Consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing

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ABSTRACT

Studies of consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing are inconclusive and have not investigated whether those attitudes are industry specific. Rather than just refer to ‘an organisation’ (i.e. non-industry specific), an industry-specific approach specifies the organisation’s core business activity. We propose that individuals expect a higher standard of advertising from banks as compared to beer companies and that this would be reflected in more negative attitudes towards banks that engage in questionable promotional practices. A demographically and geographically representative sample of New Zealanders (n = 514) was surveyed one week following the final match of the 2011 Rugby World Cup. Three items measuring consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing were adapted from the work of Portlock and Rose (2009). These three items were further adapted to specify bank or beer companies. The results indicate that most individuals perceive ambush marketing as unethical and a practice that organisations should not utilise. However, no evidence was found to support the proposition that individuals hold banks to a higher standard than beer companies in terms of ambush marketing. Demographic variables – age, gender and location – were not significantly associated with differing attitudes.

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1. Introduction

Ambush marketing, in one form or another, will likely feature at any major or mega-sport event (Chadwick & Burton, 2011). In addition to the variety of forms, ambush marketing will be conducted by organisations from a variety of industries. An industry-specific approach to the investigation of ambush marketing – where the organisation is specified according to their industry or core business – provides a previously unexplored opportunity to increase our understanding of ambush marketing.

Sponsors, governments, and event owners expend considerable resources on the prevention of ambush marketing (Bhattacharjee & Rao, 2006; Ellis, Scassa, & Seguin, 2011; Gombeski, Wray, & Blair, 2011; Hartland & Skinner, 2005; Hartland & Williams-Burnett, 2012; McKelvey & Grady, 2008). Sponsors invest considerable financial resources to acquire sponsorship rights. It is only natural that they do not want to share this with non-contributors, let alone their immediate competitors. Sponsors expect exclusivity of association. Governments invest heavily in hosting major and mega events for a variety of social and economic motives. Governments introduce event specific trademark-specific legislation to prevent ambush marketing at major and mega events (McKelvey & Grady, 2008). Event owners and managers argue that ambush marketing reduces the perceived value of the sponsorship, ultimately threatening to reduce their sponsorship revenues (Seguin & O’Reilly, 2008).

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Sponsors, governments, event owners all care about ambush marketing. But do consumers? This has been explored in previous research on consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing (Lyberger & McCarthy, 2001; Portlock & Rose, 2009; Sandler & Shani, 1989; Seguin, Lyberger, O’Reilly, & McCarthy, 2005; Shani & Sandler, 1998). This research indicates that many consumers are ambivalent towards ambush marketing. These studies demonstrate that even though some consider ambush marketing to be unethical, annoying, inappropriate, and unfair, and indicate a willingness to alter their purchase behaviours accordingly, a sizable group do not share these convictions.

Previous research has not assessed whether the type of industry in which an ambushing organisation operates impacts consumer attitudes. Rather than just refer to ‘an organisation’ (i.e., non-industry specific), our industry-specific approach specifies the organisation’s industry (e.g., car manufacturer, airline, fast moving consumer beverages) when asking participants about their attitudes towards ambush marketing. Through this shift in approach, we address two important questions. Do consumers consider the industry or core business of the ambush-marketing organisation when assessing the appropriateness of its behaviour? Can organisations from certain industries engage in ambush marketing without fear of consumer resentment?

This research provides a more nuanced view of consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing by specifying the industry of the ambushing organisation. The research questions are: (1a) What are the consumer attitudes towards non-industry-specific ambush marketing?; (1b) What are the demographic influences on consumer attitudes towards non-industry-specific ambush marketing?; (2a) What are the consumer attitudes towards industry-specific ambush marketing?; (2b) What are the demographic influences on consumer attitudes towards industry-specific ambush marketing?

There are methodological and conceptual features of this research that set it apart from previous studies. Methodologically, the sample aligns with Statistics New Zealand population counts for age, gender, household size and ethnic identification. This permits the drawing of more credible and generalisable conclusions compared to previous studies, and indeed most studies of sport sponsorship. Conceptually, the literature review is the first to link ambush marketing to industry-specific advertising standards. This is important because consumers take into consideration the situation when making ethical judgements (Leonidou, Leonidou, & Kvasova, 2013). Two different organisations engaging in identical ambush marketing initiatives are not in the exact same situation.

The following section provides an overview of ambush marketing, followed by a more detailed examination of four previous studies that investigated consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing. The final section of the background literature substantiates the argument that consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing are potentially influenced by the industry of the organisation engaging in the ambush activities.

2. Background literature

2.1. Ambush marketing

Seguin and O’Reilly (2008, p. 68) state, “considerable vagueness surrounds the concept of ambush marketing”. This vagueness is reflected in the plethora of ambush marketing definitions (Sandler & Shani, 1989; Schmitz, 2005). To guide our research, we adopt Chadwick and Burton’s (2011) definition. They define ambush marketing as an organization’s efforts to “capitalize on the awareness, attention, goodwill, and other benefits, generated by having an association with an event or property, without the organization having an official or direct connection to that event or property” (p. 714). Definitional issues create challenges for measuring and understanding consumer attitudes. Some authors argue that ambush marketing is ethically questionable (Payne, 1998). Others contend that ambush may be a legitimate competitive response (Crow & Hoek, 2003).

Ambush marketing takes many different forms. Chadwick and Burton’s (2011) ambush marketing typology has three broad classifications – direct, associative, and incidental. The three types of direct ambush marketing are predatory (i.e., deliberate ambushing of a market competitor to gain market share and to confuse consumers), coattail (i.e., non-sponsor association with event through legitimate link), and property infringement (i.e., intentional use of an event’s protected intellectual property). The six associate ambush marketing types are sponsor-self (i.e., a legitimate sponsor extends its association above and beyond the sponsorship contract), associative (i.e., use of imagery or terminology without infringing protected intellectual property), insurgent (i.e., guerrilla marketing tactics near an event’s), and parallel properties (i.e., creation of a new event that runs parallel to the ambush target). The two incidental forms of ambush marketing are unintentional (i.e., incorrect consumer identification based on previous involvement or tangential involvement with event) and saturation (i.e., strategic increase in marketing communications during event).

Attitudes towards ambush marketing are not universal. There is greater legislative tolerance towards ambush marketing in both China (Preuss, Gemeinder, & Seguin, 2008) and India (Kalamadi, 2012; Seth, 2010). Seguin et al. (2005) identified differences between American, Canadian and French perceptions and attitudes towards ambush marketing.

2.2. Previous studies of consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing

This research is a replication with extension of four previous studies. A replication with extension utilises different research procedures and a sample from a different population (Tsang & Kwan, 1999). The features of these four studies are summarised in order of publication.
Shani and Sandler (1998) used four items to measure consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing: (1) Non-sponsors should not lead consumers to believe they are official sponsors of the Olympic Games; (2) the practice of associating with the Olympic Games without being an official sponsor is unethical; (3) I am annoyed by companies trying to associate themselves with the Olympic Games without being official sponsors; and, (4) it is fair for companies to associate themselves with the Olympic Games without being official sponsors (reverse item). A mail survey was distributed immediately after the 1996 Olympic Games to 1500 people. The key finding was that participants were “indifferent” (p. 378) about ambush marketing and the key conclusion was that “ambush marketers are not facing consumers who are hostile towards their ambushing activities” (p. 379).


The Seguin et al. (2005) study of consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing was in the context of the 2000 Olympic Games. The survey was administered using a mall intercept technique in various markets throughout Canada, the United States, and France. There were 2602 useable surveys collected. Four items that closely approximated the items from the two previous studies were used. The authors summarised that consumers were “slightly opposed” to ambush marketing (p. 224).

Portlock and Rose (2009) conducted a study on consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing during the FIFA World Cup 2006. A postal invitation to participate in an online survey was sent to UK households. They concluded, “UK consumers appear to be relatively tolerant of ambush marketing” (p. 281).

The current study is a logical improvement on and extension of the four studies that preceded it. None of the previous studies explored the demographic influences (e.g., age, gender) on consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing. Mall intercept techniques were used to recruit participants in two studies and, therefore, the representativeness of these samples is questionable. The range of values across the four studies for Shani and Sandler’s (1998) Item 1 (51%–79%), Item 2 (38%–51%) and Item 3 (13%–44%) is large. Consensus on consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing remains elusive. All four studies utilised non-industry-specific organisations, therefore the impact of industry on consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing is not known.

2.3. Industry-specific advertising standards

A notable feature in previous ambush marketing research has been the use of non-industry-specific items when measuring consumer attitudes. By not specifying the ambusher’s industry (e.g., telecommunications, transportation, insurance, fast moving consumer beverages), research participants have not been asked to consider the industry of the organisation conducting the ambush. In this section we propose that consumer attitudes towards advertising standards differ according to the industry. By default, we argue that consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing may differ according to the ambusher’s industry.

Advertising standards are a relevant framework for understanding sponsorship standards. This is not to suggest that sponsorship and advertising are synonyms. Sponsorship is a form of associative marketing (Chadwick & Burton, 2011) and represents a co-marketing alliance (Farrelly, Quester, & Greyser, 2005). Organisations purposely leverage their sponsorship with additional advertising, promotional activities and expenditure (Quester & Thompson, 2001). The public linking of sponsor and the sponsored partner creates the desired brand association (Cornwell, 2008). The visible part of ambush marketing is the additional advertising, promotional activities and expenditure.

In the context of advertising standards, ambush marketing is characterised as a hard issue. Hard issues focus on the “deceptive character of advertisements as well as on the proper substantiation of advertising claims” (Boddewyn, 1991, p. 25). In ambush marketing, the deception occurs when an organisation creates the impression of a relationship that is actually non-existent. When communicating with their target markets, organisations are increasingly unethical and irresponsible (Harker, Wiggs, & Harker, 2005). Advertising is pervasive, intrusive, pernicious, and mischievous (Harker & Wiggs, 2000). More specifically, the advertisement may be any combination of unfair, misleading, deceptive, offensive, false or socially irresponsible (Harker, 2000). The key issue in the context of this research is whether the threshold for advertising “mischief” is consistent across organisations in different industries.

Support for the proposition that consumer attitudes towards advertising standards differ according to the organisation’s industry is also provided by national advertising standards. In most countries, advertising is self-regulated by a national Advertising Standards Authority (Parsons & Schumacher, 2012). The New Zealand Advertising Standards Authority (2013) provides an “Advertising Code of Ethics” as well as specific codes for the advertising and promotion of specific products/services. These specific codes exist for alcohol, financial services, food, children’s food, gaming and gambling, therapeutic products, therapeutic services, vehicles, and weight management. There are additional codes for comparative advertising, advertising to children, and environmental claims. The need for specific codes demonstrates that organisations in different industries are held to different levels of advertising accountability.

Banks and beer companies provide an ideal context to compare consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing across industries. The first reason is that they are both regulated by industry-specific codes (alcohol and financial services) within the New Zealand Advertising Authority. The advertising codes are different. The four principles of New Zealand’s alcohol advertising codes are: (1) alcohol advertising and promotions shall observe a high standard of social responsibility; (2) alcohol advertising and promotions shall be consistent with the need for responsibility and moderation in alcohol...
consumption; (3) alcohol advertising and promotions shall be directed at adult audiences; and (4) sponsorship advertisements shall clearly and primarily promote the sponsored activity, team or individual (New Zealand Advertising Standards Authority). The three basic principles of the financial advertising code are that (1) financial advertisements should comply with the laws of New Zealand and appropriate industry standards; (2) financial advertisements should observe a high standard of social responsibility particularly as consumers often rely on such services for their financial security; and (3) financial advertisements should strictly observe the basic tenets of truth and clarity and should not by implication, omission, ambiguity, small print, exaggerated claim or hyperbole mislead, deceive or confuse, or be likely to mislead, deceive or confuse consumers, abuse their trust, exploit their lack of knowledge or, without justifiable reason, play on fear. While both the financial and alcohol codes state the need for “high standard of social responsibility”, the need for truth and clarity is emphasised with the financial sector’s code.

Second, brands are important in both industries. Consumers experience difficulty when evaluating competing offerings from financial institutions (Bravo, Montaner, & Pina, 2012). Service intangibility demands that financial institutions develop powerful brands to reduce consumer perceptions of risk and provide a differentiated alternative (O’Loughlin & Szmigin, 2005). Beer is produced and marketed by large multi-national corporations whose survival is dependent upon brands and marketing knowledge, as distinct from technological innovation (Jernigan, 2009). Given the homogenous nature of beer, branding is an essential aspect of both positioning and product differentiation (Vrontis, 1998).

Third, banks and beer companies differ according to their involvement levels and extent of problem solving associated with the purchase decision. The selection of a financial service firm is often a high involvement decision (i.e., consumer engagement is high) (Bart, Shankar, Sultan, & Urban, 2005), but not for all customers (Longfellow & Celuch, 1992). In contrast, beer is usually recognised as a low involvement decision, albeit one with relatively high social risks. Consumers utilise routine response behaviour when they buy low-involvement products; that is, they make automatic purchase decisions based on limited information or information acquired previously (Thogersen, Jorgensen, & Sandager, 2012). In contrast, high-involvement products are complex, risky and expensive. Consumers will normally spend more money with their bank than they will on beer. Extended problem solving, which uses many criteria to evaluate purchase alternatives, usually precedes these purchases.

In terms of their comparative value, the banking industry is highly regulated (Barth, Caprio, & Levine, 2004). Banks are also in a structured organisational field and thus face strong institutional forces from many sources (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott & Meyer, 1991).

Consumers care about business ethics (Creyer & Ross, 1997). However, there is mixed research as to whether consumers support (i.e., purchase) or reject (i.e., boycott) the ethical or unethical conduct by organisations (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). An attitude-behaviour gap exists: consumers express a willingness to make ethical purchase and avoid consumers support (i.e., purchase) or reject (i.e., boycott) the ethical or unethical conduct by organisations (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). An attitude-behaviour gap exists: consumers express a willingness to make ethical purchase and avoid unethical, but ethics/social responsibility is not the most dominant criteria in their purchase decision.

Notwithstanding the ethical dimension, ambush marketing has the potential to negatively affect the ambushing organisation in a multitude of ways. Credibility (i.e., the reputation of a company for honesty and expertise) (Goldsmith, Lafferty, & Newell, 2000), reputation (i.e., the extent to which an organisation is held in high esteem or regard (Roberts & Dowling, 2002), legitimacy (i.e., the acceptance of an organisation by its environment) (Deephouse, 1996), trust (i.e., intention to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of the intentions or behaviours of another (Singh & Sirdeshmukh, 2000), and corporate image (i.e., perceptions of an organisation reflected in the associations held in consumer memory) (Andreassen & Lindstad, 1998). Customers can utilise any of the above as heuristic proxies to simplify otherwise cognitively intensive evaluation and decision making processes (Insch, Prentice, & Knight, 2011).

Broad-scope trust refers to consumer expectation that companies within a certain business type are generally dependable and can be relied on to deliver on their promises (Hansen, 2012). Consumers rely upon category expectations to assess individual brand performance (Gupta & Stewart, 1996). The effect of trust on the relationship is greater depending on the sector under analysis. One of the areas in which this effect is most strongly felt is in the services sector (Flavian, Guinaliu, & Torres, 2005). More specifically, it has been concluded that “corporate image becomes a key tool for the management of trust in financial services distribution” (Flavian et al., 2005, p. 447).

Interbrand (2009) argue that, for consumers, “Banking should always feel safe; underneath every deal is the tacit reassurance that their money is in a safe place and at their disposal when needed. So trust is the most important factor” (p. 3). They also assert that “honest dialogue” and “open communication” are essential aspects of developing reputable banking brands. Consumers expect their banks to be credible, trustworthy, ethical, and above all else law-abiding. These would also likely apply to beer companies, but we propose that the threshold is lower. On this basis, we offer the following proposition: Compared to beer companies, more people will agree that (1) bank non-sponsors should not lead consumers to believe they are official sponsors; (2) the practice of a bank associating with an event without being an official sponsor is unethical; and (3) their annoyance is higher when banks associate themselves with events without being an official sponsor.

3. Methods

This study examines consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing and whether consumers hold industry-specific expectations for ambush marketing. The research also investigates demographic influences on these attitudes, and it represents an extension of research carried out in the context of other large-scale sporting events. These events include the
Atlanta Olympic Games of 1996 (Shani & Sandler, 1998); the 1998 Super Bowl (Lyberger & McCarthy, 2001); the Sydney Olympic Games of 2000 (Seguin et al., 2005); and the 2006 FIFA World Cup (Portlock & Rose, 2009).

3.1. Replication, extension and generalizability

It is important to consider how we, as a group of scholars, interpret the findings of sequential projects that explore a single phenomenon. A replication with extension study is a “duplication of a previously published empirical research project that is primarily concerned with increasing the external validity or generalizability, of previous research findings” [emphasis in original] (Hubbard, Vetter, & Little, 1998, p. 246). These types of study utilise different research procedures and draw its sample from a different population of subjects (Tsang & Kwan, 1999).

Replication imprecision is embraced because the external validity of the original study is enhanced in proportion to the imprecision within the replication (Rosenthal, 1979). The key points of differentiation in this study are its focus on New Zealanders, a sample that is representative of the wider population in terms of age, gender, household size and ethnic identification, and finally its contextualization within a Rugby World Cup.

3.2. Context – Rugby World Cup 2011

The Rugby World Cup is a quadrennial event owned by the International Rugby Board (IRB). In 2011 the event was hosted by New Zealand over a six-week period in spring (i.e., September and October). RWC 2011 was the largest sporting event ever held in New Zealand. The event attracted an estimated 130,000 overseas visitors (New Zealand Ministry of Economic Development, 2012). Within New Zealand, the event attracted widespread public interest and saturation media coverage (Snedden, 2012). A variety of corporations were formally affiliated with the event across three levels: Worldwide Partners, Official Sponsors, and Tournament Suppliers (Table 1). RWC 2011 fits logically alongside the FIFA World Cup, the Super Bowl and the Olympic Games as prominent sporting events in which to explore consumer attitudes to ambush marketing.

The Major Events Management Act (MEMA) protected the event-related commercial interests of these organisations. MEMA is an example of event-specific trademark protection legislation (McKelvey & Grady, 2008). Events are listed under the Act if they are deemed a major event. The purpose of MEMA is to “prevent unauthorised commercial exploitation” (New Zealand Ministry of Economic Development, 2010, p. 3), and therefore protect organisers and sponsors of major events in New Zealand from ambush marketing.

3.3. Participants and procedure

The research utilised a cross-sectional design. Data were collected in October of 2011, during the final week of the 2011 RWC. Participants \( (n = 514) \) were members of a research panel developed by a New Zealand-based market research company. The research panel is in proportion with Statistics New Zealand population counts for age, gender, household size and ethnic identification. Participants can therefore be characterised as being part of a probability-based, online access panel or a “pool of registered people who have agreed to participate in an online survey” (Comley & Beaumont, 2011, p. 316). Probability-based panels are superior to non-probability based panels (Reg et al., 2010). The sample was probabilistic to the extent that soft targets for completed questionnaires on age, gender, and region were utilised to enhance national representativeness. The benefits of online panels include speed, lower cost, ability to target niche markets, and access non-customers (Comley & Beaumont, 2011).

Potential participants were contacted via an email that contained a link to the online questionnaire. Informed consent was achieved by providing a link from the online survey to a website providing information about this ambush marketing perceptions study. No incentives to participate were offered for explicit involvement in ambush marketing perceptions portion of the larger data collection, but questionnaire respondents were provided reward points for their participation in the entirety of the questionnaire. The demographics of the sample are presented in Table 2.

3.4. Instrumentation

Nine questionnaire items were developed specifically for the purpose of this research based on the work of Portlock and Rose (2009). All nine questions were formatted as 7-point scale items (1 = disagree; 7 = agree). For each questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Worldwide partners</th>
<th>Official sponsors</th>
<th>Tournament suppliers</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emirates</td>
<td>Brancott Estate</td>
<td>Canterbury of New Zealand</td>
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<td>Mastercard</td>
<td>Toshiba</td>
<td>Gilbert</td>
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<td>Heineken</td>
<td>Land Rover</td>
<td>Russell McVeagh</td>
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<td>ANZ</td>
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<td>DHL</td>
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<td>Coca-Cola</td>
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<td>Societe Generale</td>
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<td>Dole</td>
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</table>
respondent, the nine items were administered in random order. A variety of demographic information was also collected as part of the larger panel procedure. Variables included gender, geographic region within New Zealand, employment status, occupation, occupation of main income earner, marital status, household composition, number of people in household, number of children under 5 years of age, number of school aged children, ethnic origin, personal income, and household income.

To explore research question 1 (i.e., non-industry-specific perceptions of ambush marketing), three items from Portlock and Rose’s (2009) study were adapted which reflect a range of attitudes. The three non-industry-specific perception items are listed in Table 3.

For research question 2 (industry-specific perceptions of ambush marketing), the three non-industry-specific perception items were adapted to form six new items – three each for the beer and banking industries. The new items were intended to measure perceptions of ambush marketing activities of organisations from the beer and banking industry. The contextual rewording was straightforward. For example the first item to measure consumer perceptions of ambush activities in the beer industry (BEERETH1) was, as follows: Beer companies that are non-sponsors should not lead consumers to believe they are official sponsors of the Rugby World Cup.

3.5. Data analysis

Mean difference testing was used to analyse the data. Mean scores reflected the degree that the sample agreed with statements about their perceptions of ambush marketing. A series of t-tests explored potential region and gender differences on the variables of interest while ANOVA explored mean differences amongst the age groups.

4. Results

Results are provided in terms of the two areas of interest: non-industry-specific perceptions of ambush marketing in conjunction with RWC 2011 (research questions 1a and 1b) and industry-specific perceptions of RWC 2011 ambush marketing (research questions 2a and 2b). For each, data was also analysed in terms of age, gender, and geographic region of respondents. These are the three variables on which the sample can be considered probabilistic.

4.1. Non-industry-specific perceptions of ambush marketing

The perceptions of ambush marketing at RWC 2011 varied in terms of statement agreement on the 7-point, disagree–agree scale. New Zealanders agreed most strongly with the statement that non-sponsors should not lead consumers to believe they are official sponsors (M = 5.30, SD = 1.91). Agreement was less convincing for statements about the practice being unethical (M = 4.10, SD = 2.00) and annoying (M = 3.65, SD = 2.01). Alongside results of the four prior events, results
suggest that the majority of New Zealanders, at least in the context of a locally-hosted Rugby World Cup, do not view ambush marketing favourably (Table 4).

The second aspect of the non-industry-specific perceptions analysis was to explore potential demographic correlates. For the purpose of analysing age and non-industry-specific perceptions of ambush marketing, six groups were created: 18–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45–54, 55–64 and 65+. For the purpose of analysing region alongside the variables of interest the sample was split between those living in New Zealand’s three largest cities (Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch; \(n = 273\)) and those living in the rest of the country (\(n = 241\)).

In terms of age, no evidence of statistically significant mean differences amongst the groups was found on any of the three non-industry-specific perception items. No significant mean differences were found on any of the three non-industry-specific perception item for the regional split between New Zealand’s three largest cities and the remainder of the country. The same was true for gender. Men and women did not indicate significantly different levels of agreement on any of the non-industry-specific perception statements.

4.2. Industry-specific perceptions of ambush marketing

Significant differences were not found among the perceptions of ambush marketing practices within the beer and banking industries (Table 5).

The second aspect of the industry-specific analysis was to explore any demographic correlates. The same six age groups and split amongst region of residence from the non-industry-specific perceptions analysis were utilised. No significant mean differences were found on any of the three industry-specific perception items for the regional split between New Zealand’s three largest cities and the remainder of the country. The same was true for gender. Men and women did not indicate significantly different levels of agreement on any of the statements.

Although no evidence was found to suggest that age groups generally perceive the ethics of ambush marketing differently, some evidence was found suggesting that the 45–54 age group agreed more strongly with the beer and bank industry ethical perception items than the 25–34 age group (Table 6). These items – \(t = 4.31\), \(df = 234\), \(p = .05\) for \(BEERETH2\) and \(t = 4.52\), \(df = 234\), \(p = .05\) for \(BANKETH2\) – were the items that explicitly included the word “ethics” within them. Based on Cohen’s (1992) effect size calculation, the difference can be characterised as medium for both variables (Table 6). Differences amongst other groups on the industry-specific perceptions were smaller.

4.3. Results summary

The majority of participants perceive ambush marketing as unethical and a practice that organisations should not utilise. Their level of annoyance with the practice is considerably lower than their other attitudes. No evidence found to support the notion that individuals may hold banks to a higher standard than beer companies in terms of ambush marketing as had been proposed. Demographic variables – age, gender, and location – were largely irrelevant.

### Table 4
Non-Industry-specific perceptions of ambush marketing across major events.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-sponsors</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should not lead consumers to believe they are official sponsors of the...</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The practice of associating with the... without being a sponsor is unethical.</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am annoyed by companies trying to associate themselves with... without being official sponsors.</td>
<td></td>
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Note: Percentages represent rate of statement agreement (both agree and strongly agree).

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Industry-specific perceptions of ambush marketing.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-sponsors should not lead consumers to believe they are official sponsors of the Rugby World Cup.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The practice of associating with the Rugby World Cup without being an official sponsor is unethical.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Companies that associate themselves with the Rugby World Cup without being official sponsors annoy me.</td>
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Note: Standard deviations in parentheses
5. Discussion

There is ongoing conjecture about whether sponsorship, ambush marketing, and efforts to prevent ambush marketing are effective. The existing literature on consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing is inconsistent (Lyberger & McCarthy, 2001; Portlock & Rose, 2009; Seguin et al., 2005; Shani & Sandler, 1998). There are no empirical studies concerned with whether organisation type influences these attitudes. Accordingly, the present study investigated whether organisational type influences consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing. A review of the literature lead to the proposition that consumer attitudes to ambush marketing by banks would be more negative when compared to beer companies. Another goal of the research was to understand whether demographic variables are related to consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing. The four important findings of the current research are first summarised and then discussed further in the first sub-section.

The first important finding is that the majority of New Zealanders, at least in the context of a locally hosted Rugby World Cup, do not view non-industry-specific acts of ambush marketing favourably. The majority believe that companies should not engage in the practice and that it is unethical. However, only a minority consider ambush marketing to be annoying. Compared to previous studies (Lyberger & McCarthy, 2001; Portlock & Rose, 2009; Sandler & Shani, 1989; Seguin et al., 2005), the proportion of New Zealanders opposed to these practices is either the second highest (should not) or highest (unethical). However, the comparative level of annoyance is best described as mid-range (Refer Table 4).

The second important finding is that age, gender, and location of residence were not related to consumer attitudes towards non-industry-specific acts of ambush marketing. Put differently, the market is relatively homogenous in their attitudes towards ambush marketing. Third, consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing are consistent across ambushers from different industries. It can therefore be interpreted that both bank and beer companies are held to the same level of acceptable behaviour.

Finally, age, gender, and location were not related to perceptions of industry-specific ambush marketing. This result is consistent with the second finding that consumer attitudes towards non-industry-specific ambush marketing do not vary according to these variables. Closer scrutiny identified that compared to the 25–34 age-group, the 45–54 age-group was more adamant that both beer and banks were acting ethically.

5.1. Implications

As a result of our study and reflections on related studies, we have identified several issues worthy of further commentary. Practitioners and future researchers alike should consider these in their efforts to better understand consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing.

5.1.1. The majority of consumers do not care about ambush marketing

In the introduction we posed a fundamental question, “Do consumers care about ambush marketing”? There is a significant group of participants who can reconcile these two statements: (1) an organisation should not engage in ambush marketing; and (2) ambush marketing is unethical, with this statement: ambush marketing does not annoy me. This suggests that until the ambushing annoys them, consumers will feel ambivalent, despite recognising the activity as inappropriate and or unethical. Here, we use the term inappropriate to describe a behaviour that should not be done. It is this lack of annoyance that will most likely provide ambush marketers with impunity from a large group of consumers. Our results do not provide any organisation with a green light to engage in ambush marketing. Banks especially should be concerned that the majority regard ambush marketing as unethical and a practice that they should not utilise. A sizeable group of consumers perceive ambushing to be unethical. This ought to provide event owners with some confidence that a “name and shame” campaign emphasising the unethical dimension of the ambusher’s behaviour, may influence consumer sentiment towards ambushers (McKelvey & Grady, 2008).

5.1.2. Ambush marketing and consumer confusion

Insufficient consumer understanding of what constitutes ambush marketing may underpin the current results. This is especially the case regarding the lack of differentiating attitudes towards and beer companies. Prosecution of ambush marketers is rare (McKelvey & Grady, 2008). In the absence of prosecutions and with event-specific trademark protection legislation making every effort to define and identify acts of ambushing, consumers may be left with the impression that ambush marketing does not occur. Consumer confusion is almost certainly exacerbated by the many different forms of
ambushing. Ambush marketing is not a homogenous set of activities. It is unlikely that a participant would hold consistent attitudes to each of Chadwick and Burton’s (2011) ambush marketing types. Future research must specify the type of ambush marketing to better understand consumer attitudes.

Activation type may influence consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing. Activation refers to “the ‘how’ of sponsorship implementation” (O’Reilly & Lafrance Horning, 2013). Activation is synonymous with sponsorship-linked marketing (Cornwell, 1995). The variety of ambush marketing types needs to be considered in conjunction with the ambusher’s activational and non-activational communication. It may not necessarily be the ambush marketing that creates negative consumer attitudes towards the ambusher. The activation mechanism may be a key contributing factor. If an ambush marketer provides consumers with a free, hot coffee as they wait outside a cold stadium, are they likely to look unfavourably upon the organisation responsible? The activation mechanism may be most relevant to the “annoying” dimension of attitudes towards ambush marketing.

5.1.3. Attitudes to ambush marketing need to be understood in the context of attitudes to advertising

The ambusher’s activational communications are situated firmly within the realm of advertising. Ambush marketing remains a “hard issue” in more ways than one. It is not just the “deceptive character” of ambush marketing, but also the extent to which ambushing is more (or even less) deceptive than all other forms of advertising. Critics argue that ambush marketing is misleading and deceptive. The extent to which ambushing is more (or even less) deceptive than all other forms of advertising. Critics argue that ambush marketing is misleading and deceptive. The extent to which ambush marketing is misleading and deceptive should occur with reference to the misleading and deceptive nature of all other advertising.

5.1.4. Demographic correlates of ambush marketing perceptions

Consensus in the ethics literature is hard to come by (Lane, 1995; Mudrack & Mason, 2013). The strictness of ethical judgements normally increases with age (Akaah, 1989; Ruegger & King, 1992; Tan, 2002), but this is not always the case (Ede, Panigrahi, Stuart, & Calchich, 2000; Vitell & Paolillo, 2003). Other studies identify no correlation between age and ethical judgments (Barnett & Valentine, 2004). A recent literature review argues that even though gender differences are not evident in every study of ethical judgement, women employ stricter moral and ethical standards when differences are evident (Pan & Sparks, 2012). Our results lend support to previous research identifying very limited age-group and no gender differences in ethical judgments.

5.2. Limitations and future research

It is important to note the limitations of this study. No data were collected on participant awareness of ambush marketing during the Rugby World Cup. Steinlager conducted an ambush marketing campaign against Heinekin, the official beer sponsor. The Steinlager campaign was discussed in the media in terms of its ethicality and whether it breached the MEMA Act. Steinlager was not prosecuted under the MEMA Act. It is not known whether the participants were familiar with this ambushing attempt or others during the RWC. The respondents from which the data were collected were representative of the wider population in terms of age, gender, household size and ethnic identification. The sample is not random even though the demographic soft targets make for a reasonably probabilistic sample. The participants are therefore not truly representative of the wider New Zealand population. The use of such a panel, however, remains a strength of this research. This study was limited to a comparison of banks and beer companies. Ambush marketing by other types of companies - car manufacturers, airline, fast moving consumer beverages, fast food, and household electronics – may elicit different consumer attitudes. The utilisation of qualitative techniques may provide additional and valuable insights into the affective, cognitive and behavioural responses to ambush marketing. Previous ambush marketing research has used qualitative methods (i.e., interview data) (Farrelly et al., 2005; Seguin & O’Reilly, 2008), and has been limited to interviews with executives of events and sponsors. Qualitative insights into consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing are non-existent. A mix-method approach that utilises both qualitative and quantitative data offers opportunities for new insights. Experimental approaches where participants are exposed to real or mock ambush marketing examples are also called for. These experiments can also incorporate the different types of ambush marketing, as well as the ambusher’s activational and non-activational communications.

The development of an improved scale to measure attitudes to ambush marketing is necessary. The previously mentioned qualitative research will make a contribution to the development of this scale. An improved scale will provide researchers with an improved capacity to quantify consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing, as well as the capability to discriminate between the various dimensions that likely underpin these attitudes. This scale would be well suited to the challenge of differentiating the impact of ambush marketing and the leveraging tactic on consumer attitudes, as discussed above. Future research could also be replicated with other events using participants from a variety of nationalities. In this way, the attitudes of local residents towards ambush marketing could be distinguished from those outside of the host nation.

The question arises as to whether or not ambush marketing is ethical, illegal or clever business practice. This research positioned ambush marketing in a negative or unfavourable light (Meenaghan, 1998). We recognise that, for others, ambush marketing represents an innovative marketing practice. Future research should consider how people reconcile these arguments and we note, again, the particular type of ambush marketing will be highly relevant.
6. Conclusion

The findings from this study are unique insofar as previous studies have not investigated consumer attitudes towards industry-specific acts of ambush marketing. Neither has previous research reported any attempt to measure demographic influences on consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing. The study was the first to investigate consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing for New Zealand consumers, Rugby Union and the Rugby World Cup.

Consumers appear to place little emphasis on the industry of the ambushing organisation. A bank’s level of concern about being perceived as an ambush marketer should be no higher than a beer company. No organisation is likely to be immune from the scorn of consumers who do hold negative attitudes to ambush marketing.

Consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing were consistent across three key demographics. Given the often-equivocal voice regarding demographic correlates of ethical judgement and moral behaviour, this result is not surprising. Our conclusions here are made more credible by the probabilistic nature of the sample.

The extent to which attitudes towards ambush marketing translates into consumption or non-consumption is not known. This research takes us one step closer to consensus on consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing. The emerging consensus is that the majority of consumers perceive ambush marketing to be unethical and inappropriate, but not necessarily annoying. Therefore further inquiry should seek to provide a more nuanced view of if (and how) perceptions of inappropriateness, unethical practice and feelings of annoyance translate to other consumer behaviours.

References


