



ATHENS 2004 SPONSORSHIP AWARENESS EVALUATION

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Abstract

Connecting a brand to Olympic Games through sponsorship contributes to the build of a competitive advantage and maps a positive image in the long run. Brand awareness is considered to be the first necessary stage in the demanding process towards achieving purchase and brand commitment. The research evaluates the post-2004 Olympic sponsorship reality in Athens presenting a series of different brand awareness scenarios, hopefully contributing towards understanding the process of brand image building and preservation. The random sample $N = 400$ was generated through a tailor made questionnaire. Overall, the results demonstrate high long term awareness levels for sponsoring brands which continued to increase in the different stages of questioning and maximized in the last level where respondents had to choose between competitors. On the other hand, challenges were found in the 'fit' between the sponsoring brand's image and the Olympic sponsorship setting leading to low levels of brand awareness. In total, the study could suggest a useful tool to be used in other post – event localities producing generalizable results and conclusions.

1. Introduction

Sponsorship has been appraised as being very important in achieving a wide range of objectives related to brand equity, brand awareness, brand trust, brand recognition and overall favorable brand perceptions and associations. Olympic sponsorship's universal recognition has constituted the most important factor for the market's decision to invest funds in the process of being incorporated in the same positive and beneficial environment. The aforementioned associations refer to linkages developed between the brand and the sponsored event when coexisting under the same organizational roof. The event is been selected due to its capacity to transfer its values and image to the brand concept. Incorporating the total of event perceptions, the brand aims to build or reestablish its own features around the event

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character (Chien, Cornwell & Pappu, 2011; Keller, 1993; Smith, 2004).

In the same framework, sponsorship provides awareness and knowledge of a brand and makes associations that are understood by the consumers. 'Equity' refers to the sum of conceptual properties linked to a brand producing additional value to the specific product (Aaker, 1991). One of Aaker's equity four dimensions includes brand 'awareness' in its importance to directly affect consumers' attitude and choice. Establishing brand name awareness is a basic step in the creation of brand image and brand linkages to peoples' minds. Aaker (1996) suggested an awareness measuring instrument, based on a 'three levels' brand awareness questioning technique. The study aims to estimate the post-Olympic sponsorship awareness levels applying Aaker's measuring technique to Athenian citizens.

Even though Olympic sponsorship remains the strongest marketing tool aiming to reinforce the brand image, there is an evident lack of evaluation techniques to objectively measure sponsorship's different effectual results. The present study realizing the evident lack of Olympic sponsoring awareness knowledge aims to examine a series of research areas associated with the level of recognition sponsors enjoy post Games time.

Theoretical Foundation. Defining Sponsorship as an Effective Marketing Vehicle

Positive consumer behavior is the ultimate objective and the overall purpose of sponsorship (Seguin & O'Reilly, 2008a). Sponsorship contributes determinedly to two fundamental aspects of the marketing effort: brand awareness and brand equity (Keller, 1993; Ruth & Simonin, 2003). In some cases brand awareness could be the only feature in selecting a brand. Often consumers prefer a known brand, despite the obvious advantages of a less familiar brand.

Olympic sponsorship offers brand distinction from competition gaining a competitive advantage evidently based on the brand increased awareness and recognition amongst other brands (Soderman & Dolles, 2010). Ruth and Simonin's (2003) study suggests that consumers showed higher levels of brand awareness, expressed interest in Olympic Games-related brands, considered the brands as credible, and overall formed a positive attitude towards the sponsoring brands.

However, threats arise primarily from ambush marketing which is a frequent phenomenon in the mega events such as Olympic Games. These threats include: lack of differentiation of the official sponsors when compared to ambushers (Schmitz, 2005; Tripodi, 2001), misconception of consumers on which brand is indeed the official sponsor of the Olympic Games (Farrelly, Quester, & Greyser, 2005), insufficient brand exposure (Seguin & O'Reilly, 2008a; 2008b). Additionally, sponsorship effectiveness is also challenged by several factors. Giannoulakis, Stotlar and Chatziefstathiou (2008) suggest for example that the effectiveness lies heavily on the consistency of the objectives that the sponsors set to achieve when they invest in funding the Games and attaching their brands to the Olympic brand itself.

Strategic decisions on targeting specific markets should match the equivalent communication techniques within the sponsored activity in order to achieve initial objectives. Seguin and O'Reilly (2008b) highlight inappropriate brand exposure in the sponsored activity failing to produce 'matches' in consumers' perceptions.

Authors like Chien et al. (2011), Mason (2005), Pentecost and Prugsamatz (2006) as well as Soderman and Dolles (2008) have dealt enough with the appropriateness of the sponsored event in relation to the image objectives of the brand and the 'fit' that has to be achieved in order to maximize sponsorship results. Chien et al., (2011) stress the importance of 'aligning' the brand image to the spirit, values and icon of the Olympic movement in order to build positive attitudes. Pham (2000) argues that communication tools can often decrease sponsorship effects. Messages, icons and imaging can fail to communicate brand qualities if not managed positively. Smith (2004) adds that previous communication strategies could fail to 'fit' with the new Olympic image. Additionally, Pitts and Slattery (2004) suggest that the exposure time period is very critical to the effectiveness of sponsorship. However, companies will heavily invest in Olympic sponsoring as the only vehicle to achieve a differentiated new positive image for the sponsoring brand due to the magnitude and nature of the most important event worldwide.

Despite the generous number of theoretical approaches though on the importance of enhancing awareness, there are very few studies that have thoroughly explored the relation between the sponsored event and the associated brand. Gwinner and Eaton (1999) recorded a positive relationship between a sporting event's image and the brand when transferred through sponsorship. The study of Jalleh, Donovan, Giles-Corti and Holman, (2002) similarly suggests that sponsorship can significantly affect brand awareness and overall participants attitude underlining the 'usefulness' of using sponsorship in marketing strategies.

Aaker's model of measuring brand awareness

Brand image for years has been directly related to a successful marketing strategy with authors increasingly attempting to analyze the components leading to a successful brand picture and therefore a profitable market course for the product. As early as 1942, Guest's study on students' brand awareness produced significant results, marking a new era for brand image analysis. It was Aaker though in 1972 that attempts to identify the features of a strong brand leading to the creation of the brand 'equity' paradigm.

'Equity' according to Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) concentrates all those conceptual properties connected to or are involved with a certain brand product. Similarly to Aaker (1991), Keller (1993) suggests that these brand 'associations' are developed from various sources and marketing activities and can be affected by the links created in consumers' minds. Aaker's equity model (1991) suggests the grouping of these brand properties into four dimensions directly linked to product development, operation and management as well as performance measurement. Starting with brand 'awareness' Aaker emphasizes its importance in affecting consumers' perception and preference. Awareness relates to consumers' familiarity with a certain brand often suggesting the first crucial stage towards the final purchase. Secondly, 'perceived quality' influencing in many ways brand consumers' attitudes is suggested here as having direct relation with profitability. 'Brand associations' refer to all those features connected with the brand often used to produce strategies of connecting the brand to a certain icon. Lastly, brand 'loyalty' receives additional value from Aaker suggesting that is the centre of a

brand's value and leads to significant overall brand equity.

The author strongly argues that measurement remains the focus of successful management (Aaker, 1996). Obtaining indicators for all four dimensions supports an effective auditing mechanism rather than remaining focused on financial performances only. Attempts to produce measuring techniques have suggested similar structural patterns of aided, spontaneous, and top of mind questioning (Laurent, Kapferer & Roussel, 1995). When it comes to awareness, Aaker's (1996) 'three levels' evaluation model consists one of the fundamental theories towards analyzing buyers' perceptions and deeper knowledge on a brand that need to be retrieved to finally enhance marketing effectiveness overall. Analytically, Aaker (1996) defines three different levels of brand awareness in an effort to dive into respondents' market consciousness and extract valid information on the brand under investigation. The value of the model goes beyond simple brand description and thus, could contribute towards an overall market as well as brand competition environment assessment. Aaker firstly, describes the 'top of mind' recalling as the highest awareness level since if the brand appears first when asked relevantly, it is considered to dominate respondent's perception. This unaided recall becomes the most favorable position for a brand when positioned primary to the recollection process. Secondly, at the following brand recall level, support is offered to facilitate recollection. A categorical guidance is offered engaging the 'product class' to support recalling (Aaker, 1996). At this second awareness level, the recalled brand becomes synonymous to the product category signifying the distinct position the brand holds in the specific category. 'Brand recognition' is suggested by Aaker to be the third level of exploring awareness reflecting familiarity to the brand and most importantly, associations deriving from previous exposure. Recollection amongst a group of brand competitors is a manner of 'aided recall' whose value is extended to revealing overall market perceptions and attitudes.

Purpose of the study

Aaker's measuring model is engaged here to support the investigation of:

'the level of long term unaided and aided awareness Olympic sponsors enjoy after the Athens 2004 Games' that constitutes the main purpose of the present study. More analytically, main research objectives of study include:

- a. The 'top of mind' recalling level Olympic sponsors record eight years after the 2004 Games
- b. The extent that 'product class' supports sponsors recollection after the Athens Games
- c. The Athens 2004 Olympic sponsors 'recognition' level amongst competing brands
- d. The increase of recalling between different measuring stages
- e. The shift of participants' awareness between brands at the three awareness levels

Following Aaker's theoretical model the research instrument starts from the 'highest awareness level' that of the 'top of mind' crucial unaided questioning in search for the brand that dominates the perception regarding any national or international Athens 2004 Olympic sponsor. Secondly, the 'brand recall' level measures awareness levels when the product class is offered. In this case, a product categorical guidance was

offered in ten sponsors' categories combining both International and Grand National sponsors' categories. More specifically, the following categories included (noting the 2004 Olympic brands in parenthesis):

A. 'International' Sponsorship Categories: Non-alcoholic Drinks (Coca Cola), Timing/Scoring Systems and Services (Swatch), Wireless Communication Equipment/mobiles (Samsung), Retail Food Service (McDonalds).

B. 'Grand National' Sponsorship Categories: Alcoholic Drinks (Heineken), Bank (Alpha Bank), Dairy Products (Fage/Delta), Automobiles (Hyundai), Postal Services (Hellenic National Postal Service - EL.TA.), Telecommunications (Cosmote).

Contextual setting of the ATHENS 2004 Olympic Sponsorship

An Olympic sponsorship program constitutes the most important worldwide exposure environment for brands wishing to be associated with a unique cultural, moral and life living value system. Similarly, Athens 2004 Olympic Games proved to be a setting for 'Top Partners' as well as national sponsors to maximize their association with the greatest event of all, in Greece the birthplace of the Games, underpinning a greater intrinsic importance for the connected brands (IOC, 2009).

The international sponsorship programme known as the Top program or Olympic Partnership is engaged with the Olympic movement for almost two decades. TOP Partners, or Worldwide Olympic Partners have supported the International Olympic Committee, the Organizing Committees and all National Olympic Committees participating in many Olympiads through the provision of numerous services, products and related activities. Despite the fact that Greece remains the smallest country ever to host the Games, sponsorship provided the 'highest-ever per capita support' of any local marketing program in the history of Olympic Games until 2004 (IOC, 2009).

Athens 2004 Olympic Games generated 50% more than the predicted revenue through national and torch relay sponsorship, while the total sponsorship target was met two years prior to the event (ATHOC, 2003). The strategic decision to limit considerably the sponsorship program finally led to 23 sponsors across three tiers aimed to increase 'heightened visibility' for the sponsors within an environment of 'limited commercialism' in comparison to 100 Sponsoring categories at the SYDNEY 2000 Games and the 200 ATLANTA 1996 Games (ATHOC, 2002). ATHENS 2004 sponsorship revenues exceeded 570m Euros in total. The National Sponsoring and Torch Relay Programs produced more than 300m€ and approximately 272m€ derived from the TOP V Program (International Sponsors). Reaching 37%, sponsorship became the second biggest source of revenues after the international broadcasting rights program while covering approximately 23% of the ATHENS 2004 balanced budget.

Domestic sponsors faced a great potential of encompassing the Olympic ideals with their product image through a series of promotional benefits, events, activities within the host country. Sponsors included in the present study are: OTE and COSMOTE, the Athens 2004 Grand National Sponsors for telecommunications services, provided the Olympic Games with numerous telecommunication services and equipment as well as networking solutions. Hyundai Hellas, a Grand National Sponsor,

provided more than 3,500 vehicles to the Athens Organising Committee for the needs of thousands of officials and staff. Alpha Bank, a well-established bank in Greece became also a major Athens 2004 ticketing outlet by selling ceremony and event tickets in 140 selected branch offices throughout Greece. ELTA, the Hellenic Post Services, underlined its support for the Games in the minds of the Greek people and all visitors being a pride grand sponsor of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games. Fage/Delta, presented a radical cooperation of two companies becoming Grand National Sponsors in the dairy products category. Heineken being a very popular local beer became a Grand National Sponsor for the category of alcoholic drinks (IOC, 2009).

Regarding international sponsors, the Coca-Cola Company, a Worldwide Olympic Partner, continued to be a faithful Olympic sponsor strongly seeking the interconnection with the Olympic values and positive image. In Athens, McDonalds launched the most comprehensive global and on-site promotional effort in the company's 30-year history with Olympic Games. Samsung strategically focusing on the Olympic ideals, incorporated values such as 'goodwill, fair play, friendship, mind or effort' into their promotional activities. Olympic sponsorship at the Athens 2004 Games demonstrated Swatch's relationship and commitment to the Olympic spirit, while celebrating the balance between sport and culture (IOC, 2009).

2. Material and methods

Instrument. A tailor made questionnaire was designed to facilitate sponsorship awareness measurement since there is an evident lack of relevant instruments. Validity is ensured with Aaker's three levels' awareness evaluation model becoming the core guiding paradigm for the present study to evaluate Olympic sponsoring. Moreover, content validity of the questionnaire employed for this research was also ensured by a panel of experts.

Sample. The international sponsors examined in the study, constitute well established brands enjoying a plethora of promotional privileges by the Olympic marketing program. Seventeen (17) sponsorship related questions along with 8 demographic areas were included in the specifically designed questionnaire using a combination of open and closed questions. The sample consists of 400 participants focusing heavily on their age and educational background. Taking into consideration that the Athens Games were organized in 2004 then the participants age should not be less than 24 (18 years old at Games time) to ensure that all possible sponsorship exposure was maturely conceived. Both age and educational background were verified through a pilot study contacted a few months before the final research through a convenience sample with the general public (100 participants).

Instrument Testing. The pilot study demonstrated an evident inability of older people to effectively conduct the questionnaire but the same time confirmed the content validity of the instrument. Similarly, people with lower educational background seemed incapable of filling certain areas of the questionnaire leading to the decision to focus on the aforementioned age and educational targeted groups. The research targeted mainly the age group between 24 to 50 years old, based on the assumption that the specific group is considered to be one of the most consuming and

market – aware population. More specifically, 37,3% of the total sample was 24 to 30 years old, 27,5% was between 31 to 40 and finally, 25,5% was between 41 to 50 (only a 7,3% was between 51 to 60 years old deriving from the pilot study). In addition, the majority of participants were University degree holders (61%) or postgraduate students (27,8%) thus, of high caliber to ensure that they were closer to following all aspects of the Games, simultaneously presenting an intense buying behavior. With the support of a group of five assistants the research was conducted at three different University locations to facilitate sampling, randomly selecting classrooms due the time consuming nature of the questionnaire.

3. Results and Discussions

Awareness Level One. The level of awareness enjoyed by the Olympic Sponsors in the Greater Athens area eight years after the Games was recorded in the present study producing significant results. Olympic sponsorship awareness was recorded at three different levels (Aaker, 1996) aiming to measure the density and nature of sponsorship as perceived by participants.

The inclusion of the ‘out of mind’ question aims to measure the ability of a sponsor to remain vivid in participants’ perception as an Athens 2004 Olympic Sponsor without any categorical or multiple choice guidance. The increased difficulty produced by this type of questioning reinforces the validity of answering and the results significance. Respondents are asked to recall any brand considered to be an Olympic sponsor during the Athens Games without differentiating between National and International sponsors, or providers and suppliers in an effort to evaluate the effective recollection of the sponsors.

Coca Cola, an international Olympic sponsor figures in the first place of correct sponsors’ recollection with 54,8% (219) while only 1,5% (6) suggested Pepsi. The national telecommunications sponsor Cosmote is recorded in the second place in the process of sponsors’ recollection with 45,3% (181), while the false estimation of Vodafone (a great telecoms competitor) received 18% (72). Hyundai being the Olympic car provider and ALPHA Bank a national sponsor follow with 32,3% (129) of respondents recollecting them correctly in the process of evaluating Olympic sponsorship. Twenty one percent (21,3%) of participants (85) recalled the dairy products Fage/Delta to be included in the Olympic sponsorship program. Surprisingly, Heineken in the alcoholic drinks category was recalled as an Olympic contributor by only 19,8% (79) of respondents, followed by the Hellenic Postal Service (ELTA) with 14% (56) and the timing keeping provider of Swatch with 12,3% (49). Interestingly, at the last two places, the categories of technology and food services record limited recollection. Ericson is recalled as the Olympic technology player with 9,8% (39) against 9,3% (37) of the actual Olympic provider that of Samsung. More significantly, the false suggestion of a successful Greek easy food company ‘Goody’s’ featuring as the Olympic Sponsor for the Athens Games by 15% (60) of respondents constitutes a sponsorship failure for the international 2004 Olympic sponsor of MacDonald’s receiving only 9,5% (38) of the responses.

Awareness Level Two. In order to facilitate recalling of the Athens 2004

Olympic sponsors the research proceeded with a question offering a group of Olympic product categories to support respondents' recollection. The results produced in this questioning section recorded a low increase in the overall Olympic sponsors' recalling with the use of the categorical guidance.

Coca Cola from previous 54,8% (219) grew to just 58,3% (233) of respondents recalling correctly in this guided questioning process. Similarly, Cosmote in the telecoms category from 45,3% (181) of correct recalling grew to 50,5% (202) with competing Vodafone lowering to 13,8% (55). Olympic sponsor Alpha Bank increased to just 33,8% (135) with National Bank a great national competitor also increasing to 13,8% (61). Significant increases in correct recollection occurred in the categories of dairy products reaching 42,3% (169) of responses, as well as ELTA doubling to 30,3% (121) at the Olympic postal category. Hyundai increasing to 37,3% (149) suggests an example where brands present low increase levels despite this categorically supported question. Heineken presented an increase from almost 20% (79) to 27% (108) of respondents answering correctly, facing though an equivalent increase of a well-established sport sponsor Amstel to 17,5% (70). Similarly, Swatch's low increase of correct answering to 18,3% (73) is followed by the rise of Omega as a possible sponsor according to 10,3% (41) of respondents. Interestingly, the low recalling increase of SAMSUNG from 9,3% (37) to 12,3% (49) is not a remarkable result in this category. The huge rise of Nokia to 22,8% (91) as a possible Olympic Sponsor recalled incorrectly becomes a dramatic development for the category of technology claiming a significant sponsorship deficiency for Samsung at the Athens 2004 Games. Similarly, the increased guess by the respondents from 9,5% (38) to 14,8% (59) for McDonalds as the Olympic food sponsor is overshadowed by the noteworthy increase of the national food company Goody's from 15% (60) to 25,3% (101) suggesting a real threat to this category's sponsorship effectiveness.

Awareness Level Three. The process of gaining reliable results is reinforced with the use of a third question offering further support through the provision of four possible sponsors. Every product category employs four most probable competitors narrowing respondents' choice and hopefully facilitating the recalling process. Overall, the provision of four choices increased all previous levels of correct sponsors' recalling.

Analytically, Coca-Cola becomes the most recognized brand with positive recollection increasing to 87,8% (351). In the telecoms category, the national sponsor Cosmote increased to 69,4% (270) from previous question (50,5% or 202). It has to be noted, that the provision of four possible brands benefitted Vodafone increasing from 13,8% (55) to 28,5% (114). Similar reaction is observed in other categories such as Alpha Bank rising from 33,8% (135) to 47,5% (190) but also competitor National Bank reaching 25% (100) from previous 15,3% (61). More vividly, dairy companies Fage/Delta almost tripled their percentages from 'out of mind' recalling of 21,3% (85) to 84,8% (339) with the choice of four other brands. Hyundai constitutes a typical example of effective recognition when the brand doubles the previously low recalling levels from 37,3% (149) to 62,5% (250) when provided a list of possible brands. Once more, ELTA the national postal sponsor

enjoyed a great increase from 30,3% (121) to 55,5% (222) while the suggestion of the four other competitors produced some significant results for other postal brands like, ACS 18,8% (75) and DHL 12,58% (51). Similarly, Heineken managed to climb to 52% (208) with competitors also presenting some noteworthy results such as 33,5% (134) of respondents choosing Amstel and 10,3% (41) Mythos. In the same lines, Swatch managed to considerably increased positive responses from 18,3% (73) to 41% (164) while Omega rising to 31,8% (127) and Longines to 16% (64) amongst the four offered choices.

The last two brands fail to benefit from Olympic sponsorship recording low levels of awareness, while the same time non Olympic brands enjoy a significant recognition. Samsung did not manage to elevate the low awareness levels recorded in the previous two questions with only 27,8% (111) of respondents recalling correctly. On the contrary, Ericson was selected amongst the four choices with a remarkable 47,5% (190) of respondents recognizing it as the Olympic brand for the Athens 2004 Games. The most surprisingly of all, McDonalds despite the noted increase from 14,8% (59) to 25,8% (103) in the present question was 'defeated' by the national non Olympic food brand 'Goody's' with an enormous 61% (244) suggestion.

Table 1. *Olympic Sponsors 'Three Levels' Awareness*

Athens 2004 Olympic Sponsors	Olympic Sponsors' Awareness		
	<i>Out of Mind</i>	<i>Recall with product class</i>	<i>Recognition amongst competitors</i>
COSMOTE	45,3% (181)	50,5% (202)	67,5% (270)
ALPHA BANK	32% (128)	33,8% (135)	47,5% (190)
FAGE/DELTA	21,3% (85)	42,3% (169)	84,8% (339)
HYUNDAI	32,3% (129)	37,3% (149)	62,5% (250)
ELTA	14% (56)	30,3% (121)	55,5% (222)
HEINEKEN	19,8% (79)	27% (108)	52% (208)
COCA COLA	54,8% (219)	58,3% (233)	87,8% (351)
SWATCH	12,3% (49)	18,3% (73)	41% (164)
SAMSUNG	9,3% (37)	12,3% (49)	27,8% (111)
McDONALDS	9,5% (38)	14,8% (59)	25,8% (103)
Non Olympic Brands Recalled as Olympic			
ERICSON/NOKIA (mob.)	9,8% (39)	22,8% (91)	47,5% (190)
GOODY's (food)	15% (60)	25,3% (101)	61% (244)

Evaluating sponsors' recalling between different awareness levels

Using crosstabulations (nominal data) between the three measured awareness levels the study proceeds to an in depth analysis of how recollection fluctuates and is affected by the method of aided recalling at the two last stages.

First "top of mind" to Second "recall with product class" awareness level - Recalling correctly at 2nd level

Firstly, a crosstabulation analysis is used between the first 'top of mind' and 'recall with product class' measurement levels. The aim of this further examination

is to record the exact level of awareness when supported by the aided suggestion of 'product class'. Focusing on the participants that did not recall the sponsors in the first stage, the analysis showed that overall all sponsors presented an increase in participants' recollection in this second aided stage.

From those participants that did not recall initially the Olympic sponsors, the use of the 'product class' produced some significant results. In more detail, Coca Cola presenting high awareness levels in the first stage, managed to increase further correct recalling when 82,7% (43) of participants recalled the brand correctly, while a small 7,7% (4) preferred Pepsi. Similarly, ELTA was recalled correctly by 69,2% (72) of those who didn't manage to recall the certain sponsor previously, enjoying a dramatic overall increase. Noteworthy, a significant 14,4% (15) chose ACS while Speedex and DHL received 4,8% (5) each. In the same pattern Fage/Delta dairy brands enjoyed an increase of 53,9% (55) with only 5% (5) suggesting Olympos and 3,9% (4) Mebgal being two large competitors.

However, a different picture is recorded for the telecommunications sponsor Cosmote. Despite its evident increase by 48,97% (48), a significant increase is also recorded for its fierce competitor Vodafone with 42,9% (42). Similarly, Heineken increased by 35% (41) but simultaneously faces the dramatic increase of the biggest competitor Amstel recalled at this stage by 53,8% (63).

Additionally, Hyundai increased by 38,5% (30) but it is noteworthy that preferences were spread between three other brands with Nissan receiving 16,7% (13), BMW 10,3% (8), Fiat 5,1% (4). A similar recollection spreading pattern is recorded to the bank category when despite the 19,3% (26) increase for Alpha Bank, a significant 41,5% (56) suggested the National Bank, 25,9% (35) Eurobank and 8,9% (12) Piraeus Bank. Swatch received 25,6% (31) increase but remarkably, 33,1% (40) preferred Omega while Longines and Timex received 7,4% (9) each.

McDonalds continued to be challenged by the dramatic increase of Goody's by 70,1% (96) despite the 21,9% (30) increase recorded at this stage. In the same pattern, Sony Ericson was recollected by 27,4% (45) as an Olympic sponsor, with Samsung presenting the smallest increase rate of all Olympic brand categories with 12,8% (21).

Another considerable result of this section refers to the level of brand perception 'maintained' amongst participants who recalled Olympic sponsors at the first 'top of mind' stage. In total, all brands maintained their position at the second level 'product class' questioning presenting though some interesting data. At this recollection level, Samsung and McDonalds constitute two cases where 14,3% (5) shifted from their previous suggestion to another brand that of Nokia and Goody's respectively. Both brands present less faithful participants with opinion maintained to 82,9% (29) for McDonalds and to 80% (28) for Samsung. Similarly, Heineken with 88,2% (29) seems to 'lose' some of participants shifting to Amstel by 9,2% (7). Interestingly, Cosmote presents a loyal 92,2% (154) but one should note a 7,8% (13) shift towards its biggest enemy Vodafone. Alpha Bank retains 91,6% (109) while small shifts are recorded towards National Bank 4,2% (5) and Eurobank 3,4% (4). In similar lines, Swatch presents 93,3% (42) with insignificant percentages shifting to other brands i.e. 2,2% (1) to Omega and 2,2% (1) Timex.

The following three brands enjoy the most faithful participants. Coca Cola vividly maintains its fans with 96% (190), while only 1% (2) moving to Pepsi and 1% (2) to Red Bull. Fage/Delta enjoy an enormous 99% (77) leaving no room to other competitors. In addition, ELTA maintained 98% (49) with no significant shifts recorded.

The use of chi-square χ^2 analysis revealed that for all above comparisons (except one) there were statistically significant differences (see Table 2).

Table 2. Crosstabulations and χ^2 between Level One 'Top of Mind' – Level Two 'Recall with product class'

Athens 2004 Olympic Sponsors	<i>1st level to 2nd Level</i> 'Top of Mind' – 'Recall with product class' (crosstabs)		<i>1st level to 2nd Level</i> Chi-Square Tests		
	<i>% that recalled correctly only at 2nd level</i>	<i>% that recalled correctly at 1st level, but shifted to other brands at 2nd level</i>	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
COSMOTE	48,97% (48)	42,9% (42) Vodafone	65,381 ^a	5	,000***
ALPHA BANK	19,3% (26)	41,5% (56) National	133,138 ^a	4	,000***
FAGE/DELTA	53,9% (55)	4,9% (5) Olympos	8,018 ^a	4	,091 ns
HYUNDAI	38,5 (30)	16,7% (13) Nissan	90,550 ^a	4	,000***
ELTA	69,2% (72)	14,4% (15) ACS	17,221 ^a	4	,002***
HEINEKEN	35% (41)	53,8% (63) Amstel	53,776 ^a	4	,000***
COCA COLA	82,7% (43)	7,7% (4) Pepsi	14,601 ^a	4	,006**
SWATCH	25,6% (31)	33,1% (40) Omega	61,338 ^a	4	,000***
SAMSUNG	12,8% (21)	27,4% (45) Sony Er.	70,399 ^a	4	,000***
MacDONALDS	21,9% (30)	70,1% (96) Goody's	46,302 ^a	4	,000***

Note: ns = non significant, **significant at the 0,01 level, ***significant at the 0,001 level

Second "recall with product class" to third "brand recognition" amongst competitors awareness level – Recalling correctly at the 3rd level

The present section aims to map the awareness level as recorded between the two last stages using aided questioning. The main focus of this part remains the behaviour pattern of participants from the previous 'product class' category to the third level of brand recognition. Facilitating their recollection further, participants are presented with four competing brands to choose.

The following four Olympic brands seem to have earned faithful believers since they have sustained their awareness levels high. Heineken maintains 97,2% (103) of participants recalling the brand at the previous stage with only 2 participants (2%) shifting to Mythos. Not surprisingly, Coca Cola retains 94,7% (216) of the second level with an insignificant 3,1% (7) shifting to Pepsi. Similarly, Fage/Delta manage to keep 94,4% (101) of the ones choosing the brand in the second level with insignificant participants moving to Mebgal. Hyundai with 93,9% (139) leaves little margins of recalling to competitors.

Alpha Bank is one of the four brands that despite maintaining 90% (117) of

participants also demonstrate a minor spread towards all other proposed brands i.e. Eurobank 5,4% (7), 2,3% (3) National Bank, 2,3 % (3) Piraeus Bank that could be useful to further studies for the certain period. Samsung following the same pattern maintains 81,3% (39) but also faces a shift towards Sony Ericson 10,4% (5) and LG 8,3% (4). Similar to the above, ELTA maintained 88,3% (106), while shifting is recorded towards ACS 6,7% (8) and DHL 4,2% (5). Similarly, Swatch sustains 87,1% (61) with 8,6% (6) departing to Omega and 2,9% (2) to Longines.

Two noteworthy results are recorded at this level indicating Olympic sponsorship incapability to increase awareness. Cosmote managed to maintain 84,8% (168), but unexpectedly 14,6% (29) participants changed their choice towards largest competitor Vodafone. The international sponsor McDonalds managed to maintain 84,2% (48) when offered a list of competitors but still 12,3% (7) reported Goody's as the most probable Olympic sponsor.

Remarkably, it was recorded that some non Olympic brands' preferences shifted to Olympic and other brands at the 3rd level. Having a closer look to participants' answers when facing four possible competing brands some noticeable results derive on the 'non Olympic' brands performance at this level. In general, all non Olympic brands partially maintained their believers while a small population demonstrated limited shifts to other brands.

More specifically, brands like Goody's retained awareness levels with 91% (91), Omega 87,5% (35) and Sony Ericson 82,6% (38). It is crucial to note that some shifts towards the Olympic brands were recorded, such as the case of Vodafone supporters at the 2nd level, being now redirected to Cosmote with 18,2% (10). Similarly, Pepsi few followers when facing the list of possible answers 33,2% (2) were redirected to Coca Cola. Amstel is another non Olympic brand that at this 3rd level preserved 78,6% (55) of its previous votes but more importantly 'lost' 18,6% (12) to Olympic Heineken. Eurobank recorded a shift of 25,6% (10) towards the Olympic sponsor Alpha Bank, as well as National bank responses now shifting to the Olympic bank by 6,6% (4).

Table 3. Crosstabulations and χ^2 between Level Two 'Recall with product class' – Level Three 'Recall amongst competitors'

Athens 2004 Olympic Sponsors	2 nd Level to 3 rd level 'Recall with product class' – 'Brand Recognition amongst competitors' (crosstabs)		2 nd Level to 3 rd level Chi-Square Tests		
	% that recalled correctly at 3 rd level	% that recalled correctly at 2 nd level, but shifted to non Olympic brands at 3 rd level	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
COSMOTE	84,8% (168)	14,6% (29) Vodafone	256,771 ^a	15	,000***
ALPHA BANK	90% (117)	5,4% (7) Eurobank	366,093 ^a	12	,000***
FAGE/DELTA	94,4% (101)	2,8% (3) Mebgal	92,210 ^a	12	,000***
HYUNDAI	93,9% (139)	3,4% (5) Nissan	222,969 ^a	12	,000***
ELTA	88,3% (106)	6,7% (8) ACS	174,241 ^a	12	,000***
HEINEKEN	97,2% (103)	1,9% (2) Amstel	166,567 ^a	8	,000***

Athens 2004 Olympic Sponsors	<i>2nd Level to 3rd level</i> ‘Recall with product class’ – ‘Brand Recognition amongst competitors’ (crosstabs)		<i>2nd Level to 3rd level</i> Chi-Square Tests		
	<i>% that recalled correctly at 3rd level</i>	<i>% that recalled correctly at 2nd level, but shifted to non Olympic brands at 3rd level</i>	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
COCA COLA	94,7% (216)	3,1% (7) Pepsi	382,891 ^a	12	,000***
SWATCH	87,1% (61)	8,6% (6) Omega	207,953 ^a	12	,000***
SAMSUNG	81,3% (39)	10,4% (5) Sony Eric.	120,375 ^a	12	,000***
MacDONALDS	84,2% (48)	12,3% (7) Goody’s	151,958 ^a	12	,000***

Note: ns = non significant, **significant at the 0,01 level, ***significant at the 0,001 level

4. Conclusions

The engagement of sponsorship aims at making explicit links between the sponsoring brand and the sponsored event reaching specific target markets and achieving increased awareness and recognition. Aaker’s awareness evaluation model (1996) is applied to structure the research instrument and theoretically guide the examination of the long term 2004 Olympic sponsorship knowledge in Athens. The use of the chi-square χ^2 analysis demonstrated statistically significant differences between the three awareness levels. This could suggest that Aaker’s (1996) model of measuring awareness is verified, emphasising the theoretical as well as the applicable significance of the present study.

Overall, the sponsor categories finally recalled by participants matched the ones initially chosen to be examined in the present study enhancing content validity further. No other product category was recorded in the ‘top of mind’ question where respondents are offered no support in the process of recalling. The majority of Olympic sponsorship categories (eight out of the ten) included in the present study was recalled successfully. In the present study, the majority of the brands under examination have overall managed to make a ‘match’ with the Athens 2004 Olympic Games. Olympic sponsorship is not limited to the international sponsors or global brands, since national organizations and domestic brands also gain momentum when sponsoring the Games. Since the first awareness level, it was interesting to note that amongst the first five places there are three national sponsors that seem to be recalled by participants easier than some of the benefitted global well-known brands such as Samsung or Swatch. Cosmote, Alpha Bank, Fage-Delta and ELTA, showed high levels of awareness and in some cases exceeded that of the international sponsors.

The main feature of the second awareness level is the fact that the majority of brands presented moderate increases of correct recalling. With the exception of ELTA and Fage/Delta all other brands recorded limited increases with the aided support of ‘product class’. In some cases, this recalling pattern led some competing brands to arise and benefit from this categorical guidance. Overall participants recalling correctly at the first level demonstrated a highly loyal behavior preserving their positive support at the second stage.

At the third level, the aided question of recognizing the correct Olympic sponsor amongst competitors at the third level produced the most positive results for all brands. Coca Cola, Cosmote, Hyundai and the significantly increased Fage/Delta secured their position as the most recognized brands enjoying significant increases of positive recognition. It is remarkable that ELTA, Heineken and Swatch almost double their percentages at this stage.

Coca Cola features as the most recalled brand of all, presenting the highest awareness levels amongst all brands at all levels. This international brand managed to sustain awareness at all three measurement levels with minor shifts towards other brands. According to the literature it's one of the international/global brands that have been leveraging sponsorship to the Olympics in order to achieve favorable results and have succeeded (Sengun & O'Reilly, 2008; Soderman & Dolles, 2008; Tripodi, 2001; Tripodi et al., 2003). Whether this attachment to the Olympic Games or its intensive marketing strategy created stronger attachment and preference amongst consumers needs to be explored further.

At the other end, Samsung, the official sponsor in the mobile product category suggests a typical example where an international well established product fails to build a connection between the brand and the positive image of the Olympic Games. Recalled last in the first 'top of mind' question did not manage to increase significantly in the third 'choosing amongst competitors' question. On the contrary, Ericson falsely becomes a brand connected with Olympic sponsorship reaching high levels of recognition leaving Samsung incapable of obtaining as strong position at respondents' perceptions. In addition, one of the most valuable results produced remain the choice of Nokia which appeared to concentrate the appreciation of those participating in the research proving the effectiveness of their company's marketing tools. In the same lines, the international brand Swatch despite its low percentages at the first stage managed to retrieve some awareness only at the last level of recalling amongst competing brands. In addition, Omega falsely produced noticeable awareness levels at all stages followed by Longines and Timex.

Similarly, McDonalds one of the most well-known international brands in the food category was not recalled as effectively as expected. Despite the constant and intense marketing mechanisms McDonalds follows worldwide, there was no evident link recorded between the brand and the Athens Games according to the present results. At all questioning levels, surprisingly, McDonalds was not recalled as a possible Olympic sponsor. Presenting low levels of awareness and recollection received an insignificant increase only at the last question of recalling amongst competitors featuring always second. The first position in this product category at all awareness stages belongs to the national food chain company 'Goody's' presenting gradually high levels of recollection. It is a surprise to note that a national food company exceeded the awareness of a large international sponsor that of McDonalds despite the enormous marketing benefits enjoyed during Olympic Games. At all measurement levels, Goody's gained more and more support even from participants recollecting McDonalds correctly at the first level. Goody's remains the most popular easy food chain in Greece well known for its best quality and effective customer

service. Presenting a youthful and lively image and shop environment Goody's through an effective promotional campaign, as it seems in the recent study results, has managed to concur market locally and become the synonym of easy food in Greece.

National telecoms sponsor Cosmote has received considerable and gradually increased recollection at all levels. However, this Olympic brand has been followed closely by its major competitor Vodafone evidently managing to map an effective promotional strategy and build associations between the brand and sport events. It is evident, that at the last 'recognition amongst competitors' level Vodafone manages to gain support even from those that correctly voted for Cosmote previously. Similarly, Heineken enjoys increased levels of awareness but also faces a minor but notable support turn towards competing Amstel.

Alpha Bank, ELTA, Fage/Delta and Hyundai with approximately one third of respondents recalling them correctly, remain high in the second question when respondents are partially supported with the provision of product categories. One of the main results is the dramatic increase of percentages they all enjoyed at the third level of recalling amongst competitors. Remarkably, Hyundai's massive increase of awareness at the last level indicates the distinct position the brand holds amongst competing brands. One additional feature of the aforementioned brands is that despite the gradual increases between all levels, a limited spread towards other competing brands at the second level was recorded and should be further reviewed.

In the present study, it is evident that the majority of Olympic sponsors demonstrate a strong brand image. These recorded awareness levels could stand as a reliable indicator of sponsorship effectiveness for these brands, which however have to be supplemented with sufficient brand knowledge research in order to produce holistic effectiveness assumptions.

Implications & future research. The vast majority of sponsors recalled as Olympic brands suggest a successful marketing program for IOC marketing planners securing a positive communication environment for sponsoring organisations. However, the recoded negative awareness evaluation for some of the most globally established and traditional Olympic sponsors, dictates the need for revisiting the marketing program overall before diminishing the sponsorship appeal to future candidates. IOC advancing sponsors' communication benefits further could secure a positive recognition level, support their image transmitting process, and thus offer the equivalent to their investment returns. IOC marketing auditing mechanisms prior, during and post Games could support the sponsorship's evaluation leading to successful sponsorship contracts. Adjusted or further categorisation of the Olympic sponsors' categories at IOC's marketing program could benefit sponsors receiving certain promotional benefits and audited exposure benefits. Support could be offered to sponsors to communicate their brand image clearly, upon an effective promotional platform during Olympic Games. Parallel supplementary promotional vehicles could be offered to sponsors to enhance their image through interactive marketing schemes. Intra-organisational partnerships could highlight a sponsor's icon and extent its promotional activity to wider audience. The connection of sponsors to other social partners such as the tourism and cultural sectors creates promotional networks of

additional value complementing IOC's marketing framework. The increase of advertising benefits, sales promotion and overall sponsors' exposure remains a suggestion to be carefully reviewed by IOC marketers before jeopardising the Olympic product value both commercial and intrinsic.

International sponsors facing low recognition levels need to revisit their communication vehicles and locate their strategy imperfections in order to correct the image transferring process. Internal marketing strategies evaluation should include all communication tools and messages as well as the ways these are transmitted to reach consumers. Past confusing or ineffective campaigns can prove to be more powerful than the Olympic sponsorship itself into communicating a positive image. In addition, the study presented some very positive attitudes towards relevant local brands sometimes recalled as international sponsors. Factors like the lack of adequate presence of the sponsoring brand in the local market (i.e. McDonalds' small number of shops in the greater Athens area), concretely established local brands (such as Goody's) as well as cultural or political attitudes towards a certain sponsoring brand could detrimentally affect awareness levels leading to low purchase intentions and attitudes. International sponsors facing the global audience often are incapable of focusing on specific localities considering Olympic sponsorship as a 'central' promotional activity benefiting only indirectly. Sponsoring brands could take advantage of the unique promotional opportunity to increase awareness at different local markets and create a new positive Olympic related character. Local manifestations and interactive promotions could create a positive environment for the sponsoring brand (such as Alpha Bank 'Athlorama' street promotions).

Olympic sponsorship's awareness and recognition biggest enemy remains ambush marketing attempts very often met at Olympic Games. Despite the fact that these companies have not purchased any official marketing rights from IOC, they dare exploiting the Olympic idea by paraphrasing terms and symbols implying their connection with the Games. Organisers role could be extended further towards punishing ambush attempts and in general allocate additional resources in the effort to fight ambushers. Simultaneously, organising committees for Olympic Games could contribute towards increasing consumer anti-ambush consciousness and the cost this has on the host city and Olympics in total. Olympic sponsoring enhanced with intense communication activities would be difficult to be challenged by ambush brands to the point of threatening the income of the host city.

Contributing to the relevant body of knowledge the study indicates the obvious practical implications to sponsoring brands, but simultaneously suggests that additional research needs to be conducted in order to verify model's generalisability further. The present study focuses heavily on the long term effect sponsorship has on citizens of an Olympic city. Immediate or short term awareness levels should additionally be measured to unfold sponsorship's effectiveness and perceptions during or just after the Games experience. Consequently, short along with long term results could be examined to measure awareness fluctuations and duration. The present results combined with the prior and post to event attitudes, evaluations, assessments and behaviors towards the sponsoring brands have to be

further analyzed in order to explain the interaction process between all engaged communications' tools leading to a certain brand image.

Valid conclusions could also be made only when brand's marketing tools effectiveness is overall evaluated. Long term intense marketing strategies could prove to be more effective than the attachment of the brand to Olympic Games through sponsorship. In addition, parallel marketing competitors' strategies could severely jeopardize Olympic sponsorship effectiveness. Thus, fruitful results could derive from an examination of the level and nature of competing brands' promotional efforts prior, during and post Games time. In the same lines, ambush marketing efforts during the Games often fiercely exercised by certain brands have to be examined in depth, in order to record the level of their influence in consumers' perception and their overall impact on the Olympic brand recognition. In total, an in-depth study should be undertaken to highlight the factors that a brand fails to create a 'match' between Olympic Games and consumers' minds. Consequently, the effectiveness of sponsorship is affected by inappropriate brand communication management when failing to explicitly form linkages in consumers' perception. Brand image needs to be in alignment with the Olympic ideal reflecting similar values and quality features, in order to maximize positive recognition. Otherwise, funds allocated by organizations in sponsoring Olympic Games will not achieve equivalent returns when image building objectives are not attained. Whether the recollection levels as produced in the present awareness measurement are considered effective or not, it remains a marketing question to be answered in relation to the set objectives and the overall sponsorship goals.

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