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Objectives for Sponsorship of Gay Games IX: An Exploratory Case Study

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Abstract:

Over the past three decades, sponsorship has evolved into a significant source of income within the sport and event management industry. A review of the literature reveals a substantial amount of work regarding this complex phenomenon. However, there has been very little research devoted to the sponsorship of amateur sporting events and entities, and even less devoted to sponsorship of sporting properties for members of the lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgendered community. This exploratory case study was conceived with the intent to examine the objectives of organizations which sponsored Gay Games IX, an LGBT international sporting mega-event which garnered \$4.16 million in sponsorships. Site observations, documents, and semi-structured interviews were employed to gather data. Findings indicated that objectives for sponsorship of the event included increasing brand awareness and image, strengthening of employee relations, and increasing sales. Limitations of the study are discussed and recommendations for future research are outlined.

Keywords: Sport, sponsorship, gay games

1. Introduction

Over the last three decades, the sponsorship of sport and event properties has emerged as a significant component of the industry. Sponsorship is defined as “the acquisition of rights to affiliate or directly associate with a product or event for the purpose of deriving benefits related to that affiliation or association” (Mullen, Hardy, & Sutton, 2000, p. 254). IEG (2017) reports that the annual expenditures for sport sponsorship have grown at least 4% each year since 2013, with global sponsorship totals expected to exceed \$62.7 billion in 2018. Sport and event management researchers have examined the development of sponsorship through a variety of methods. The vast majority of the sport sponsorship literature has focused on sponsorship of Olympic, professional, and major college sport (Stotlar, 2013). There exists a void in the literature investigating the process of sponsorship for amateur sport events and properties, especially those events which attract predominantly lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered participants.

IEG (2017) reports that while sponsorship did grow in each of the last four years, growth during the 2017 year fell short of the projected total. That sluggish growth signals the reality that sponsorship decision makers are facing; organizations must carefully weigh the costs, benefits, and desired outcomes before entering into a sponsorship arrangement or partnership. The purpose of this study was to investigate the sponsorship decision-making process for those sponsors which engaged in sponsorship of Gay Games IX. Specifically, this study sought to examine the established objectives for sponsorship of the LGBT sporting and cultural event.

This study was guided by the following research question: What were the objectives of companies which engaged in sponsorship of Gay Games IX? Due to the growth and significance of the sport and event sponsorship market and the existing gap in the literature, this study represents an important contribution to the existing literature regarding sport and event sponsorship. Furthermore, because of the growth and increasing financial significance of LGBT themed sporting events, this research can provide valuable and pertinent information to practitioners.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Sport and Event Sponsorship

Sport sponsorship is defined as “the provision of resources by an organization directly to an event or activity in exchange for a direct association to the event or activity” (Sandler & Shani, 1993, p. 9). From its inception, organizational sponsorship was classified as corporate philanthropy or a method through which organizations could improve public relations (Lough & Irwin, 2001; O’Hagan & Harvey, 2000). Since that time, sponsorship has grown into a powerful communication tool

which provides sponsors with strategic opportunities to communicate with target markets and potential customers (Desbourdes & Tribou, 2007; Mujkic, Butiene, Valantine & Radio, 2017). Investments in sport and event sponsorship have grown for 19 consecutive years (IEG, 2017) due to the widespread appeal of sport. Additionally, sponsorships which focus on specific sports or events can allow for message and target specificity not often obtainable through other methods of corporate communication (Dumitru & Nichifor, 2014).

In their earliest forms, sponsorships existed as pre-determined and standardized agreements which afforded all sponsors the same benefits and rights as other sponsors that provided the same or similar levels of financial support. Recent findings indicate that organizations engaging in sponsorships are now looking for more customized, product or business specific opportunities to engage consumers (Stotlar, 2013; Zullo, 2013). While the packaging and offering of sponsorship benefits has evolved, benefits typically fall into categories of licensing, advertising, naming, and hospitality benefits (Delia, 2014; Lee & Ross, 2013; Stotlar, 2013; Zullo, 2013;

2.2. *Sporting and Event Sponsorship Objectives*

Practitioners and researchers have long acknowledged the significance of corporate sponsorship through both the provision of sponsorship opportunities as well as the empirical research dedicated to the phenomenon. One key factor that any research involving sport and event sponsorship needs to consider is the “why” of sponsorship. Researchers and practitioners must have a fundamental understanding of why organizations would choose to engage in a sponsorship relationship in order to adequately and accurately approach the topic from their respective views. The necessity for understanding the complicated and dynamic topic of sponsorship objectives has been acknowledged in academia (Dolphin, 2003; Stotlar, 2013); therefore, a robust amount of research exists surrounding the phenomenon.

The existing literature base on sport and event sponsorship makes one thing clear; there is not a single objective that can account for an organization's decision to enter into a sponsorship agreement or partnership (Gilbert, 1988; Thwaites & Carruthers, 1998; Meenaghan, 1983). While a definitive objective is lacking, research has revealed numerous themes. Meenaghan (1984) was one of the earliest researchers to investigate sponsorship objectives. He argued for sponsorship as a marketing tool, the employment of which was “managed by objectives” (p. 5). He introduced two categories of objectives: corporate objectives and product related objectives. More recent work has identified a variety of potential objectives for sport and event sponsorships which include increasing brand awareness (Amis, Slack, & Berrett, 1999; Zullo, 2013), community support and interaction (Greenhalgh & Greenwell, 2013; Lee, Hur, & Sung, 2015; Mack, 1999; Sandler & Shani, 1993), employee support and morale (Dolphin, 2003; Mack, 1999, Tripodi, 2001), increasing sales (McCarville & Copeland, 1994; Tripodi, 2001; Stotlar, 2013) and increasing media exposure (Johansson & Utterstrom, 2007; Meenaghan, 1984; Sandler & Shani, 1993; Stotlar, 2013).

2.3. *The Gay Games*

In 1980, Dr. Tom Waddell, a former member of the United States Olympic Team, began planning the Gay Olympics. Waddell sat out to create a cultural and sporting event which championed ideas of diversity, inclusion, and doing one's personal best (Litchfield, 2013). During his years competing in mainstream sport organizations and events, Waddell noticed the poor treatment experienced by sexual minorities. His vision for the Gay Olympics was one which included freedom for participants to be true to themselves, compete in their desired events, and experience acceptance and support (Krane, Barber, & McClung, 2002; Symons, 2012). The Gay Olympics never came to fruition as the United States Olympic Committee won an injunction banning Waddell from use of the term Olympics in name or advertising for his event (Symons, 2012).

While he faced a number of significant legal and financial challenges, Gay Games I began on August 28, 1982 in San Francisco, California (Symons, 2012). The quadrennial sporting and cultural event experienced significant growth with each iteration. What began as a modest event in 1982, continued to develop as a premier international festival of LGBT sports and culture. Gay Games III was the first edition of the event to be held outside of the United States with 7,300 athletes competing in Vancouver, British Columbia. Gay Games IV featured more participants than the 1994 Olympic Games with 12,500 participants involved in 31 sports. The event continued to grow in scope with the addition of cultural events, popular celebrity performances, as well as choir and band competitions (Symons, 2012).

The 2006 installment of the Games, held in Chicago, included a number of extravagant events including an extremely expensive opening ceremony held at the Chicago Bears' Soldier Field and closing ceremonies held at the Chicago Cubs' Wrigley Field. The event also included performances by community icons such as Megan Mullally, Cindy Lauper, and Margaret Cho (Robinson, 2006). While the budget for the event was large, organizers were able to keep their promises to execute the event without asking the city of Chicago for additional funding and the event finished with a balanced budget, the first Gay Games to do so (Brigham, 2007).

Gay Games VIII took place in 2010 in Cologne, Germany and featured an opening ceremony which hosted 25,000 participants and guests (Symons, 2012). In 2009, the Federation of Gay Games, announced Cleveland, Ohio as the host of Gay Games IX, choosing Cleveland over bids from Boston, Miami, and Washington D.C. (Maag, 2009). Gay Games IX, held in August of 2014, featured a \$6.8 million operating budget, raised \$4.16 million through cash and in-kind sponsorships, and was responsible for a \$52.1 million economic impact in northeast Ohio (Rohlin & Greenlaugh-Stanley, 2014).

3. Design and Methods

The purpose of this study was to examine the objectives for corporate and organizational sponsorship of the 2014 Gay Games. Due to the existing void in the literature regarding sponsorship of LGBT sport properties and events, this study utilized an exploratory case study design. The case study method allowed for an examination of contemporary events which produced rich data for deep probing and analysis (Burns, 1990; Yin, 2009). Case studies are strengthened when data are gathered from a variety of sources and triangulated (Creswell, 2014; Yin 2009); this study employed three modes of data collection; field notes (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2009), document analysis (Yin, 2009), and in-depth semi-structured interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Yin, 2009).

During August, 2014, the researcher visited Cleveland, Ohio in order to observe Gay Games IX. During that time, the researcher took detailed field observation notes on the context of the event, collected documents which were deemed suitable for analysis, and photographed pertinent displays and sponsorship activations. Following the completion of the site visit and observation and in corroboration with practitioners and peer academics, a 12 question instrument was developed in order to guide the semi-structured interviews. Following the development of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted to test the strength and adequacy of the interview guide (Doody & Doody, 2015). Following an evaluation of the process, the interview guide was reduced to 10 questions in order to eliminate redundancy.

Participants for the study were recruited via email, internet contact forms, and through the social media sites Facebook and Twitter. Participants were selected using stratified random sampling (Mirakhmedov, Jammalamadaka, & Ekstrom, 2015). In order to select participants, sponsors of Gay Games IX were assigned to stratum based on the United States Small Business Administration guidelines and then Microsoft Excel was used to randomize a list of potential participants. The researcher recruited starting at the top of the generated list and continued to recruit participants from each stratum until saturation (Creswell, 2014; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) had been reached.

Data analysis for this study was an inductive analysis which allowed the researcher to construct patterns, themes, and categories (Yin, 2009). Observation notes, documents, and transcribed interviews were analyzed through the use of NVivo 11 (QSR International, 2017) in order to "find constructs, themes, and patterns that can be used to describe and explain the phenomenon being studied" (Gall et.al., 1996, p.453). Data from each source were coded in three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2009). The employment of multiple data sources allow the establishment of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Creswell, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 2000, Yin, 2009).

4. Findings

The nature of qualitative research allowed for the collection of a rich and robust data set. The examination of that data led to the emergence of three themes related to organizational objectives of Gay Games IX sponsorship. Findings indicate that elevating brand awareness and image, strengthening employee relations, and increasing sales were significant objectives of sponsorship for the 2014 Gay Games. The identified themes are presented and evidenced through the participants' own words and quotes from analyzed documents.

4.1. Elevating Brand Awareness and Image

One of the fundamental tenets of corporate sponsorship is to create or elevate the awareness of an organization's products and services. Certainly, the ability of an organization to market its products and/or services is one of the cornerstones for success. An analysis of the data for this study indicated that increasing brand awareness and image were an important objective for organizations engaged in sponsorship of Gay Games IX.

Gay Games IX gave sponsors the opportunity to reach out to participants in order to elevate awareness of the various corporations and organizations. Brian spoke of desire to raise awareness as a chief objective for sponsorship of the Games, "Well we wanted to make sure that people saw us in the community." He continued, "I felt like it would really give us the opportunity for exposure outside of our geographical area." Later in the discussion, Brian again reiterated the importance of the association between their brand and the Gay Games IX brand, "The number one objective was putting our brand on an international event. We believed that it would raise our stature."

Eileen's organization also saw the opportunity to garner brand awareness from those unfamiliar with their services, "This wasn't one to get a lot of new business locally." She continued, "People locally know our brand. But, for those travelling in it was great to introduce our brand, our capabilities, and our first-class services to all those people."

Carson echoed those sentiments stating that awareness for his organization, particularly specific segments of the organization's operation, was the most important objective identified by the decision makers. When asked specifically about objectives established for the Games he answered, "To get recognition...to get awareness...that would last long after the Games were here." Similarly, Susan identified "building awareness for our family of products" as a key objective for GG9 support.

Nicole spoke eloquently about the desire for her company to experience greater brand awareness as a result of Gay Games IX sponsorship:

The Gay Games were so unique for us. It was a different opportunity to get our brand out to new clientele whereas, like I said, every other event is kind of copy-and-paste benefits. You know, it's a different event or organization, but it's the same style and it's impacting the same people.

Wilson mentioned the idea of brand awareness and image a number of times in discussions surrounding desired outcomes of sponsorship. "Sponsorships are used...to reinforce our brand in certain markets where we're working, to raise public awareness of the firm." He expanded on that idea stating, "In our firm, when we do sponsorships, it's all about building relationships, getting to know people, getting people to know us." Later he revisited the idea of raised awareness as an opportunistic consideration of Gay Games IX sponsorship:

I think because of the size and the vast number of organizations involved, both governmental and non-governmental, we had the ability to raise awareness of the firm significantly across multiple fronts. We had one-on-one interaction with a lot of key decision makers across the community.

Jim agreed offering, "We decided it was beneficial to take an official sponsorship position with the event and get some high-profile notice of our name out there."

In 2012, Marriott International introduced their "Be You, With Us" campaign aimed at LGBT travelers. Marriott saw the Gay Games as a natural way to raise awareness of their LGBT themed services as Kristine Friend, Senior Director of Segment Marketing, shared:

Marriott's partnership with the 2014 Gay Games is a win-win. Through our support for the Games, we combine America's love of sporting competition with our long history of embracing the LGBT community too. We know that every guest must feel special, comfortable and welcome when they stay at any one of our portfolio of brands. That's the exact same feeling the Gay Games inspires in everyone, and why our message, 'Be You, With Us,' is such a great fit (Marriott, 2014, p.1).

Numerous sponsors were able to activate their sponsorships and raise awareness for their brands in the Games' Festival Village. Researcher observation notes indicated signage promoting Coca-Cola as the sparkling beverage provider for the Gay Games. Representatives of the Coca-Cola Company were able to distribute samples of their Honest Tea, Coca-Cola, Diet Coke, Dasani, and vitamin water. Coke's press release regarding their Gay Games sponsorship spoke to the opportunity to bring their brands to life during the week (Coca-Cola, 2014).

Increasing brand awareness and image has long stood as a cornerstone objective for prospective sponsors. The Gay Games presented the opportunity for corporations and organizations to reach specific segments of their target markets through carefully planned activations and promotions. Additionally, some sponsors used the sponsorship agreement to raise awareness for specific components of their brands. The data from the semi-structured interviews as well as information gleaned from documents indicates that the ability to elevate brand awareness and image was a primary factor considered by corporate sponsors of Gay Games IX.

4.2. Strengthening Employee Relations

The ability to improve or strengthen employee relations also emerged as an important consideration for organizations to engage in sponsorship of the 2014 Gay Games. In all, 10 of the 14 participants referred to employee support as a significant factor in the decision making process. An analysis of interview data as well as documentary evidence points to employee relations, motivation, and support as key considerations for corporate sponsorship of GG9.

It was a group of employees who brought the sponsorship opportunity to the attention of Carson:

We had a number of employees that came to us and asked if it was something we would be interested in getting behind. We told them that we would absolutely have some conversations about it and they then put the Gay Games fundraising staff in contact with us. From there, they made their pitch and the committee took it under consideration. It was unanimously approved.

Later, he expanded on desire of his organization to make a statement to its employees sharing that it was one of the key considerations for supporting the Games, "we wanted to support our LGBTQ employees and show them that we stand with them as allies."

Eileen's company also wished to support their employees, "We knew that we were going to have a number of people participate in the Games, for instance one of our people participated in swimming and medaled, and we wanted to be a part of that." Susan's business viewed GG9 as a vehicle for a message of support to those they employed. She shared, "We wanted our own employees, the participants of the Gay Games, and allies across the world to know that we support them, we care about them, and we wanted to be there as a partner."

Karyn Twaronite recognized that Ernst & Young's sponsorship "affords our people meaningful opportunities to participate, volunteer and ultimately advance EY's purpose of building a better working world" (Ernst & Young, 2014). Deandra Williams shared a key component of General Electric's consideration in sponsoring the Games:

"GE Lighting is proud to have a global employee base that is representative of all backgrounds, ethnicities and sexual orientations. We demonstrate our support for an inclusive workforce by participating in numerous events that showcase the interests and diversity of our employees (The why, n.d.).

Nene Foxhall mentioned employee consideration's in her explanation of United Airline's sponsorship, "Supporting them is another way we can honor the diversity of our customers, employees and the communities we serve" (The why, n.d.). Susan Juris saw University Hospitals' sponsorship as, "our commitment to nurture and strengthen a culture of diversity and inclusion, both within our system and across the communities that we serve" (The why, n.d.). Allen Vineyard recognized the

importance of the sponsorship for his company noting, "For Coca-Cola to show our associates that we value and celebrate diversity through our partnership and volunteerism speaks volumes" (Coca-Cola, 2014).

The desire to strengthen employee relations was an important outcome for corporate sponsorship of Gay Games IX. A variety of semi-structured interview participants specifically made reference to employee relations when describing the consideration process for engaging in sponsorship. Additionally, documentary evidence also provided insights into the consideration of employees that sponsors had. Decision makers saw the Gay Games as an opportunity to support an event which supports opportunities for members of an underrepresented and stigmatized population, a population whose members they employ. Sponsors believed that a public show of support for an event such as the Gay Games would send a strong message to their LGBT employees and allies, a message that the population is valued by their respective organizations.

4.3. Increasing Sales

The opportunity to increase sales emerged as a key objective for Gay Games IX sponsorship during the data analysis process. Of the seven for-profit organizations which participated in semi-structured interviews, six identified increasing sales as an objective for sponsorship. The seventh organization also provided an explanation as to why increasing sales was not an identified objective for his company.

Eric represented the one for-profit organization which did not identify a desire to increase sales as an objective for their Gay Games IX sponsorship, he explained why:

Our target market, our target client is dealing with CEOs or the CMOs. So it's a small kind of group that you know we are calling on and so you know advertising, we don't spend any money on advertising. It's more of the word of mouth and our reputation over the last, my dad's been in the business for, 40 years. We do the sponsorship and the non-profit piece as part of good will, and you know it can help when we're meeting with clients if they see the organizations that you support.

In 2013, Cleveland hosted the National Senior Games, it was the increased sales experienced during that event which encouraged Nicole's sponsorship. She shared:

A year or two prior to that, the Senior Games were here in Cleveland. It wasn't as publicized as the Gay Games were, and it wasn't as big as the Gay Games, but still it impacted us financially in a good way. It was kind of like, if we got this from the Senior Games with no advertisements or sponsorships and no effort on our part, imagine what could happen if we go ahead with the Gay Games sponsorship and now we are advertising ourselves to the athletes and their families and friends.

Later, she again mentioned the idea of increasing sales as a key objective, "Knowing the benefits of what we would get out of it; the sales impact of the gay community coming here to support us. It was just definitely kind of a no-brainer."

Susan spoke of her knowledge regarding market research on LGBT consumers and what that meant for sales of her company's products:

To be honest, and not too come across too cynically, we know the market research that's out there that speaks to the LGBT community and propensity to purchase products which they feel recognize and support them. The opportunity to reach those consumers in a setting that was so important to them was just a no-brainer.

Similarly, Brian stated that his business saw the potential for a GG9 sponsorship to encourage participants and attendees to "hopefully be interested in what we were doing and become new customers." Wilson explained his organization's viewpoint on sponsorship of Gay Games IX in terms of the ability to increase sales, "It's more just supporting organizations that support the community, through that we build relationships, and from those relationships is where sales are going to come."

For companies which exist to create profits, increasing sales was a key objective for Gay Games IX sponsorship. Several participants shared their thoughts that associating with the Gay Games would in fact lead directly to an increase in sales of their products and services. Others believed that the association would create goodwill and an environment which could lead to relationship building and sales down the road. Six of the seven participants representing a for-profit company referenced increasing sales as an objective for their GG9 sponsorship.

5. Discussion

This study sought to investigate the objectives of organizations which engaged in sponsorship of the 2014 Gay Games. This research extends the existing literature base regarding sport and event sponsorship and lays the foundation to address an existing gap in the literature regarding sponsorship of LGBT themed sport and event properties. Identified objectives for sponsorship of Gay Games IX included elevating brand awareness and image, strengthening employee relations, and increasing sales.

5.1. Elevating Brand Awareness and Image

The desire to elevate brand awareness and image emerged as the most prevalent objective for sponsorship of Gay Games IX. Brand awareness has long been identified as one of the most fundamental business-centric objectives for corporate sponsorship. The literature is rife with findings to substantiate its place as the chief consideration for many corporate

sponsors. The data from this present study indicate that both for-profit and not-for-profit organizations viewed elevating brand awareness and image as an important objective for their Gay Games IX sponsorship.

Multiple participants referenced the desire to expose event-goers to their brands, products, and services as a chief objective of GG9 sponsorship. Responses indicated that sponsors viewed sponsorship of the Games as a promotional tool which could generate awareness from consumers unfamiliar with their brands. Others saw the sponsorship as possessing the potential to help to bolster the image of their brands.

Lee, Hur, & Sung, 2015 write that sponsorship has the ability to create brand affinity. Sponsors of GG9 recognized the ability of an association with GG9 to provide greater awareness of those components of their company. Sponsorship of an event aimed at sub-segments of sport consumers, in this case the LGBT sport consumers, can provide extremely high levels of return on investment (Miloch & Lambrecht, 2006). Marriott exemplified one such company, using their Gay Games IX sponsorship to promote their "Be You, With Us" campaign.

Elevating brand awareness and image was a key objective for sponsors of Gay Games IX. This identified objective supports a litany of the existing literature regarding sport and event sponsorship (Dolphin, 2003; Kang & Stotlar, 2011; Tripodi, 2001; Zullo, 2013). Meenaghan (1984) writes that organizations are driven to engage in sponsorship in order to increase public awareness and build brand image. Dolphin (2003) identifies sponsorship as a chief advertising tool predicated on increasing brand awareness and enhancing image. Tripodi (2001) identifies improving brand awareness and enhancing company image as the most important reasoning for investment in sponsorship. The data from the present study indicates that enhancing brand awareness and image was identified as the most often referenced business based objective for sponsorship of the 2014 Gay Games.

5.2. Strengthening Employee Relations

Findings from this study indicate that the desire to strengthen employee relations was an important objective for corporate sponsors of Gay Games IX. Documentary evidence and participant responses indicated that decision makers saw the opportunity for a Gay Games IX sponsorship to send a message of support and encouragement to their employees, particularly for employees close to the LGBT community. This finding supports previous work indicating that businesses and organizations seek to support causes close to their employees in order to publicly acknowledge the value the organization places on its staff (Dolphin, 2003; Mack, 1999; Tripodi, 2001).

Many Gay Games IX sponsors referenced their sponsorship as a way of demonstrating their commitment to supporting a LGBT cause. Hickman, Lawrence, and Ward (2005) write that sponsorship can act as an internal marketing mechanism which reaffirms and reinforces organizational culture and values. Employees who identify with those values may exhibit higher employee organizational identification and commitment. The Gay Games provided the opportunity for corporations to take a public stance on inclusivity and diversity, which could encourage stronger organizational identification and increased commitment of LGBT employees and allies.

A number of organizations sought to support the Gay Games with the awareness that members of their organization were intimately involved with the planning of the Games. Additionally, several organizations recognized that they had employees which planned to participate in GG9. Zepf (2008) writes that employees see an increased fit between themselves and their employers when they perceive sponsorship activities that reflect their own values. The Gay Games sponsorship provided those organizations with a chance to directly support an event with which those employees were closely associated.

Findings from this study indicate that sponsorship decision makers do believe that their sponsorships are evaluated by their internal constituents. Additionally, the data indicate that strengthening employee relations was an important objective for corporate sponsors of Gay Games IX. These findings support the existing literature base which considers sponsorship to be an effective internal marketing tool (Hickman, Lawrence, and Ward, 2005, Kuo, 2007) which organizations can use in order to support employee interests and values (Zepf, 2008), improve employee perceptions of employers (Kuo, 2007), and improve morale and motivation (Irwin, Asimakopoulos & Sutton, 1994; Mack, 1999).

5.3. Increasing Sales

The data indicate that a desire to increase sales was an established objective for the for-profit organizations which sponsored Gay Games IX. The desire to increase sales through sponsorship of the Games was referenced by six of the seven for-profit companies which participated in the semi-structured interviews. The participant representing the seventh company explained that his organization engages in sales at the highest levels where it is executives brokering deals with other executives and therefore his organization did not engage in sponsorship with goals or expectations regarding increased sales. The findings from the study support the existing literature base on increased sales as an important objective for sport and event sponsorship (Dolphin, 2003; Irwin & Asimakopoulos, 1994; Kang & Stotlar, 2011; Lough & Irwin, 2001; Miloch & Lambrecht, 2006; Tripodi, 2001).

All but one of the study participants representing for-profit companies referenced or directly stated that increasing sales was one of their objectives for engaging in sponsorship of GG9. Sponsorship of special sporting events and festivals can be an extremely effective way to reach customers (Brenner, 2003), allowing for the creation and maintenance of consumer relationships and ultimately leading to sales (Miloch & Lambrecht, 2006). Sponsors of Gay Games IX saw the opportunity to build relationships with customers through support for the event, hoping to build relationships, which would culminate in

sales. The data suggest that key decision-makers representing the organizations were mindful of the pink dollar (Oakenfull, 2013) and what courtship of that dollar could potentially mean in terms of increased sales.

Four of the for-profit businesses in the sample were classified as small business. Mack (1999) writes that small businesses are often concerned with philanthropic motivations such as supporting the community, and the business-centric objective of improving employee relations and morale. Additionally, small businesses do not adequately take advantage of the marketing potential of their sponsorships in order to increase sales. Findings from this study do indicate that the small businesses had philanthropic motivations, however they did engage in marketing actions designed to promote their sponsorships with the objective of increasing sales.

The desire by Gay Games IX sponsors to increase sales through a calculated approach utilizing sponsorship and targeted marketing supports Ragusa's (2005) finding which indicate that in the early 2000s there was a shift in corporate thought and companies began to actively pursue selling to LGBT consumers. The purchasing power of the LGBT community and its pink dollar (Oakenfull, 2013) are attractive to corporations and organizations. Additionally, the LGBT market is one that seeks to be courted (Penzaloe, 2006) and dutifully supports companies that support diversity and inclusion (Gudelunas, 2011; Oakenfull, 2013). Sponsorships of Gay Games IX brought those findings to life as a number of companies sought out sponsorship understanding what the sponsorship could mean for company sales.

5.4. Limitations

Two limitations to the present study were identified. First, holding to the tenets of qualitative research, the generalizability of these findings is limited based on the degree of similarity between new situations and Gay Games IX (Hoepfl, 1997). Practitioners and readers are responsible for determining the level of similarity between their situations in order to ascertain whether these findings are generalizable or transferrable to their situations.

Second, due to the existing gap in the literature regarding sponsorship of amateur LGBT sporting properties and events, this study was truly exploratory. Because of that exploratory nature, previous findings specific to this phenomenon were not available for comparison. As a result, findings from this study were compared only to the existing general sport and event sponsorship literature base.

5.5. Implications for Practice and Research

Findings for this study support a litany of previous research which posits that the sport and event sponsorship process is a multi-faceted process with a variety of considerations taken by the sponsoring organizations. Therefore, practitioners should work diligently to understand the needs and desires of organizations with whom they are seeking to partner. Researchers can use the current study as a guide for conducting future research into sponsorship of LGBT sport and event properties as well as additional amateur sport and event properties. Additionally, a quantitative or mixed-methods study can build on the foundation laid by this study in order to gather a larger pool of data for examination.

6. Conclusion

This study constitutes a significant contribution to practice and research of sport and event management because it explores the complex process of sport and event sponsorship of a growing area of the field. Findings from this study indicate that those charged with sponsorship decision-making considered elevating brand awareness and image, strengthening employee relations, and increasing sales to be important organizational objectives which could be achieved through sponsorship of the 2014 Gay Games. These findings affirm previous work which posits sponsoring organizations often have multiple objectives when entering into sponsorship agreements (Gilbert, 1988; Thwaites & Carruthers, 1994; Meenaghan, 1983). Furthermore, this study also supports previous findings (Apostolopoulou & Papadimitriou, 2004) which indicate significant variations in internal approaches and considerations with regard to sponsorship proposal evaluations.

Sport and event sponsorship is a phenomenon which has experienced a great deal of variation and development in a relatively short period of time. Additionally, due to significant cultural changes and the recession of stigma regarding LGBT individuals, amateur gay sporting events have also gone through a period of growth and progression both in numbers as well as size and scope. Due to the evolving nature of sport and event sponsorship and LGBT sporting events, sport and event management practitioners and researchers should continue to investigate this phenomenon so that the process and results of LGBT sporting event sponsorship can be further understood and perfected.

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