



# Consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing



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## ABSTRACT

Studies of consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing are in conclusive 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 "capitalise 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 ambushing 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 associative 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), distractive (i.e., presence of non-sponsor at or near an event without infringing protected intellectual property), values (i.e., use of an event's central theme 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.

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