exclusive association to the Olympic Games and the Olympic and Paralympic Movements and the rights to use the Games’ Marks for marketing purposes. Yang *et al.* (2008) point out that despite the fact that sport sponsorship has developed into a major industry in the global marketplace (IEG, 2004), and the People’s Republic of China (hence China) is no exception, there have been only a few attempts to examine how sport sponsorship works in the context of Chinese culture and economics (see e.g. Geng *et al.*, 2002; Söderman and Dolles, 2008). They also claim that with its own unique history and cultural background, China provides a very different market for sport sponsorship. Sport sponsorship in China helps “to build not only brand equity, but also relationships, networks, and alliances. Relationship is utterly the most important element in business dealings in China” (Yang *et al.*, 2008, p. 64). Thus there is an increasing need for research addressing this uniqueness and identify the ways in which international and domestic corporations perceive and act on the opportunities for sponsorship investment in China.

According to BBC Monitoring Media (2006) China is the third-largest advertising market in the world after the USA and Japan. Total advertising expenses in 2005 amounted to 30.5 bn US\$ and further growth was predicted due to the Olympic Games. While foreign ventures have continued to enter and advertise in China, local Chinese enterprises have driven a significant portion of the expansion in advertising expenditure, and local brands comprised the entire top ten list of advertisers (Kahn, 2003). International well known brands should, according to Tai (2007), however be careful in bringing their advertising concepts straight to consumers in mainland China. This is a motive for us to conduct marketing research on China.

Another rationale for our research can be derived from the literature on the formulation of global brands that ideally carry the same message and position in various inter-market segments (Hill and James, 1990; Meffert and Althans, 1986; Rutigliano, 1986). As Samiee *et al.* (2005) conclude, marketing scholars have exhibited much interest in exploring standardized international marketing programmes and global marketing strategies (e.g. Jain, 1989) in which branding plays a pivotal role. Brand knowledge in this context represents the personal meaning about a brand that consumers have stored in their memory, and includes all descriptive and evaluative brand-related information (Keller, 2003). In addition to brand awareness, it includes brand attributes which may be used in marketing to link brands with positive regional images (Beijing, China, in this study) or sporting images (Olympic Movement and Sport).

The purposes of this research therefore are:

- to discuss sport sponsorship of the Beijing Olympic Games as a strategic investment toward creating brand awareness in China and on the international market;
- to analyze sponsor advertisements based on a means-objectives model of sponsorship; and
- to search for patterns of advertisement strategies.

Our theoretical contribution is a revised view on brand equity in a sponsor context. Earlier research by Fahy *et al.* (2004) focused on two distinct levels of competitive advantages: one on sponsorship and the other on product markets. While a peculiar sponsorship might be superior to that of competitors, it will only generate a competitive advantage in product markets if it provides value or enables the creation of value for the customer (Barney, 1991). Despite ever increasing expenditure, the measurement of sponsorship effectiveness has, to date, proved problematic. With a better understanding of what the sponsoring organization actually wanted to achieve and what benefits were actually accrued, the local host of the Olympic Games might be able to offer better evidence of cost effective returns for the sponsor and thus aid the sustainability for sponsorship revenues.

Literature review: toward developing our research framework

The area of marketing communications has experienced a quiet, yet significant transformation during the past three decades. Cornwell (2008), Rust and Oliver (1994) have gone so far as to foretell the death of “traditional” advertising techniques at the hands of recent technological developments and widespread media fragmentation. Leading the way toward these changes have been the so-called non-traditional promotional techniques such as sponsorship-linked marketing. Although alternative definitions exist, Cornwell’s (1995) discussion of sponsorship-linked marketing as “the orchestration and implementation of marketing activities for the purpose of building and communicating an association to a sponsorship” (Cornwell, 1995, p. 15) encompasses the ultimate goal of most corporate sponsorship activities, particularly those involving major sports events. In this context it is necessary to highlight central differences between advertising and sponsorship. Whereas sponsorship involves a fee paid in advance for future communication values, advertising offers a more knowable and more controlled communication. Furthermore, whereas sponsorship requires leveraging (promotional spending in addition to the sponsorship fee) to obtain the greatest value, advertising is often sponsorship’s most valuable leverage.

It needs to be considered further that in most cases a long-term perspective is taken by sponsors (Crompton, 2004). In this sense sponsorship awareness, image or relational objectives are pursued in order to create a favorable environment for future sales. The measurement of media coverage, thought important in the earlier days of commercial sponsorship, is now largely discounted (Pope, 1998) since the extent of media coverage has been shown to have little impact on consumers’ attitude and behavior toward a brand. Brand as a concept is in the literature defined in various ways but most often these are based on a traditional perspective. Two examples are Kotler and Keller (2006) and Rizebos (2003) who show that a brand is a symbol which implies that the product or the service can be associated with a corporation. In addition to this rather “narrow” definition, we apply the definition by de Chernatony and McDonald (1998): “A successful brand is an identifiable product, service, person or place, augmented in such a way that the buyer or user perceives relevant, unique added values, which match their needs most closely. Furthermore, its success results from being able to sustain these added values in the face of competition” (de Chernatony and McDonald, 1998, p. 20).

Sponsorship has been defined as a “cash and/or in-kind fee paid to a property (typically a sports, entertainment or non-profit event or organization) in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that property” (International Events Group, 2000, p. 1). Giving the global attention it should be added

that “sponsorship of the arts and or sporting events is an increasingly popular way of generating positive feelings about firms” (Meenaghan, 1991, p. 36). Sponsoring thus occurs in several different contexts. On an individual level an athlete can cooperate with a sponsor firm, on an organizational level there is cooperation or an association between a sports team and a sponsor firm. The most frequently investigated theoretical concept related to the improved processing of sponsorship stimuli is undoubtedly the idea of matching or congruence (between the sponsor and the event or activity also called fit, relatedness and similarity) (Cornwell *et al.*, 2005). Strategic work referring to cooperation and branding issues within sports is generally not common. There are a number of reasons why these questions have not been prioritized. One explanation is a lack of resources and competence, but it can also depend on the fact that sports are basing their existence on other values, articulated basic values, than those which commercial corporations are based on leading to a sports focus on more primary parts of the activity. This trend is general within the sport movement but there are actors which work more “strategically” (Fyrberg and Söderman, 2007).

Sponsorship of sports, arts and charitable events is a mainstream marketing activity no longer in need of extensive introduction or justification. There is, however, a need to account for the progress made to date in the integration of sponsorship-linked marketing into management theory and research. Moreover, there is a need to open a discussion of realignment in our thinking regarding the role sponsorship and other indirect marketing communication currently play and will play in the future. Up to this point, we have tended to consider sponsorship, product placement, *advergaming* and other new approaches as uniquely interesting areas at the intersection of advertising and entertainment. It is time to consider these trends holistically as a move toward a new era in communications, one that could be called “indirect marketing”. There are many possible perspectives on sponsorship. In this paper, the perspective of the firm that might utilize advertising matched with sponsorship in marketing and communications is considered.

Underlying many marketing communications theories is basic psychological theory on information processing. Key to an understanding of what happens in the mind is the idea of associative networks (Anderson and Bower, 1973) and spreading activation (Collins and Loftus, 1975). If advertising, as an area of study, embraces sponsorship as part of the domain of advertising, then sponsorship decision-making must be embraced as part of the domain of advertising management something which has not yet occurred. The old set of advertising relationships focused largely on the relationship between the agency and the client (e.g. Gould *et al.*, 1999), and on the transactional perspective of buying advertising exposure. For many clients advertising agencies were the gateway to media. In contrast, sponsorship-linked marketing may take many forms and include many intermediaries, but may also include direct alliances between the firm and the property (Farrelly and Quester, 2005) and sponsoring is almost always relational in orientation.

How sponsorship information is encoded and later retrieved depends not only on the nature of the exposure but also on the nature of the receiver. Previous research suggests that the knowledge a person holds about a sport influences the perception of the congruence of a sponsor-event pairing (Roy and Cornwell, 2004). This research only captured event knowledge, but what is the role of other information held in memory? What influence does it have on a new sponsorship relationship?

The pairing of a brand or corporate name with an event or activity is similar to the paired-associate learning task found in numerous studies in psychology. In the

paired-associate paradigm, two words are presented at study and then individuals are asked to recall one given the other. The memory literature has provided the most comprehensive account of how pre-existing memories might contribute to recall. These works accept the associative networks of Anderson and Bower (1973) and then focus on understanding one word's relationship to another and the way in which these relationships influence memory. They now have convincing evidence that when recall is cued with an associate of a to-be-remembered word, the network of associations emanating from both the cue and the target is involved in the recall process (Nelson and McEvoy, 2002), for example when you ask individuals "Is the brand the Olympic Games or the five rings?". The results of Nelson *et al.* (1997) suggest that the provision of a mediator concept (or word) would be most important when the associative pathway involves an intermediate link between the cue and the target, as would often be the case in sponsorship. That is to say that in practice, marketing managers could supply a concept to support the link between the sponsor and activity instead of relying on an individual's pre-existing memory networks.

Research framework

Three means factors

- (1) *Co-branding*: A symmetrical brand alliance between two or more established brands for mutual benefit. The sponsor's name is associated with the Olympic Movement the Olympic Games. Co-branding also referred to as brand alliances (Blackett and Boad, 1999; Rao and Rueckert, 1994), joint branding (Simonin and Ruth, 1998), double branding (Hillyer and Tikoo, 1995) or brand bundling (Farquhar *et al.*, 1992) is considered to be another way of gaining benefits from intangible assets and a brand leverage strategy (Filipsson, 2008; James, 2006). This factor reflects that brand building and brand management are increasingly considered as a strategic area which management needs to take into consideration (de Chernatony and McDonald, 1998; Melin, 1999; Ruttenberg *et al.*, 1995).
- (2) *Revenue factor*: The brand's associations are those that can be connected to the company and its brands. Association means what is directly, or indirectly, linked in the consumer's mind to a specific brand. Aaker (1996) and Cornwell and Coote (2005) argue that associations create value for the company by helping the consumer to understand information and to differentiate the brand, which subsequently gives the consumer reasons to buy and thus to create revenues.
- (3) *New customers*: Sponsorship can heighten the firm's brand and create awareness of your business and products in the minds of a new set of customers. People in a brand community can be considered as "active loyalists", users that are "committed, conscientious – almost passionate" (O'Guinn and Muniz, 2001).

Three objective factors

The analysis will be simplified by assuming three dimensions expressing effects:

- (1) *Product image*: The traditional brand contract "one brand = one product = one promise" has been displaced to "one brand = one promise = several products" (Kapferer, 1992). Firms therefore prefer to use

their existing brand, when introducing new products (Filipsson, 2008). This is addressed in our research by asking, whether the focus of the advertisements on products? Which product associations are used in the advertisements?

- (2) *Corporation image*: Branding has increasingly been applied to promote corporations (e.g. Lenovo) discussed by, e.g. Chao *et al.* (2003) and Doebele (2002). Based on Hollensen (2007) we see advertisements focusing on the corporation as a market establishment. We assume that the image of a firm strengthens its brand value.
- (3) *Region image*: Branding has also been applied to regions (Kotler *et al.*, 1999; Kotler and Gernter, 2002; Rowe and McGuirk, 1999). There is a growing interest in the internationalization of a brand (Vallaster and de Chernatony, 2005) that can be defined as “the process of developing a firm’s brand equity that appeals to overseas target customers’ positive attitudes about the brand” (Bennett, 1995). We assume that advertisements related to the Chinese context might not only help to build brand equity, but also relationships, networks and alliances in China (Figure 1).

Research design

The Olympic Games’ sponsors

There were five sponsorship levels at the Beijing Olympic Games.

The Olympic Partners (TOP Programme) (12 sponsors): Created in 1985 and managed by the IOC, the Top Olympic Partners (TOP) programme is the only sponsorship with exclusive worldwide marketing rights to the use of the Games’ Marks for both Winter and Summer Games. The global marketing rights include partnerships with the IOC, all active National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and their Olympic teams, the two Organizing Committees of the Olympic Games (OCOGs) and the Games of each quadrennium. The following companies are the TOP Partners for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games: Coca-Cola, Atos Origin, General Electric, Johnson-Johnson, Kodak, Lenovo, Manulife, McDonalds, Omega, Panasonic, Samsung and Visa.

In addition to the global TOP Programme, the Olympic Games are supported by a domestic sponsorship programme which grants marketing rights by using the Game’s marks within the host country. The domestic Olympic Sponsorship Programme, which includes sponsors, suppliers and providers, is managed by the respective OCOG under

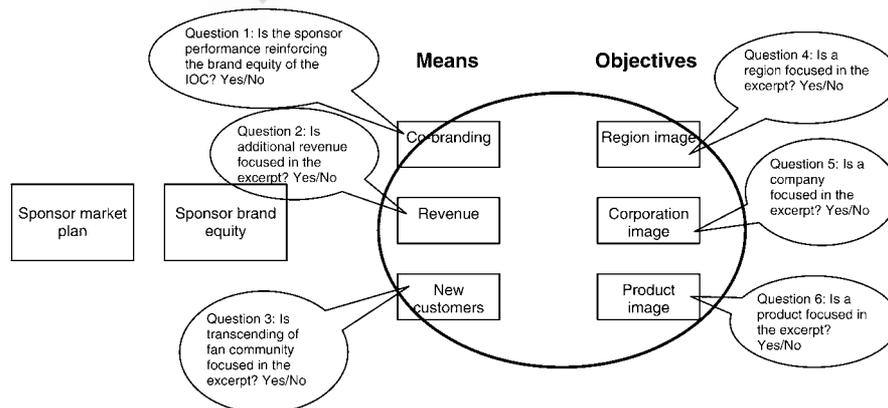


Figure 1.
The six-factor model

the direction of the IOC. Domestic sponsorship programmes are primarily focused on fulfilling the many specific operational needs of the OCOG during the planning and staging of the games. In addition, domestic sponsors also support the host nation's NOC and Olympic team (IOC, 2008). For the Beijing Olympic Games the following corporations were selected by the "Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games" (BOCOG) on four sponsorship levels:

Beijing 2008 partners (11 firms): Bank of China, CNC, Sinopec, CNPC, China Mobile, VW, Adidas, Johnson & Johnson, Air China, PICC and State Grid.

Beijing 2008 sponsors (ten firms): UPS, Haier, Budweiser, Sohu.com, YiLi, Tsingtao, Yanjing Beer, Bhpbilliton and HengYuanXiang, and TongYi.

Beijing 2008 exclusive suppliers (15 firms): Great Wall, Kerry Oil & Grains, Gehua Ticketmaster Ticketing, MengNa, BEIFA, HuáDi, YADU, Snickers, Qinxihé, Sinian, TechnoGym, Royal, Staples, Aggreko, Schenker.

Beijing 2008 co-exclusive suppliers (17 firms): Taishan, Sunglo, EF, Aifly, Crystal CG, Yuanpei Translation, Der Floor, Aokang, Liby, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Dayun, Capinfo, Unipack, Microsoft (China), Kokuyo, Newauto, Mondo.

Sample and data collection

The first data set includes 200 collected excerpts: 120 newspaper articles, press releases, advertisements and 80 clippings from Chinese webpages about the Olympic Games and sponsoring activities. Data were gathered in China in June/July 2006. The 120 clippings were chosen by page-by-page searches of Chinese newspapers and magazines constituting articles and advertisements of Beijing 2008 sponsors and Beijing Olympic activities. For the purpose of conducting our data search a press database search could not be applied, as advertisements cannot be retrieved from press databases using a search string. Our data selection was therefore limited to the collection of Chinese Newspapers and magazines at the Chinese National Library in Beijing and the Library of the Graduate School of CASS in Beijing. The newspaper and magazine collection in the Chinese National Library in Beijing is considered to be one of the largest available in China covering all major domestic newspapers and magazines. A compiled list of the newspapers and magazines been searched in 2006 and later in 2007 can be found below[1]. The advertisements retrieved covered the period 1 January to 10 July 2006, whereas the clippings cover the period back to 2001, when it was announced that Beijing will host the Olympic Games.

The second data set consists of 292 excerpts and advertisement clippings from newspapers and magazines collected during August/September 2007. We applied the same data collection method as in 2006. The clippings constituting advertisements of the sponsoring companies and their activities in the period preceding the Beijing Olympic Games were chosen to a large extent from the same newspapers and magazines as in 2006. Our data gathering was however limited to the collection of Chinese Newspapers and magazines available at the Shanghai Library and local universities' libraries in Shanghai. Compared to the 36 sponsors in the 2006 sample, the number of sponsors included in our search increased to 65 due to new announcement of sponsors by the BOCOG (see Table I on the changes).

Instrumentation and limitations

A qualitative content analysis was applied to match the advertisements with questions associated with our means-objective model of sponsoring. This analysis is based on Creswell's (2003) suggestion to convert indications extracted from qualitative data into

No.	Name	2006 number	2007 number	Added sponsor
1	Worldwide Olympic Partners (TOP Programme)	11	12	Johnson-Johnson
2	Beijing 2008 Partners	11	11	
3	Beijing 2008 Sponsors	9	10	TongYi
4	Beijing 2008 Exclusive Suppliers	5	15	Great Wall, Kerry Oil & Grains, Gehua Ticketmaster Ticketing, Qinxuhe, Sinian, TechnoGym, Royal, Staples, aggrego, schenker
5	Beijing 2008 Co-exclusive Suppliers	0	17	Taishan, Sunglo, EF, Aifly, Crystal CG, Yuanpei Translation, Der Floor, Aokang, Liby, Dayun, Capinfo, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Unipack, Microsoft (China), Kokuyo, Newauto, Mondo
6	Total	36	65	29
7	Actual number of sponsors appeared	26	45	

Table I.
Comparison between
sponsors of 2006 and
2007

codes. In this paper all 492 excerpts and advertisements were examined and codified based on the six questions associated with the means-objective model. The content analysis of the clippings and web articles was undertaken by the authors, followed by a discussion with local experts (Chinese marketing managers with experience from Western business practices) to avoid cultural bias explanations. To evaluate our findings additional secondary sources such as interviews taken from the website of the BOGOC and the sponsoring companies have been used.

By applying the questions of the proposed means-objective model we divided our sample into nine patterns (Table II).

We are aware that the analysis is based on a selection of advertisements in printed media and also does not cover other marketing channels, like TV, radio etc. Data collection was also limited to a period in 2006 and again in 2007 focusing on printed Chinese media available in Beijing and Shanghai universities' libraries. However, as Simons (2003) notes, China is the most complex media market, as it has more than 3,000 television channels, some 1,800 radio stations, over 1,000 newspapers, more than 7,000 magazines and numerous internet portals. Given the size of the country, there are

Pattern	Factor 1-3	Factor 4-6	Code
1	Co-branding	Region image	P14
2	Co-branding	Corporation image	P15
3	Co-branding	Product image	P16
4	Revenue	Region image	P24
5	Revenue	Corporation image	P25
6	Revenue	Product image	P26
7	New customer	Region image	P34
8	New customer	Corporation image	P35
9	New customer	Product image	P36

Table II.
Different patterns
and code

also various regional variations found, complicating marketing research even further. All advertisements in China also need to be approved by the official China Advertising Association, with regulations varying according to the region (Simons, 2003).

Findings

We analyzed 80 web articles with regards to Olympic preparations during the period 2001-2003, and the competition to qualify for sponsorship. The firms accepted by the BOCOG have often organized well-visited events, like press conferences, to communicate their strong support for the Olympic values and the Olympic Movement. The Chinese candidates that have been accepted are extremely pleased and proud to be selected by the decision-maker (perhaps seen as the Chinese government itself). Therefore only “co-branding” determines the preparatory stage of the Olympic Games (see Figure 2). Coca-Cola might serve as a typical example, with its Olympic heritage, which dates back to the 1928 Olympic Games in Amsterdam and which is under contract until 2020. Already ahead of the host city vote in 2001 Coca-Cola made an “early mover” bid by producing a commemorative Coke can for Chinese consumers

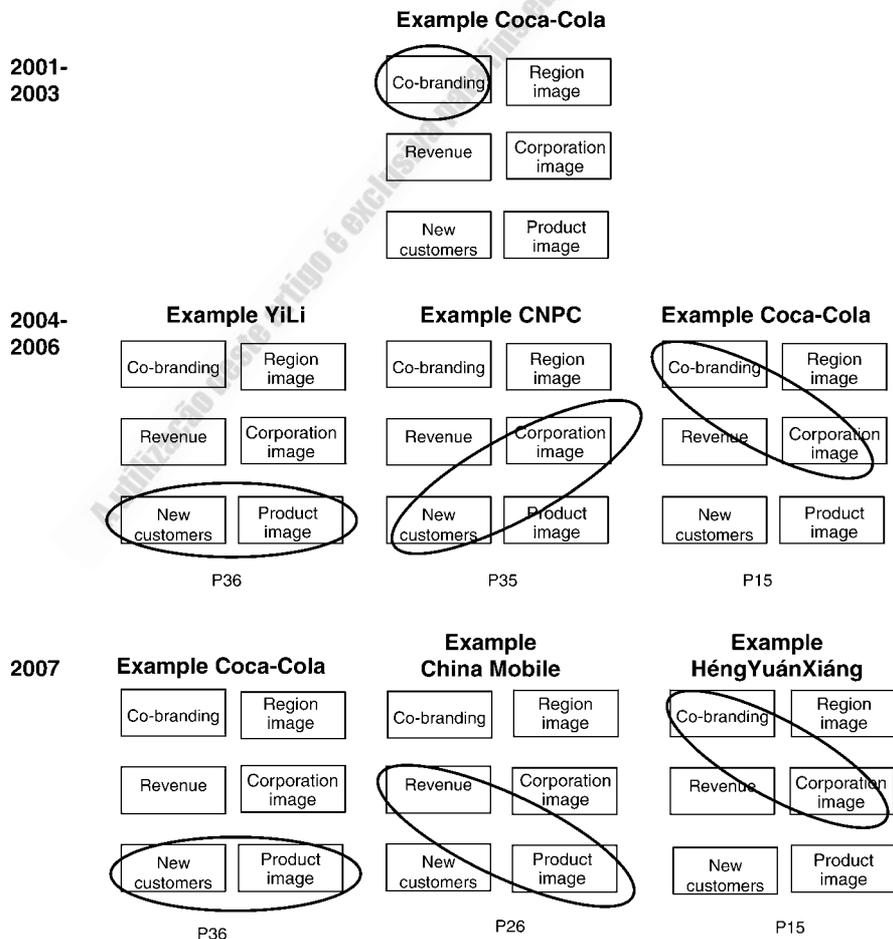


Figure 2.
Six-factor models

banking on a Beijing win (Woodward, 2005). For the first time in its Olympic partnership history, at the Beijing Olympic Games, “Coca-Cola aimed to feature the Olympic Torch Relay programme via both online and offline platforms, thereby allowing more consumers in China to interact with and embrace the Olympic spirit” (Choi, 2008, p. 248).

Between 2004 and 2006 according to our survey the first sponsor action phase took place. Here three distinct types (P15, P35, P36) are identified in the 2006 data collection out of the nine possible combinations (see Table III and Figure 2): The “Coca-Cola sponsor example” seems to be the sole firm displaying a continuous Olympic approach. Certainly there is widespread advertising and massive campaigns for their products, but most importantly, they show a strong commitment to the Games (pattern P15). China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) emerged as an example of a company trying to raise awareness of its brand in its advertisements (pattern P35). Eight of the total 26 analyzed sponsors in 2006 belong to this pattern but it is pattern P36 which dominates, where the dairy producer YiLi Group is an example. The sponsorship from YiLi is visible widespread advertising and massive campaigns for their dairy products, targeting new customers by showing a strong commitment to the Games.

Within a one year period from June 2006 to May 2007 the number of sponsors announced by the BOCOG increased by 80.56 percent. In the 2007 data collection we discovered three dominant patterns (P36, P26, P15) for the 45 sponsors in a second sponsor action phase. Each pattern is again associated with a typical sponsor in our analysis (see Table III and Figure 2).

Conclusions

In promoting sponsoring activities in the approach to Beijing 2008 the BOCOG noted that sponsors and suppliers enjoyed rights and benefits in return for their contributions to the Olympic Games, including the use of trademarks and symbols in marketing activities, as well as supplier designations of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, Chinese Olympic Committee, and Chinese Olympic teams. Given the five sponsorship levels available only 26 (45 in 2007) of the 36 (65) participating companies did appear in the collected advertisements and articles in 2006 and 2007. This is surprising if we take previous research into account suggesting that Chinese advertising professionals and managers were generally favorable toward advertising as an efficient business tool (Semenik and Tao, 1993; Liu, 2002). This finding might be explained by the limitation of only including printed media in our sample, whereas the companies might focus on other sponsorship activation strategies. It might also be the fact that their sponsorship is not self-imposed, but government-appointed. The purpose of the government inviting companies to be sponsors may simply be a means of making them share the financial burden of the Beijing Games 2008.

Pattern code	Rank 2006 (in %)	Rank 2007 (in %)	Example firm (2006)	Example firm (2007)
P36	1 (64.5)	1 (32.4)	YiLi	Coca-Cola
P26		2 (23.5)		China Mobile
P15	3 (4.7)	3 (17.6)	Coca-Cola	HéngYuánXiáng
P35	2 (30.8)	4 (11.8)	CNPC	UPS

Table III.
Six patterns rank and type sample

compared to other Chinese brands like Haier, Tsingtao and Lenovo, the company prefers to show its Olympic sponsor's role to the outside world as part of its corporate strategy for entering the international stage (Dong, 2007). Liu Ruiqi, CEO of HéngYuánXiáng, explained his sponsorship investment: "A lot of people suppose HéngYuánXiáng's products have nothing in common with Olympics Games, but our sponsorship isn't simply aiming at accelerating sales. We are improving brand value and building consumer knowledge" (www.chinaapparel.net/news/2008/2008-02-03/14916.shtml/ accessed 10 December 2008). HéngYuánXiáng wants to use this Olympic opportunity to explore international markets and gain brand value rather than sales as a benefits expected from the Beijing Olympic Games. "Since the Olympic Games possess the highest brand value in the world, if an enterprise manages to set up a connection with this brand, they build brand associations as industry leader with social commitment. It helps a lot with the establishment and promotion of a company's brand" (www.chinaapparel.net/news/2008/2008-02-03/14916.shtml/ accessed 10 December 2008). Liu Ruiqi stresses further that the goal is long-term brand building rather than a short-term sales boost. He says the marketing campaign stresses two principles: the integration of the Olympic spirit and HéngYuánXiáng corporate values, and continued cooperation with the Olympics after 2008 (www.chinaapparel.net/news/2008/2008-02-03/14916.shtml/ accessed 10 December 2008).

As described in Figure 3 by the sloping curve the center of gravity of the ellipse declines following the assumed rising of brand equity in our sample patterns. It is clear to see that the stronger the brand, the deeper it is rooted in customers and products. Therefore, we conclude that more mature sponsorship markets and more experienced sponsors were more likely to value the crucial importance of integrating their sponsorships with other marketing communications.

Comparing the patterns of sponsor advertising between 2004-2006 (first sample) to 2007 (second sample) as seen in Figure 2 we conclude from our data that the time gap between signing the contract and the dates of the event influences the strategy of the sponsoring corporations. Advertising content changes over time and the sponsors took different advertising strategies in 2001-2003 (pilot period), 2004-2006 and 2007. This even appears when analyzing the advertisements/articles of the TOP Programme Olympic Partners members, the only sponsors with exclusive worldwide marketing rights to both the Winter and Summer Games, thus covering the whole period of seven years after the successful bidding of a city to host the Games. When analyzing the advertisements and articles concerning Coca-Cola, the focus is initially only on being associated with the event (2001-2003). Later in the advertisements, the association with the Olympic Games prevails but more emphasis was placed on the Coca-Cola brand (2004-2004). The members of the domestic sponsorship programme are authorized level by level by the local organizing committee afterwards, seeing exclusive suppliers and co-exclusive suppliers joining last in the process.

Generally, it is not easy to evaluate a Chinese corporation nor is it simple to estimate its brand image (also MillwardBrown, 2008b). For example, CNPC is a world-leading integrated international energy company with businesses covering oil and gas upstream and downstream operations, oilfield services, engineering and construction, petroleum material and equipment manufacturing and supply, capital management, finance and insurance services, and new energy operations (www.cnpc.com.cn/eng/company/ accessed 20 December 2008). CNPC ranks second in Financial Times' Top 500 list of the world's most important corporations (*People's Daily Online*, 2008). However, the brand is not aligned with a global brand image. Wang Wei BOCOG

Executive Vice-President stated that CNPC's participation in the sponsorship programme will also actively promote the development of China's petroleum industry (<http://en.beijing2008.cn/66/77/article211927766.shtml/> accessed 10 December 2008). This shows the peculiarity of the large state-owned Chinese companies, aiming to increase international brand awareness. These uncertainties also refer to other sponsors such as Sinopec, PICC and State Grid.

There are many arguments from this study illustrating that sport sponsorship is a valid research in the marketing area. Some risks and uncertainties may thus be diminished by careful preparations before strategic sport investments are carried through. The existing knowledge is insufficient and there is a large number of varying factors that need to become conceptualized. The Olympic Games are threatened by clutter according to Giannoulakis *et al.* (2008, p. 261) who continue "... a potentially cluttered... and noisy marketing environment that seems very likely to be created." The instability of some Asian markets in comparison to Western markets has led various US and European companies to implement co-branded efforts together with Asian companies.

An additional obstacle and a risk among sponsors regarding the Beijing Olympic Games appeared during the year following our survey. The Tibet affair escalated due to the authoritarian government and the existing political climate in China. This happened ahead of the Beijing Olympic Games 2008 and constituted one of many issues creating uncertainty among existing sponsors and potential investors.

Note

1. Newspapers: *People's Daily*, *People's Daily Overseas Edition*, *China Business Post*, *China Economic Times*, *21st Century Business Herald*, *Beijing Daily*, *Beijing Times*, *Economic Daily*, *Guangming Daily*, *The Economic Observer*, *Beijing Evening*, *Elite Reference*, *Chengdu Business*, *China Business Times*, *China Commercial Times*, *China Petrochemical News*, *China Quality Daily*, *Chinese Business*, *Chinese Customer*, *Economic Daily*, *First Financial Daily*, *Global Times*, *Health Paper*, *International Business Daily*, *Jiefang Daily*, *Jinghua Times*, *People's Post and Telecommunication News*, *Shandong Business*, *Southeast Business*, *Sports Weekly*, *Talents Market*, *The First*, *Tsingtao Daily*, *Tsingtao Evening*, *Xinjing Newspaper*, *21st Century Business Herald*.

Magazines and Journals: *Beijing Youth Message*, *Caijing Magazine*, *CEO&CIO*, *Chinese & Foreign Entrepreneurs*, *China Entrepreneur*, *China Quality*, *China's Foreign Trade*, *China Telecommunication Trade*, *Chinese National Geography*, *Chinese Sports*, *Computer Space*, *English Salon*, *Fashion Shopping Guide*, *Global Entrepreneur*, *International Airlines*, *Lifeweek*, *Outlook Weekly*, *Marketing China*, *NanfengChuang*, *New Economy Weekly*, *New Fortune*, *Personal Computer*, *Sino-Foreign Management*, *Sports Pictures*, *The Investors*, *Tendermag*, *Tennis*, *Total Sports*, *World Broadcasting & TV*, *China Quality*.

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