Brand creation in international recurring sports events

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ABSTRACT

Although recurring sports events are held more frequently and by a larger number of cities than one-off events, little research has examined the branding process within recurring events. This paper addresses this gap by examining the brand creation process for international recurring sports events. Based on Parent and Séguin's (2008) model for one-off sports events, a comparative case study of the Alberta World Cup (Canada) and World Cup Drammen (Norway) cross-country ski events was conducted. Findings included similarities (leaders' skills/value-based actions, induced event experiences, and institutional experiences) and differences (branding/marketing efforts, recognition of the sport, and nature of the event (success, media coverage, geographic location, and history/impact)). An expanded model of event brand creation is proposed, which can be applied to both one-off and recurring sports events in small and large North American and European cities.

1. Introduction

Researchers have identified numerous benefits associated with sport brands, such as emotional attachment from fans, increased spectator masses and merchandise sales, and stronger sponsorship interests (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005; Gladden, Irwin, & Sutton, 2001; Parent & Séguin, 2008; Ross, 2006). Further, most researchers have focused on the external issues, such as effective sponsorship alignment (e.g., Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Koo, Quartermann, & Flynn, 2006) and consumer motives (e.g., Funk, Filo, Beaton, & Pritchard, 2009). There has been insufficient attention devoted to the brand builders (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2007) and even less to the organizing committee (OC) of sports events. Parent and Séguin (2008) are an exception, studying the brand creation for one-off international sports events.

Events are often divided into categories, such as mega, major or local, based on subjective interpretation (Emery, 2001). However, Emery defined a "major" sports event as "a sports event that receives national or international media coverage as a result of the calibre of competition, and one in which a minimum of 1,000 spectators are present at the event" (2001, p. 92). Although Parent and Séguin (2008) have examined a larger international one-off sports event (e.g., over 2000 athletes and 160,000 spectators attending), the branding process of smaller international recurring sports events has yet to be examined even though more cities can typically host such events. Communities in general are increasing their interest in hosting events to obtain recognition (Chalip & Costa, 2005). However, events pose considerable challenges for sport managers: they are intangible, unpredictable, short-lived, subjective in nature, and produced and consumed at the same time (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005; Gladden, Milne & Sutton, 1998; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). It therefore makes it more difficult for OCs to build a strong brand and quality event to satisfy stakeholders' needs (cf. Parent, 2008; Parent & Séguin, 2008). The degree to

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which a high quality event can be achieved is strongly affected by the organizers' relationships with various stakeholders (Parent, 2008). Stakeholders are individuals or groups who can affect the organization or be affected by its actions (Jones, 1995). Examples of stakeholders in a sport event include: the community residents and sponsors, media (local, national, and international), various levels of government, the organizers' paid staff and volunteer base, delegations, and sport organizations (locally, nationally, and internationally) (Parent, 2008). For organizers to be able to effectively build a brand for their event, they need to be aware of factors that are likely to have an impact on the brand process. A "good" brand will allow the event to be seen as desirable by stakeholders, such as sponsors and ticketholders, thereby allowing the organizers to garner resources from these stakeholders (cf. Parent, 2008).

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to examine the brand creation process for international recurring sports events. To do so, we take, as our starting point, Parent and Séguin's (2008) model and use the International Ski Federation (FIS) Cross-Country Alberta (Canada) World Cup 2008 and the FIS Cross-Country World Cup Drammen (Norway) 2008 as case studies. This paper thereby fills a gap in the literature by (1) examining a smaller sports event in two different countries and in smaller cities; (2) examining recurring sports events; and (3) testing Parent and Séguin's (2008) model. Findings could support and extend Parent and Séguin's model, making the revised model applicable to one-off and recurring sports events in small and large North American and European cities. Recurring event organizers have time to fine-tune (or even reconstruct) their brand from one year to the next; however, the event must still be perceived by the rights holders (the parent organization, typically the international federation, hereafter IF) as successful to have the chance to host the event again.

The paper begins with a presentation of the theoretical framework. This is followed by a description of the methods. The results are then presented and discussed. Finally, concluding remarks and future directions are provided.

2. Theoretical framework

To examine the event branding process, a further description of key theoretical concepts is needed. The following provides an overview of brand knowledge. The one-off event brand creation model developed by Parent and Séguin (2008) is described, as well.

2.1. Brand knowledge

Brands are suggested to be the greatest asset of a company (Aaker, 1991). Within marketing, this concept is widely studied (e.g., Aaker, 1996; de Chernatony, 1999; Kapferer, 1997; Kotler & Keller, 2006). Brand equity refers to successful brands and is made up of awareness, associations, perceived quality, and loyalty assets (Aaker, 1996). This added value helps organizations differentiate themselves from others and establish a competitive advantage (Kotler & Keller, 2006; Shank, 2005).

Gladden et al. (1998) built on Aaker's (1996) conceptualization of brand equity and constructed a cyclical model in a team sport setting where team-related (e.g., star player), organization-related (e.g., entertainment package), and market-related factors (e.g., geographical location) are believed to function as equity antecedents. These authors further argued that brand equity results in marketplace consequences, which affect marketplace perceptions. In turn, these perceptions are believed to influence the initial antecedents through a feedback loop.

Ross (2006) subsequently presented a cyclical framework for spectator-based brand equity for sport teams. Similar to Gladden et al. (1998), he proposed three antecedents to brand equity: (1) organization induced (marketing mix); (2) market induced (word-of-mouth and publicity); and (3) experience induced (actual consumer experience). These antecedents are believed to influence brand awareness and association, which, again, have consequences for the marketplace. Marketplace perceptions are further believed to affect the antecedents through feedback. Whereas Gladden et al. based their framework on models developed for physical goods, Ross (2006) emphasized service-oriented principles and the characteristics of spectator sports. A limitation of both approaches is that they merely focus on sports teams. Brand antecedents for teams may differ from events, as teams are considered more enduring than event organizations (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Venable, Rose, Bush, & Gilbert, 2005).

Spectators are not left with a physical product after watching an event; rather, they are left with perceptions and memories (cf. Berry, 2000). Urde (2003), from an organizational perspective, emphasized how brands are in continuous interaction with the identity of the consumers and that of the organization. As for the internal process, he underlined the importance of the organization's mission, vision, and values. Following the same line of thought, Ulrich and Smallwood (2007) presented the term "leadership brand" and described how organizations should ensure that their employees become committed to the organizational values. As they explained, "leadership brand is an extension of an organization's brand or identity because it shows up in the behaviours and results of leaders throughout a firm in a manner that bridges employee and customer commitment" (p. xi).

2.2. Event brand creation model

Parent and Séguin (2008) examined the branding process within a sport event setting and proposed a brand creation model for one-off events comprised of three referents: (1) the leadership group; (2) the context of the event; and (3) the nature of the event. Within the leadership group factor, three skill sets were highlighted: