



**THE DILEMMAS AND GAINS OF BRANDS
IN A MEGA SPORT EVENT ALLIANCE**

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ABSTRACT

Destinations are spending increasing amounts of money hosting mega sport events. Host destinations rely on co-branding strategies to positively influence their brand image. This thesis explores the spillover effects occurring between brand partners involved in hosting a mega sport event. In this regard, brand partners are regularly confronted with a range of challenges, such as the high cost of hosting the event, violations of human rights and the countless opportunities for carefully planned alliances to experience unforeseen negative spillover that can impede an event's sustainable growth or can ultimately result in the failure of an event alliance.

A holistic view of the brands involvement in the hosting of a mega sport event is lacking in the current literature. Brand partners involved in hosting a mega sport event form an alliance where the equity of one brand partner has the potential to spillover to the associated brand partners. Brands involved in hosting a mega sport event have traditionally been considered from a tourism perspective, investigating primarily the effects of the mega sport event on the host destination brand. This thesis argues that the body of knowledge on mega sport events is limited by narrow discussions on the phenomenon of hosting a successful mega sport event.

This thesis reports on research that aims to investigate mega sport event alliances using a holistic approach from consumers perceptible. This study argues that a holistic overview of a mega sport event alliance is not supported by the traditionally accepted theoretical foundations on mega sport events and co-branding strategies. Prior research primarily focuses on mega sport event in how these event impact on the host destination. A broader theoretical basis is thus needed to examine these events. As this thesis demonstrated, building equity requires the brand partners to acknowledge and value the sports brand in the mega sport event alliance.

This thesis contains a research article that investigated the brand alliance of a mega sport event. The empirical research adopted qualitative approach research methodologies using grounded theory and a mixed method was used for the analysis of the data. Through social media mining, the researcher extracted consumer sentiment on social media, Twitter towards the brands involved in staging a mega sport event. The theoretical framework of this study is based on consumers knowledge structure in associative network memory theory used by researchers particularly in branding.

The main finding of the thesis is that the sport brand has mainly a positive influence on the associate brand partners, while the event and host destination brands have the ability to negatively influence each other. This was indicated by comments in tweets that refer to the opening and closing ceremonies of the mega sports event. These comments consumers perceived the event and host destination brands as neglecting the sports brand, indicating a negative perception towards the event and host destination brand partners as a result.

These findings are supported by the theoretical understanding of the reciprocal spillover effect occurring between brand partners in an alliance (Raufeisen, Wulf, Köcher, Faupel, & Holzmüller, 2019). This research added to the understanding of a mega sport event as a brand alliance by indicating how the spillover effect occurs between brand partners in a mega sport event. The spillover is occurring between all three associated brand partners in the mega sport event alliance. The success of a mega sport event alliance, from tourism and marketing perspective, on the consumer positive perceptions depends on the sports brand partner

CERTIFICATION OF THESIS

This thesis is entirely the work of Cindy Sassenberg except where otherwise acknowledged, with the majority (over 50%) of the authorship of the article presented as a Thesis by Publication undertaken by the Student. The work is original and has not been submitted for any other award.

Student and supervisor's signatures of endorsement are held at USQ.

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STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION

Tables 0.1: Details of Contribution

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TO MY FAMILY FOR THEIR SUPPORT

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

| TERM | EXPLICIT STATEMENT |
|--|---|
| The Spillover effect | The spillover effect is a process consisting of mental connections between entities/brands and the transfer of associations from one brand to another brand in a brand alliance. |
| Mega sport event | Mega sport events are one-time sporting events of an international scale, yielding extremely high levels of media coverage and impact on the (economic, tourism, infrastructure, etc.) of the host destination because of the event's significance. These events are large scale and multiple countries are taking part in the bidding process. |
| The Commonwealth Games | An international multi-sport mega event involving athletes from the Commonwealth of Nations. |
| Co-branding strategy - a brand alliance | Is a combination of two or more brand partners in a brand alliance to form a new brand |
| API - Application programming interface | A concept in software technology that refers to how applications can interact and obtain data from one another |
| Consumers-based Brand Equity | Customer-based brand equity develops when a consumer holds favorable, strong, and unique brand associations in memory. Brand equity as a set of assets (or liabilities) consisting of brand awareness, brand image (associations). |
| Brand (branding) | Brands ..a name, term, sign, symbol...intended to identify the goods or services of one seller... Branding means is more than giving name and signaling to the outside world that such a product or service has been stamped with the mark and imprint of an organisation. |
| Brand image (associations) | Brand image is the cumulative product of brand associations in the consumer's mind. |
| Brand awareness | Brand awareness is consumer's ability to recognise and recall a brand. Brand awareness is the vital initial step to building brand associations that are attached to the brand node in consumers memory. |

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Mega sport events are recognised as symbols of glory for the winning nation and the host destination, serving as motivation to spend billions of dollars to host the event (ValuStrat, 2018). The appeal of hosting a mega sport event has grown significantly over the last two decades due to the advent of professionalism in sport, increased social media use and improved broadcast technology, making these events a truly global experience (Fourie & Santana-Gallego, 2011). From this perspective, a mega sport event as a co-branding strategy helps brand partners, such as the host destination brand, increase the equity of their brands (Gursoy, Milito, & Nunkoo, 2017; Kim, Kang, & Kim, 2014).

Hosting a mega sport event is not without risks (Boon, 2020; Donahue et al., 2020). The leverage of brands in a co-branding strategy is achieved through the positive spillover created by the association with other brand partners in the alliance (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Zhang & Zhao, 2009). Negative incidents affect the associated brand partners in the alliance, because of consumer towards the high cost and human rights violations of the event (Donahue et al., 2020; Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006).

Previous research indicates a brand alliance can result in an increase or decrease in consumer perceptions of the associated brand partners through the spillover process (Byon, Jun, & Mueller, 2008; Raufeisen et al., 2019; Simonin & Ruth, 1998). To date, scholars have focused largely on the outcomes to the host destination's image (Kenyon & Bodet, 2018; Lim & Weaver, 2014). The event is partner in the alliance meaning it must have a brand image in consumers' minds that can be negative or positive influenced (Xing & Chalip, 2006). Less attention has been paid to understanding the spillover effect, negative or positive, which may result from instances where the brand partners are linked with the equity of the associated brand partners (Votola & Unnava, 2006).

In the face of increased social media use meaning more consumers to consumers communications (Andéhn, Kazeminia, Lucarelli, & Sevin, 2014), a greater understanding of the spillover between the brand partners in a mega sport event alliance is necessary (Byon et al., 2008). This will be accomplished with sentiment analyses over Twitter, offering researchers fast and effective way to monitor the publics feeling towards the brands. Sentiment analysis is used to a classification problem; focusing the polarity of words and classify them into positive or negative feelings aiming to identify the attitude and opinion that are expressed (Khan, Bashir, & Qamar, 2014). In marketing literature brand image is an important concept. Brand image is based on perceptions of consumers (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Keller, 1993, 1998). Therefore, studies that investigate consumers perceptions regarding a specific brand by utilising social media is justify this method (Andéhn et al., 2014; Coulter, Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schäfer, 2012; Khan et al., 2014; Su et al., 2017; Wlodarczak, Soar, & Ally, 2015; Zafarani, Abbasi, & Liu, 2014). Although research detailing the negative consequences of hosting on the host destination do exists (Gursoy et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2014), there is limited evidence of how the negative spillover occurs to the associated brand partners.

The findings of this research includes:

- a) The practices of mega sport event organisers are not sufficiently supported by the event and host destination brands for it to be a win-win co-branding strategy;
- b) The event and host destination brands need to be aware of, manage and prioritise the success of the sports brand in relation to consumer perceptions of the event;
- c) Consumers respond not only to the event and host destination brands in a mega sport event but the sports brand as well. The amount of positive sentiment

expressed clearly establishes the sports brand as the brand with the highest perceived value to consumers.

- d) The event brand, host destination brand and sports brand operate simultaneously separately and combined in the mega sport event. This creates a paradox in the minds of consumers, as a balance between the brands is only found through the occurrence of a positive spillover effect. Positive sentiment for the sports brand is linked to the event and host destination brands. Negative spillover takes place between the event and host destination brands, but the sports brand is exempt.
- e) Positive or negative spillover effects between the event and host destination brands occur both ways, known as the reciprocal spillover effect. The brands are very closely linked and align with each other in consumers' minds.
- f) The sports brand is linked to the event and host destination brands in a pyramid fashion, being highly valued by consumers with strong positive brand associations.

1.1 Thesis Structure

This thesis is presented in the format of a 'Thesis by Publication'.

The first section introduces the rationale for undertaking the research, discussing the background and contiguous literature. Then, a paper submitted for publication is presented, written in the format of the publication journal. The research paper was submitted to be published in the international peer-reviewed journal *Annals of Tourism* (rated Q1) during the period of candidacy. The thesis concludes with a final discussion of the findings and the contributions to theory, as well as further recommendations.

1.2 Aims

The overall aim of this research is to determine consumers' perceptions of the brand partners involved in hosting and staging a mega sport event. The focus is on what the brands consumers perceive to be part of the mega sport event alliance. And in what way does the brand alliance can influence consumers' overall evaluation of the associated brand partners, and the aim of this thesis is therefore also to determine how the alliance influences the brand partners' consumer based-brand equity.

1.3 Objectives

The research objectives for this study:

1. To investigate the brand partners that consumers perceive to be involved in a mega sport event alliance.
2. To investigate consumer sentiment towards the brand partners perceived to be involved in the mega sport event alliance.
3. To investigate the spillover effect between the brand partners perceived to be involved in the alliance of a mega sport event.

1.4 Research Contributions

The research conducted in this thesis makes a number of contributions to both theory and management, are summarised in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 0.2: Research Contributions to, Marketing Branding, Event Tourism and Event Management Theory

-
- Identifying the existence of the sports brand as a partner in the alliance of a mega sport event.
 - Contributing to the body of knowledge on event management by identifying, for the first time, the importance of the sports brand in a mega sport event.
 - This study adds to the development of co-branding theory by extending understanding of the positive and negative outcomes for brand partners involved in a mega sport event alliance.
 - Identifying a third brand in a mega sport event, the sports brand.
 - Clearly conceptualising the spillover effect in a brand alliance and the co-branding strategy of a mega sport event.
 - Creation of a new model for conceptualising the ‘spillover effect’ in the brand alliance of a mega sport event.
-

Table 0.3: Research Contributions and Value to Management

-
- Discovering consumers perceived brands in the brand alliance of a mega sport event
 - Determining consumers’ perception of the event brand in a mega sport event.
 - Identifying both the positive and negative spillover effects in a brand alliance.
 - Identifying the pathways of spillover effects and how positive brand image is transferred to associated brands.
 - Discovering the importance of the sports brand in the alliance with brand partners.
 - Finding strong evidence of positive consumer sentiment and the high value placed on the sports brand
 - Providing an explanation for the cause of negative sentiment and spillover effects in a mega sport event.
 - Providing evidence of the spillover effects occurring in a mega sport event, the pathway of the positive spillover effect and details on incidents that led to a negative spillover effect in a mega sport event.
 - Finding evidence of consumers directing negative sentiment to the sports brand and athletes with no spillover effect occurring.
 - Identifying the importance of social media to better understand consumers’ perceptions with the NVivo 12 plus sentiment analysis function.
-

1.5 Background

The continued growth of mega sport events depends on destinations’ desire to host these events (Gursoy & Kendall, 2006; Kim et al., 2014). For example, Poland withdrew their bid for the 2020 Winter Olympics, and the US and Germany withdrew their respective bids for the 2024 Summer Olympics. Increasingly, studies indicate that negative local domestic

perceptions and attitudes are triggering the withdrawal of bids to host mega sport events (Kenyon & Bodet, 2018). These negative consumer sentiments towards hosting may directly impact on the future sustainability of the mega sport event, especially in developing countries, where mega sport events are used to stake their claim on the world map (Osborne, Sherry, & Nicholson, 2016). These findings substantiate the explosive growth and interest in studies on mega sport events (Kenyon & Bodet, 2018; Kim et al., 2014).

Mega events are sports-based typically, such as the Olympics, World Cups and the Commonwealth Games (Gursoy et al., 2017; Hall, 2012; Lorde, Greenidge, & Devonish, 2011; Osborne et al., 2016). The purpose of the current study is to contribute to the emerging area of co-branding and mega sport events by extending the understanding of consumer values in relation to each associated brand partner. The sentiment expressed by consumers in this research painted a picture of the brand awareness and brand equity of the partners in the alliance. This study's holistic approach to investigating the brands in a major sport event demonstrated that consumers perceive the sports brand as a brand partner in the alliance. The core of these mega (extremely large) events and the reason for their existence is their focus on sport, and the findings of this thesis highlights the profound prominence of the sports brand in the minds of consumers in mega sport events.

Mega sport events is a co-branding strategy (Washburn, Till, & Priluck, 2004), the pairing of separate brands to form a new brand, also referred to as a brand alliance (Xing & Chalip, 2006; Besharat, 2010; Park et al., 1996; Washburn, Till, & Priluck, 2004). It should be noted that the term 'strategy', as used throughout this thesis, is defined as a plan to achieve specific goals and objectives (Imber & Toffler, 2000). The Commonwealth Games is the third largest international mega sport event in the world (Uppal, 2006) and the focus of this study. Although research on mega sport events has gained increased momentum in recent years (Kenyon & Bodet, 2018; Kim et al., 2014; Lee, 2014), there is limited evidence of the holistic effects of hosting and staging a mega sport event (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007; Xing & Chalip, 2006). Reflecting on this significant gap and driven by the significant impacts of mega sport events (Kim et al., 2014; Lee, 2014), this study investigates the influence of hosting and staging a mega sport event on the associated brand partners.

Discrepancies in brand image transfer in a mega sport event arise from the occurrence of the spillover effect as part of a co-branding strategy (Smith, 2004). The phenomenon can further be explained in terms of the associative theory, balance theory and the brand image transfer theory (Chitty et al., 2018). During the hosting of a mega sport event, the brands promote the alliance by creating a link between the brand nodes in the mind of the consumer (Anderson, 1983). The associative theory explains the connectivity between the brands involved in co-branding. The brands in the alliance represent nodes, connected in a cognitive network in the consumers' mind, whose connectivity can be altered according to an external experience. Connectivity between the brands in the alliance means that one brand, such as the event brand, can influence the associated brand partners (Aaker, 1991; Anderson, 1983; Henseler, Wilson, & Vreede, 2009). Following this logic, it could be assumed through association that each brand will contribute to the alliance. The literature states that a co-branding strategy results in an increase in the brand equity of the associated brand partners (Besharat, 2010; Washburn, Till, & Priluck, 2004).

Previous studies indicate that the positive and negative perceptions of one brand partner influence the equity of the associated partners in the alliance (Shocker, 1995; Sonnier & Ainslie, 2011; Uggla, 2004). Studies in event management and sports tourism literature show the hosting of a mega sport event improves consumers' attitudes towards the host destination brand (Kenyon & Bodet, 2018) However, there are several potential risks for brand partners, such as consumers' negative perceptions of hosting the event (Kenyon & Bodet, 2018). Research shows that these negative brand perceptions may transfer to

associated brand partners during an alliance, devaluing the brand equity of partners (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Keller, 2005). To tackle these challenges, mega sport event organisers and management have to develop a more in-depth understanding of how consumers perceive the brand partners involved in hosting and staging a mega sport event.

Social media provides unique opportunities for monitoring of brand image as the content is user generated. social media is facilitating consumer-to-consumer communication, leaving managers with less control over their brands (Andéhn et al., 2014; Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006). Brands have less control over their brand image and consumer perceptions, and decreasing or increasing their brand equity could be out of their control (Coulter et al., 2012). Without a clear conceptualisation of the spillover effects in brand alliances of mega sport events, it is difficult for organisers and managers to understand consumers' perspectives. Motivated by this challenge, the main research questions this study addresses are: What brands are involved in hosting a mega sport event; how are these brands perceived by consumers; and how do the spillover effect in a mega sport event alliance impact the associated brands involved in hosting and staging the event. This study conducted social media data mining to investigate this phenomenon.

This research is interested in investigating consumer perceptions regarding the value in mega sport events. Literature studies point to numerous cases of potential host destinations that withdrew their bids for the 2022 Olympics Games due to negative local perceptions of hosting (Kenyon and Bodet, 2018). These withdrawals suggest that the event has a brand image, which is sets of associations in the consumers' minds attached to the brand. This shifts the conventional understanding of a brand image transferral in mega sport event, which is better understood through the spillover effect. Literature has explained the process of spillover as occurring to the host destination brand but not the others brand in the alliance (Kim et al., 2014; Xing & Chalip, 2006). If consumers no longer perceive mega-events positively, the chances of these events ceasing to exist are high. The need of consumers to have their country or city host a mega sport event will deplete if the event brand image is negatively perceived by consumers. Arguably, especially in countries that value democracy and politicians are held more accountable for their actions, the desire to host these events may be diminishing, ultimately to avoid transferring of negative associations through the spillover effect.

CHAPTER 2: CONTIGUOUS LITERATURE

2.1 Hosting a mega sport event

A mega sport event is hosted for the purpose of improving the equity of the host destination's brand (Zhang & Zhao, 2009). Many things influence tourism growth, but mega sport event is considered by consumers to contribute the most to a destination tourism. Mega sport events are a large-scale cultural, sporting or commercial, event which has a dramatic character, mass appeals and international significance. Such events can be lucrative, with many potential host destinations bidding to host them (Fourie & Santana-Gallego, 2011). However, a vast number of studies detail the negative consequences of hosting these events (Hall, 2012; Kim et al., 2014). A mega sport event represents more than one brand, where both the event and the host destination are believed to be a part of the brand alliance (Kenyon & Bodet, 2018). These negative perceptions about the event brand may have a direct impact on the equity of the other brands that are involved in hosting a mega sport event.

In this study, the mega sport event alliance refers to the brands that are involved in hosting and staging a mega sport event. Social media has given users a means for expressing thoughts and opinion on topics. Twitter has upwards of over 250 tweets per day (messages) making it a gold mine for organisation (Khan et al., 2014). Content analysis studies in relations to destination brands uses thematic content analysis whereby the frequency of the occurrence of words is considered as a base for analysis (Andéhn et al., 2014). Sentiment analysis of tweets over Twitter allow researcher or organisation a fast and effective way to find out the publics feelings towards the brand, business etc. Organisations can monitor their reputations and brands by extracting and analysing sentiment of the tweets publish by the public (Khan et al., 2014). Brand managers are particularly wary of damaging associations, such as negative press surrounding their brands (Doyle, Pentecost, & Funk, 2014).

From a tourism perspective, mega sport events are seen as brand image enhancers (Zhang & Zhao, 2009). For instance, a mega sport event alliance was found to increase the brand awareness of the host destination Barbados (Lorde et al., 2011). Similar discrepancies were evident among studies showing hosting a mega sport event resulted in higher investment in education and job creation (Hall, 2006). Studies investigating the influence of mega sport event alliances on the sports brand show they increase sports participation in the local community (Girginov & Hills, 2008). The varied impact reported in the above studies indicates brand managers and event organisers know little about how their brands may be affected when hosting a mega sport event. Thus, further research is needed to understand the potential impact of hosting a mega sport event on consumer perceptions of the associated partners.

2.2 Consumer perceptions of brand equity

A brand to be a name, term, symbol or design, or a combination of these, that aims to identify the offerings (products, services, experiences) of one seller and to differentiate them from the competition (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). Brand equity as a concept is used to analyse the ways that brands create value (Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer, & Exler, 2008). The creation of positive brand image and attitudes enhances its development (Faircloth, Capella, & Alford, 2001). Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) based model proposes for brand equity creations through directly brand image and brand attitude. To measure brand equity in a sport context, such as mega sport event, consumers-based analysis of brand equity is critical (Bauer et al., 2008). Customer-based brand equity is the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer perceptions in the marketing of that brand (Keller, 1993). Consumer-based brand equity is defined as a set of assets and liabilities linked to a brand name and symbol that adds to or subtracts from the value perceived by consumers (Im, Kim, Elliot, & Han, 2012).

Brand equity is a term that indicates the overall value of the brand (Ross, Russell, & Bang, 2008) and can be investigated using a financial and consumer-based approach (Keller, 1998; Ross et al., 2008; Widing, Sheth, Pulendran, Mittal, & Newman, 2003). This study focuses on the consumer-based approach as the investigation examines consumer perceptions instead of the financial worth of the brands (Bauer, Sauer, & Schmitt, 2005; Biscaia, Correia, Ross, Rosado, & Maroco, 2013; Cobb-Walgren, Ruble, & Donthu, 1995; Lim & Weaver, 2014). The most prevalent models to measure the consumer-based brand equity approach were proposed by Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993). This study builds on the brand equity approach of Keller (1993) and indicates the central driver of brand equity as consisting of two components: brand awareness and brand image (Aaker, 1992; Keller, 1993). Brand equity is consumers bias action towards an object, brand image as perceptions relation to the object, and brand attitudes as evaluation of the object, the latter two constructs influences consumers actions toward the object (Faircloth et al., 2001).

Brand awareness relates to the strength of the brand node or traces in memory, as reflected by consumers' ability to identify the brand under different conditions (Gladden & Funk, 2002; Gladden, Milne, & Sutton, 1998; Lee, 2014; Ross, Russell, & Bang, 2008). More specifically, brand awareness can be characterised in terms of two components: brand recognition and brand recall (Aaker, 1991; Berry, 2000; Keller, 1993). The consumer has to be aware of the brand before a specific brand image can be developed, and brand awareness is thus the starting point for developing brand equity (Gladden et al., 1998; Keller, 1993; Ross, 2006). Customer-based brand equity develops in customers' minds if they hold favourable, strong and unique brand associations in their memories (Bauer et al., 2008). This study will include brand image as the main indicator of brand equity, as brand awareness is conceptualised as already being high due to the nature of mega sport events. Furthermore, recent studies confirm that brand image has the most significant influence in building consumer-based brand equity (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Lim & Weaver, 2014). Thus, to investigate the brand equity of the brand partners involved in a mega sport event, this study focuses on the brand image of the partners as an indication of brand equity.

2.3 Brand image

Brand image refers to the overall impression of the brand in the minds of consumers and consists of a specific set of brand associations (Biscaia, Correia, Ross, Rosado, & Maroco, 2013; Chalip & Costa, 2005; Keller, 1993; Ross et al., 2006; Ross et al. 2008). Brand image can be further grouped into three different types of brand associations: attributes, benefits and attitudes (Bauer et al., 2008).

Brand attributes represent the illustrative features that characterise the brand (Rio, Vazquez, & Iglesias, 2001), and these brand attributes contribute to the actual performance of the brand. They include attributes that are external to the core product (Bauer et al., 2008; Boo, Busser, & Baloglu, 2009; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Qu et al., 2011).

Brand benefits represent the personal value consumers attach to the attributes of the product or service (Keller, 1993); more specifically, what consumers think the brand can do for them. Brand benefits are further categorised into symbolic and experiential benefits (Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986). Symbolic brand benefits refer to the consumer's need for identification, group membership, role position and self-enhancement (Bauer et al., 2008). Experiential brand benefits correspond to the brand's capacity to elicit sensory and emotional pleasure, emotions and cognitive stimulation. Experiential benefits refer to what it feels like to use a product or service. It, therefore, includes the emotions of the consumer. Experiencing a mega sport event may offer experiential benefits to the consumer. Previous studies find the following experiential benefits to be relevant to the sports brand image: nostalgia, escape,

socialising, emotions and entertainment (Bauer et al., 2008; Gladden et al., 1998; Ross et al., 2006; Ross et al., 2008).

Brand attitudes are the final type of brand association (Keller, 1993) and are defined as a predisposition to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner to a given object (Keller, 1998). Consumer attitudes have mostly been investigated in terms of consumers' cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions (Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960). Contrarily, brand attitudes can also be investigated as solely affective dimensions that represent the consumer's predisposition towards a brand (Bauer et al. 2008). This study is based on this unidimensional approach by grouping the brand attributes and benefits of the brand partners in the mega sport event alliance in terms of positive and negative sentiment. The next section investigates previous research on the brand image of the partners involved in a mega sport event alliance.

2.3.1 Brand image of partners involved in a mega sport event alliance

2.3.1.1 *Research on the host destination brand*

In terms of the host destination brand, studies generally refer to a sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions a consumer has of the destination (Crompton, 1979). The branding concept is applied by destination managers to develop the image of the country, certain regions or individual cities in a tourism context (Kim et al., 2014). The host destination brand is a geographically fixed name of a place, an umbrella brand, because it affects local residents, potential travellers and other stakeholders (Lim & Weaver, 2014). The host destination brand image consists of the place's geography, history, art, music and famous citizens (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). It is evident that an attractive host destination brand image is an essential component of city branding (Larsen, 2014) and plays a key role in consumer travel decisions and future behavioural intentions (Bianchi, Pike, & Lings, 2014). The host destination has previously been explained in terms of characteristics such as services, cultural attractions, cosiness, safety and awareness (Richards & Wilson, 2004).

Previous studies have identified the host destination in terms of trust and community attachment (Gursoy et al., 2017) and conviviality and excitement (Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk, & Baloglu, 2007). Brand benefits contribute to the performance of the brand (Keller, 1993), and these dimensions will be included in this study as host destination brand benefits. It is possible when hosting a mega sport event that the host destination brand image can be investigated in terms of a specific set of brand attributes (e.g., cultural attractions, safety) and brand benefits (e.g., trust, excitement). Therefore, the host destination brand image will be investigated in this study according to the dimensions identified in previous studies.

2.3.1.2 *Research on the event brand*

An event can be defined as a package carried out with a perceived concept, customised and modified to achieve the aim of that event (Jayswal, 2008). Event marketing is defined as the practice of promoting the interest of an organisation and its brands by associating the organisation with a specific activity (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2013). This activity can either be owned by the company, where the company stages the event, or the activity can be endorsed by the company through sponsorship and owned by a third party (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2013). In view of the latter, the company engages in a financial exchange with a third party for visibility throughout the event.

The event brand consists of characteristics such as event size, professional status, event history, event venue and promotional appearances (Gwinner, 1997). The event image is the

‘cumulative interpretation of meanings or associations attributed to events by consumers’ (Gwinner, 1997, p. 147) linked to the physical, emotional, social, organisational and environmental facets of the event. The key characteristics of an event have previously been identified as success, media coverage, geographic location, event history, recognition of the sport, nature of the event and its impacts (Parent, Eskerud, & Hanstad, 2012).

An event is found worthwhile to visit when consumers perceive the event as fun (Green & Chalip, 1998). One study found that consumers perceive novelty and escape as important benefits, as people seek to escape from their daily lives and share in identity when visiting events (Green & Chalip, 1998). The fun, novelty, escape, identity and social-cultural impacts represent experiential and symbolic consequences, and, thus, this study suggests these are the brand benefits of the event. Therefore, this thesis investigates event brand image in terms of a specific set of brand benefits (e.g., fun, novelty, escape) consumers perceive of the Commonwealth Games.

2.3.1.3 Research on the sports brand

Brand image in sport is becoming increasingly important in the sports marketplace (Ross, 2006). This is especially pertinent in professional sports since the core product is intangible, unpredictable and subjective in nature (Gladden et al., 1998). The significance of sports brands is evident in the ranking of the top brands worldwide, with European football teams obtaining the largest followings on Twitter (Biscaia, Correia, Ross, Rosado, & Maroco, 2013). For sports brands, the brand image relates to commercial success (Boyle & Magnusson, 2007). Studies investigating the influence of a mega sport event on the associated sport shows a resultant increase in sports participation (Fourie & Santana-Gallego, 2011; Girginov & Hills, 2008) and sports attendance (Fourie & Santana-Gallego, 2011). Limited studies investigate sports brand image in a mega sport event alliance.

Previous studies show the brand attributes of sport include top athletes, head coaches, logos and stadiums (Bauer et al., 2008), team sports and level of sport (Kwon, Trail, & Anderson, 2005), sports legacy, social progress, and equality (Girginov & Hills, 2008) and success, star players, head coaches and management (Gladden & Funk, 2002). These brand attributes will be used as themes in this study to investigate the impact of hosting a mega sport event on sports brand equity.

Studies show the benefits of the sports brand consist of experiential brand benefits, such as nostalgia, escape, socialising, emotions and entertainment (Bauer et al., 2008; Gladden et al., 1998; Ross et al., 2006; Ross et al., 2008). Symbolic brand benefits in sport are identified as identification, admiration and internalisation (Bauer et al., 2008; Gladden et al., 1998). The sports brand image can be investigated in terms of a specific set of brand attributes (e.g., success, head coach, stadium) and brand benefits (e.g., admiration, identification, internalisation).

In summary, this study supposes that consumers of mega sport events may perceive the brand partners involved in the mega sport event alliance in terms of their brand attributes, brand benefits and consumer attitudes (positive and negative sentiments). However, limited evidence is available to understand how brand partners are perceived by consumers in a mega sport event alliance. Therefore, this study suggests the following research objective:

RO1: To investigate the brand partners that consumers perceive to be involved in a mega sport event alliance.

2.4 Previous research on the consequences of hosting a mega sport event

Previous research on the effects of hosting a mega sport event suggests the brand alliance can have positive consequences (Arnegger & Herz, 2016; Florek, Breitbarth, & Conejo, 2008; Hall, 2006; Kenyon & Bodet, 2018) and negative consequences for the host destination brand (Girginov & Hills, 2008; Gursoy et al., 2017; Hall, 2012; Kim et al., 2014; Solberg & Preuss, 2007).

The positive consequences of a mega sport event alliance have been extensively investigated (Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010; Kaplanidou, Jordan, Funk, & Ridinger, 2012; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007). For example, London's hosting of the 2012 Olympics fostered a more acceptable domestic image (Kenyon & Bodet, 2018). Hosting a mega sport event can have a positive impact on a host destination's economy by stimulating urban development (Richards & Wilson, 2004) and result in the increase in city construction (Maiello & Pasquinelli, 2015). One strong argument for hosting an event from an international marketing perspective is that the host destination can utilise the mega sport event to enhance the destination's brand image (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). Positive consequences were also observed for the economy of the host cities following the 2002 FIFA World Cup and the 1999 Rugby World Cup (Jones, 2001; Lee & Traylor, 2004). Previous theories showing positive effects on the equity of the brands in the alliance mostly indicate the influence on the brand image of the host city (Xing & Chalip, 2006). Studies have shown that mega sport events can improve the image of a host city (Arnegger & Herz, 2016).

This research includes the Beijing Olympics, which was shown to have a direct positive impact on the brand image of Beijing (Zhang & Zhao, 2009). The hosting of a mega sport event can increase brand awareness of a city (Ritchie & Smith, 1991). It is commonly assumed the impact of a mega sport event is positive, which explains the strong popularity and intense competition in bidding to host these events (Kim et al., 2014). Despite the prevailing assumption that hosting a mega sport event can enhance a destination's image, various studies have reported inconsistent findings, outlining both the positive and negative impacts of hosting a mega sport event (Girginov & Hills, 2008; Gursoy, Chi, Ai, & Chen, 2011; Hall, 2012; Kenyon & Bodet, 2018; Kim et al., 2014). It is still unclear how the hosting of a mega sport event affects the brand equity of the associated brands in an alliance. It is mostly assumed that the impacts of mega sport events are primarily positive, and the event's brand image is transferred to and strengthens the host destination's image (Kim et al., 2014). Research shows that host destinations are overall optimistic about brand image improvement during the hosting of a mega sport event (Baade & Matheson, 2004). There is, however, a void in the research in a sport context, leaving the claimed benefits for a host destination unverified (Kim et al., 2014; Xing & Chalip, 2006).

The negative consequences of hosting a mega sport event are evident in previous research (Gursoy et al., 2017; Hall, 2012; Kim et al., 2014). Negative consequences include the perceived high cost involved in hosting the event (Solberg & Preuss, 2007). The Olympic Games in Berlin in 2008 were estimated to cost 32 billion pounds, and Greece spent 8 billion pounds in 2004. Another important negative consequence is the obvious neglect of stadiums. The once costly sports stadiums built in previous mega sport events have turned into ruins; such as those used in the Winter and Summer Olympic Games in Berlin 1936, Sarajevo 1984, Atlanta 1996, Athens 2004, Turin 2006 and Rio de Janeiro 2016 (Boon, 2020). The recent Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro in 2016 showed the Olympics aquatics stadium abandoned, filled with puddles of water, exposing locals to possible dengue (Boon, 2020). An important negative consequence is human rights violations by host destinations. Event organisers in Rio, on 3 June 2015, bulldozed an improvised community, Vila Autódromo, with a local population of 700 families, to build stadiums, parking lots, swimming pools and media centres (Donahue, 2020). Studies that investigate the impact on the associated sports brand in

the alliance rather focus on the behaviours of consumers (Fourie & Santana-Gallego, 2010; Girginov & Hills, 2008). The 2012 London Olympics saw increased sports participation in the region (Girginov & Hills, 2008), and a mega sport event can increase attendance at local sport events (Fourie & Santana-Gallego, 2010).

These studies provide a starting point to understand the influence of hosting a mega sport event and offer opportunities to further develop this line of research. No enquiry has yet investigated the impact of hosting a mega sport event on the associated brand partners in a mega sport event alliance, to date preferring to focus on the impact on the destination brand partner (Kenyon & Bodet, 2018; Kim et al., 2014; Lee, 2014; Preuss, 2015). It is likely that the hosting of a mega sport event may influence the remaining brand partners in the alliance as well. As destinations continuously look for ways to improve their brand image and seek to align with mega sport events to attract intentional media attention (Rocha & Fink, 2017), and branding techniques have become powerful tools for destination marketing, (Lim & Weaver, 2014), this study suggests the following research objective:

RO2: To investigate consumer sentiment towards the brand partners perceived to be involved in the mega sport event alliance.

2.5 Mechanisms influencing consumer processing of a mega sport event alliance

Associative theory and the brand image transfer theory are identified as mechanisms that assist in influencing consumers through association (Chitty et al., 2018).

2.5.1 Brand image transfer

Brand image transfer theory explains the transfer of positive images between two brands during sports sponsorship (McCracken, 1989; Miller & Allen, 2012). Brand image transfer is based on the associative network theory and represents a co-branding activity jointly formed by various brands (Ilicic & Webster, 2013). The brand image transfer theory shows that, initially, the sports celebrity serves as an antecedent to influence consumer perceptions regarding the sponsor's brand image (McCracken, 1989; Miller & Allen, 2012). The theory describes how sports celebrities enter this process with an already attained brand image, and the consumer associates the sports celebrity's brand image with the sponsored product's brand image (Zdravkovic & Till, 2012). Studies that examine brand image transfer in relation to sports event sponsorship show that the brand image of the event may extend to the brand image of the product (Gwinner, 1997; Zdravkovic & Till, 2012).

The brand transfer theory is a process of transference of the positive image between two brands (McCracken, 1989). The transfer of images is consistent with Keller's (1993) concretisation of brand associations and helps to explain the associated network memory model. Past research on brand image transfers in sport events shows the event's brand image is transferred to the associated destination's brand (Kim et al., 2014). The brand image of one partner in a mega sport event alliance will spillover to the associated brand partners.

2.5.2 Associative Network theory

The various types of knowledge structure in people brains that contains details of information or associations (Anderson, 1983). Aaker (1991) defined brand associations as 'anything that links in memory to a brand', and brand associations comprises of brand attributes, brand

benefits and brand attitudes (Faircloth et al., 2001). Brand attitudes is the focus of this study, more specifically, the tangible and intangible features of the brand. Keller (1993) describes consumers' memory as a set of nodes that link to various brand associations relating to a brand. Information is stored in these nodes and is linked to others node sets in the brain. The links vary in strength, and closely different information about the brand is linked in memory (Faircloth et al., 2001). Brand image is understood as consumers' perceptions of the brand associations. Brand image is a consumer construct residing in associative memory network, critical to consumers' decisions making and evaluations, which is the main contribution to brand equity (Faircloth et al., 2001; Keller, 1993).

As a type of association, brand attitudes directly influence brand image (Faircloth et al., 2001). Marketers are interested in the brand associations that consumers hold in their minds, since the network associations in consumers' minds can provide a clear understanding consumer perceptions on brands, which includes the people, places and usages of the brands (Henderson, Iacobucci, & Calder, 1998). Consumers' association networks often contain more than one brand. When consumers are reminded of a brand, the nodes are activated and spread to the other nodes from the stimulus node; moreover, the degree of stimulation depends on closely the brands are aligned. (Henderson et al., 1998).

Associative network theory can explain the connectivity between nodes in the minds of the consumer, and nodes contain stored information (Boyle & Magnusson, 2007). The associative network theory indicates that each node is connected via a cognitive structure in the memory, and the links between the nodes represent the strength of associations (Zdravkovic & Till, 2012), showing how brands in an alliance influence each other (Henseler et al., 2009; Till & Busler, 1998). The theory indicates that brands represent nodes, connected in a cognitive network in the consumer's mind, whose connectivity can be altered according to external experiences (Till & Busler, 1998). Memories and knowledge of a brand are constructed by associations between nodes connected by links. The more salient the nodes and tighter the links, the stronger the brand image is in the market (Kim et al., 2014). Associative network theory explains the connectivity between brands involved in co-branding strategy. This study argues that each brand partner represents a node in consumers' memories, and the partners are connected within a cognitive framework, which may result in spillover between brand partners in a mega sport event alliance.

Co-branding theory can be used to explain the negative spillover effect in an alliance when consumers transfer negative information from one brand to the other brand (Votolato & Unnava, 2006). Co-branding strategy can have positive and negative consequences for associated brands (Washburn, Till, & Priluck, 2000). This study theorised that a mega sport event alliance could have some positive and negative effects on the equity of brand partners (Xing & Chalip, 2006). It is not clear how the brand alliance in a mega sport event influence the brand equity of the individual brand partners. In an attempt to address this gap in the literature, the current study suggests further investigating the effects on the brand image of the brands in the alliance.

According to co-branding theory, when the host destination brand aligns with associated brand partners, consumers may seek balance by re-examining their pre-existing attitudes towards one brand partner in a negative or positive direction in order to find consistency. These theories serve as a basis for this thesis' understanding of how brand partners in a mega sport event alliance influence each other. Therefore, this study research objectives is the following:

RO3: To investigate the spillover effect between the brand partners perceived to be involved in the alliance of a mega sport event.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher investigated and analysed patterns of perception regarding the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games by collecting nonparticipant observations expressed on social media. The Commonwealth Games was the focused on international multi-sport involving 6500 athletes and officials from Commonwealth countries (Australian Government, 2018). Grounded theory was used due to the nature of the research, which involved collecting and analysing data simultaneously (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2007). Grounded theory is a set of theories about the relationships existing between concepts expressed in the collected data's patterns as derived from the analysis (Glaser, 1992).

Glaser (1992) explains the purpose of grounded theory as discovering patterns in the data analysis. Social media mining refers to the use of a computer to dig through volumes of data to discover patterns (Zafarani et al., 2014). It involves investigating the deeper meaning of online perceptions regarding the brand equity effects of hosting a mega sport event. Grounded theorists aim to analyse the data as part of a non-static analysis. The approach of in this study is qualitative but also integrated component in the quantitative analysis. The research design is based on combining qualitative and quantitative (Teichert & Schöntag, 2010). This means the study will gain the benefits from the qualitative in-depth technique with the quantitative assessment of the data of the brand associations in consumers' minds. Rich details and deep insights gain into consumers perceptions of the brands in a mega sport event, at the same time, through quantitative results it can be assumed to be universally valid (Teichert & Schöntag, 2010).

3.1.1.1 Social media mining

Data mining is a process that extracts large-scale data and useful, actionable patterns to gain insights and knowledge (Gundecha & Liu, 2012). Data mining of social media can expand a researcher's capability of understanding phenomena on dynamic online platforms (Gundecha & Liu, 2012). Using NVivo software, the researcher found that sentiment analysis on large data sets is difficult as the program cannot run large file sizes, and a lot of manual coding of data is needed to reduce file sizes. The researcher started with individual experiences, developing progressive categories to analyse the data by identifying patterns. For this research, Ncapture screen scrapper, which is comparable with NVivo, was used to collect historical tweets from the Twitter library (Zafarani et al., 2014).

Date mining is techniques that form part of a branch of artificial intelligences (Liao, Chu, & Hsiao, 2012). Data mining of social media can expand a researcher's capability to understand phenomena (Gundecha & Liu, 2012). Online content is useful for understanding the underlying needs and desires of consumers regarding brands (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Data mining on social media can expand a researcher's capability to understand phenomena (Gundecha & Liu, 2012). Online content is useful for understanding the underlying needs and desires of consumers regarding brands (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

Social media mining can be conducted to obtain massive amounts of social media data (Zafarani et al., 2014). Glaser (1992) explains the purpose of grounded theory as discovering patterns in data collection analysis. Grounded theory works with empirical studies using observational data (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2007). Social media allows people to connect and share opinions across a spectrum of media, and it allows researchers to observe people's behaviour on a large scale (Andéhn et al., 2014). Social media allows people to connect and share opinions across a spectrum of media, and it allows researchers to observe people's behaviour at a large scale (Andéhn et al., 2014). Social media can be used to

understand the effect of word-of-mouth marketing on a brand. Social media is ideal for word-of-mouth marketing as consumers generate and spread brand-related information without constraint (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016).

3.1.1.2 Grounded theory methodology

Grounded theory aims to derive meaning from text (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2007; Rennie, 2000). This means that text contains insight and meaning. Glaser and Strauss explained grounded theory as being contingent on the person producing it, and they further explain that different researchers can derive different theories from information (Rennie, 2000). The theories derived from the research are valid as long as they are justified by the data (Rennie, 2000). The theory of reasoned action attitudes constitutes a combination of brand-based associations, attributes and benefits and confirms that brand attitude is influenced by brand image. Overall evaluations of a brand are represented by brand attitudes, and positive consumer-generated content should positively affect brand attitude (Coulter et al., 2012).

The grounded theory, applicable to this study are: data collection in association with data analysis, the construction of analysis codes and categories from data, the coding of phenomena, and theory generation and memo-writing to define relationships between categories (Ong, 2012). Grounded theory consists of inductive strategies for analysing data—the data generates the theory (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2007). Morse et al. (2016) described the grounded theory research approach as enabling researchers to capture complexity and variations in the world. The fluid, dynamic and evolving nature of grounded theory allows a researcher to investigate a complex this social phenomenon.

3.1.1.3 Data mining on Twitter

For this study, Twitter was chosen for several reasons: it has a public search API to access historical and real-time data. All tweets on Twitter are public, unlike other social media sites that may have privacy restrictions (Wlodarczak, 2017). Twitter requires researchers to register their blog, creating a token to access data. This is based on OAuth, an open standard for authorisation on the web (Wlodarczak, 2017). Twitter has a powerful query API, and researchers can refine terms to include or exclude certain terms, allowing researchers to narrow the results to relevant tweets and place filters on searches. All tweets are public, unlike other social media sites that may have privacy restrictions. Twitter has character restrictions on tweets, making opinion mining easy and requiring users to tweet concise statements rather than complex, longwinded statements (Wlodarczak, 2017).

Twitter is a social media platform, so the content is user-generated, in real-time network connecting users to the latest issues, stories, ideas, opinions and news shared by other users (Su et al., 2017). This platform allowing unique public communication through messages called tweets, that are short easy to construct lending to near to real-time response to current events. Providing a platform as a constant updated resource of public opinion expression and reaction (Su et al., 2017). Twitter is detailed reflection of public opinion trends because of its interactive nature in facilitating spontaneous conversations on current issues (Su et al., 2017).

3.1.1.4 Findings the patterns in consumers perceptions

Observational measurements deploy predetermined coding or rating schemes to quantify behaviours (Haidet, Tate, Divirgilio-Thomas, Kolanowski, & Happ, 2009). All observations were recorded without knowledge of their importance, and these observations were analysed,

compared and classified without a research focus. Through the analysis of these observations, generalisations could be drawn (Blaikie, 2009). Social media mining is a nonparticipant form of observation, which means the participants are not aware of the presence of a researcher. Scholars categorise nonparticipant observation as different from participant observation (Haidet et al., 2009). By collecting data in this format, the researcher needs to review the collected data and try again if unsuccessful, as no certainties exist in this data collection method. Social media mining starts with becoming acquainted with the online domain, such as the use of different jargon, which influences the data search method, or the terms used in data mining. The researcher recognises people are individuals with their own backgrounds, assumptions and experiences, contributing to a continuing construction of reality through social interactions (Dina, 2012).

These categories will be both nominal and ordinal. Nominal data refers to data with a natural order, while ordinal data has a data value (Freeman, Walters, & Campbell, 2011). Categorical data summarising both frequencies and percentages will be used with the total number of observations indicated (Freeman et al., 2011). Describing the categorical data involves counting the observations in each category and indicating the percentage of the total tweet data. The application of categorical qualitative data, such as reporting frequencies, descriptive statistics and percentages of themes (Borrego, Douglas, & Amelink, 2009). A quantitative method is used to interpret qualitative data to help with interpreting and studying the phenomena (Rossman & Wilson, 1985). Qualitative behaviours can, therefore, be transformed into quantitative data for statistical analysis (Borrego et al., 2009).

Grounded theory derived its theoretical underpinnings from pragmatism (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Pragmatism seeks to explore contradictory ideas, with a focus on 'what works' regarding the research question (Pole, 2007). Pragmatism is commonly leveraged by mixed-method researchers since it suits the study of complex social phenomena. The pragmatic researcher considers the question more important than the paradigm or method used (Pole, 2007). In an inductive strategy, all facts are observed and recorded without knowledge of their importance, and these facts are analysed, compared and classified without a hypothesis. Through the analysis of these facts, generalisations are drawn (Blaikie, 2009).

The researcher focused on relevant jargon and hashtags relating to the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games. Grounded theory consists of inductive strategies for analysing data—the data generates the theory (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2007). The researcher starts with individual experiences, developing progressive categories to analyse the data by identifying patterns. Social media mining consists of selecting relevant information from social media sites (Wlodarczak, 2017). The search for the data will be refined by using different hashtags and specific words to garner consumer perceptions of the experience value dimensions. Data collection starts with becoming acquainted with the online domain, such as the use of different jargon, which influences the methods and themes used in the data search. Initial or open coding is the process of identifying important words or groups of words in the data and labelling them accordingly (Birks & Mills, 2015). The important words or groups of words, such as verbatim quotes from participants, are used as labels, while categories are groups of related codes (Birks & Mills, 2015). The researcher needs to find out more about the properties of a category or establish a relationship between two categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

Grounded theory involves looking for negative cases to make results conclusive. Sentiment analysis is a useful tool to investigate online communications. It is important to understand the meanings of categories that emerge from observations to ensure that the data is not forced to fit into predetermined categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Data was analysed on the basis of sentiment analysis, focusing on opinions that express or suggest positive and negative sentiments (Liu,

2012). Before 2000, little research focused on people's opinion and sentiments. Since then, it has become a highly attractive field of study (Liu, 2012). A wide range of domains and industries have thrived on this analysis for its numerous commercial applications. Opinions are at the centre of human actions, revealing the influence of human behaviour (Liu, 2012). The explosive use of social media, such as Twitter, has led to people increasingly using opinion content to make decisions (Liu, 2012). Whenever people make a decision, they want other opinions as well. Gathering consumer opinions, or a target market's opinion, is a long-standing business practice in marketing and public relations (Liu, 2012).

Data collecting started a week prior to the event and ended a week after the event to capture all perceptions of consumers update of the mega sport event. The main classification of the Twitter data was according to positive and negative consumer sentiment. Tweets containing no sentiment were deleted, for tweets did need to contain emotions and opinion to draw workable conclusions. The sports brand was mined by the researcher based on the day the event was scheduled to occur on the official schedule of the Commonwealth Games. Then, the researcher categorised the data based on the brands consumers were expressing sentiment about—any brand that consumers were indicating in their tweets. If sponsorship brands were included in consumer tweets, the researcher would have concluded that these indicated brands are as important as the event and host destination brands. As it stands, consumers only indicated the sports brand to be an important part of the brand alliance of a mega sport event, which will be discussed further in chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4: DO NOT NEGLECT THE SPORTS BRAND IN A CO-BRANDING ALLIANCE: THE DILEMMA OF A MEGA SPORT EVENT

This chapter was submitted to be published in the journal *Annals of Tourism Research*. The research paper addresses the research objectives of the thesis. During mega sport events, the host destination brand and the event brand enter into a co-branding strategy to produce the staged event. This research paper sets the scene by conducting research on the holistic effects of consumers' perspectives of mega sport events. The mega sport event in focus is the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games. The paper reports on the results of social media mining of consumer sentiment about the brands involved in the brand alliance of a mega sport event. The perceptions of consumers of the involved brands were identified, indicating a spillover effect occurred during the mega sport event. The real test in understanding if co-branding is a win-win strategy for each brand partner as prior research indicated (Besharat, 2010), or in the instance of mega sport event does one brand primarily win. In the brand alliance is higher consumer awareness and positive sentiment towards the brand.

The sentiment analysis was performed on data, collected tweets, then thematic analysis was conducted to draw conclusions.

The key research objectives that are addressed in this section are:

RO1: To investigate consumer recognition of the partners in a mega sport event brand alliance.

RO2: To investigate consumer sentiment towards the brand partners perceived to be involved in a mega sport event alliance.

RO3: To investigate the spillover effect between the brand partners perceived to be involved in a mega sport event alliance.

DO NOT NEGLECT THE SPORTS BRAND: The spillover effect in a mega sport event

Abstract: This study investigates the brand alliance of a mega sport events comprising of the event, the destination and the sports brands. Extant literature into this phenomenon of the spillover effect in a mega sport events are limited in scope. In this context existing research in the effect on brand equity is fragmented. This study draws upon various disciplines, aiming to provide a holistic approach to investigating a mega sport event from the perspective of the consumer. It seems the sports brand is essential to the brand alliance. The findings are the sports brand as salient brand partner in the brand alliance that causes positive spillover to the associated brand partners.

Keywords: mega sport event, brand equity, brand alliance, spillover, associations

INTRODUCTION

Branding has transcended past the point of an exclusive managerial practice to a societal phenomenon (Andéhn et al., 2014). This study contributes to the body of knowledge regarding mega sport events by exploring the spillover effects in brand alliances. A brand alliance involves the combination and alignment of two or more individual brands (Simonin & Ruth). A successful brand alliance will improve perceptions of the partner brands and enhance their brand equity (Osselaer & Van, 2006). Brand equity is of paramount importance, consisting of brand awareness and brand image from perceptions of consumers (Aaker, 1992; Keller, 1993; Ma, Cheng, Bu, & Jiang, 2018). Strategies are developed on the premise of building, managing and utilising brand equity, and co-branding alliances are increasingly being used to reach this objective (Washburn et al., 2000). Therefore, co-branding alliances have attracted considerable interest among researchers.

A mega sport event is an example of the brand alliance phenomenon (Simonin & Ruth, 1998). Studies in tourism show that host destinations seek to increase brand equity in improving the destination image and awareness by hosting mega sport events. Despite the prevalence of the alliances between brands and strong interest in research in this context (Im et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2014), little is known of consumer perception on the brands in a mega sport event, and crucially how a mega sport event affects consumer sentiment towards the partner brands. During a brand alliance the spillover effects on consumers can be positive and negative (Raufeisen et al., 2019), suggesting the brands in a mega sport event can positively and negatively affect the brand equity of the associated brand partners.

Hosting a mega sport event resulted in positive effects such as: increased brand awareness of a host city (Lee, 2014; Ritchie & Smith, 1991) and enhancement of the host destination's brand (Kenyon & Bodet, 2018). Negative effects include negative associations such as mismanagement of local residents, and unsustainable environmental practices (Gaffney, 2013; Gursoy et al., 2017; Hall, 2012). However, research into consumer perception reflects concern on how the consumer reacts to a mega sport event brand alliance, suggesting this type of alliance is not without complexities or negative effects (Gursoy et al., 2017). There is evidence that destinations dropped their bids due consumers' negative sentiment towards a mega sport event (Fourie & Santana-Gallego, 2011; Gelan, 2003; Solberg & Preuss, 2007).

Considering the significant impact sports events have on the fabric of society and the negative perceptions of locals towards hosting (Burgan & Mules, 1992; Gursoy et al., 2017; O'Brien, 2006), mega sport events might become undesirable to host. Further studies in this

area are justified, into this phenomenon to ensure the sustainable management of future mega sport events.

If a mega sport event is a co-branding strategy, all associated brands in the alliance must theoretically be effected equally (Besharat, 2010; Washburn, Till, & Priluck, 2004). If the event brand and the sports brand is partners in the alliance, their brand equity will unavoidably be impacted by the alliance. Considering all the associated brands, does all the brand partners brand equity get effected equally? Though mega sport-event literature focuses primarily on the effects on the host destination brand (Kim et al., 2014; Lorde, Greenidge, & Devonish, 2011; Rocha & Fink, 2017), limited research exists on a mega sport event as a brand alliance and the spillover effect occurring to the associated brand partners (Xing & Chalip, 2006).

This study investigates the understanding that a mega sport events brand alliance comprises of three brands: the event, the destination and the sports. Using a Grounded Theory research methodology this study conducted social media data mining before, during and after the staging of a mega sport event. The purpose of this study is threefold, to investigate: 1) the brand partners that consumers are aware of in a mega sport event alliance; 2) consumer sentiment towards the brand partners in the alliance; and 3) the spillover effect on the brand equity of the partners.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

Brand equity is a term that indicates the overall value of the brand (Keller, 1998; Ross et al., 2008). Consumer-based brand equity is defined as a set of assets and liabilities linked to a brand name and symbol that adds to or subtracts from the value perceived by consumers (Aaker, 1996; Bauer et al., 2008; Keller, 1993). Alternatively, Keller (1993) explains that brand equity is developed when customers experience high levels of brand awareness and hold strong, positive and unique brand images in memory. To examine consumer-based brand equity, firstly, it is important to consider what constitutes a brand in the eyes of the consumer. Brands are intangible, and seminal studies identify a brand as a name, term, symbol or design, or a combination of these, that aims to identify the offerings (products, services, experiences) of one seller and to differentiate them from the competition (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). Customer-based brand equity is the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer perceptions in the marketing of that brand (Keller, 1993).

The most prevalent models to measure the consumer-based brand equity approach are proposed by Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993). Brands with high levels of awareness and unique favourable associations signify high-equity brands. Two underlying dimensions exist to measure the construct of brand equity: brand awareness (recall and recognition of a brand) and brand image (the overall associations a brand has), and these need to be investigated (Besharat, 2010).

Brand awareness relates to the strength of the brand node or traces in memory, as reflected by consumers' ability to recognise the brand under different conditions. The consumer has to be aware of the brand to develop a brand image of the specific brand; hence, brand awareness is the starting point for developing brand equity (Gladden et al., 1998; Keller, 1993; Ross, 2006). This study predicts consumers are aware of three brands in a mega sport event which constitutes of: the host destination brand; the event brand and the sports brand.

Brand image is defined as a particular set of brand associations held in the minds of consumers (Arai, Ko, & Ross, 2014). Based on this reasoning brand associations and brand image are used interchangeably in the literature (Sonnier & Ainslie, 2011). As such, at the heart of a brand is its high levels of brand image or brand associations that contribute to the consequent building of equity (Zdravkovic & Till, 2012). Based on these understanding this

study investigates the brand equity of the brand partners in a mega sport event in terms of the brand image.

Several issues remain unexplored, few, if any, of these studies examine the brand image of the partners in a mega sport event alliance. The destination image is explained as a the sum of the beliefs, ideas and impressions that people have of a destination (Crompton, 1979), and the event is understood as a package ‘brand elements’, carried out with a perceived concept, customised and modified to achieve the aim of the specific event (Jayswal, 2008; Kim et al., 2014). No official universal definition of an event brand image exists in the literature. Rocha and Fink (2017) describe the Olympic event brand as constantly associated with positive attributes such as excellence, multiculturalism and fair competitions.

Sports brand is described as any athlete or team that a sports organisation uses to help differentiate its product from the competition (Arai et al., 2014). The sports brand image is rationalised in terms of brand attributes, such as the coach, sports expertise, and the sports stadium; and the sports brand benefits include experiential and symbolic brand benefits (Bauer et al., 2008; Gladden & Funk, 2002; Gladden et al., 1998). Sports brand is highly experiential and elicits high levels of experiential brand benefits, where consumers experience significant admiration, identification and family bonding (Bauer et al., 2008; Gladden et al., 1998). Professional sports teams are culturally important to consumers, and their team/sport is often considered an extension of themselves. Sports consumers accept their club teams as a brand and support branding activities (Abosag, Roper, & Hind, 2012). Sport organisations, especially sporting teams, are becoming more interested in focusing on their image (Kahuni, Rowley, & Binsardi, 2009).

Sports generate a degree of passion and emotional response unheard of in other fields (Abosag et al., 2012). Sports has the ability to provide drama and excitement and, conversely, frustration, making it distinctively unique (Parent et al., 2012). Failing to understand the importance of the sports brand to consumers may have negative effects on the associated brands in the alliance. This study explores the idea of sports playing a greater role, as a contributing brand partner in the alliance.

Critically to this study, research on brand image has limited the scope of investigation on brand associations, influencing the choice of brand partners, omitting the question of the spillover effects on the partners. Although research on mega sport event alliances has not addressed issues of the brand partners image, the extensive research on brand in marketing literature points to the prominence of brand perceptions in information processing and decision making (Im et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2014). This study examines the brand image of the partners involved in a mega sport event to investigate the equity of these partners.

Co-branding

This study leans on co-branding theory and associative theory to provide a theoretical foundation for understanding consumers’ perceptions of the spillover effect in a mega sport event. Co-branding is the combination of two or more brand partners in a brand alliance to form a new brand (Besharat, 2010; Park, Jun, & Schocker, 1996; Xing & Chalip, 2006). Research indicates that during a co-branding strategy, a specific set of brand associations are transferred to the associated brand partners during an alliance to ultimately reform the brand’s image (Ilicic & Webster, 2013; Zdravkovic & Till, 2012). These transfers have the ability to improve consumer valuations of the brands (Votola & Unnava, 2006). However, research signifies both positive and negative spillover occurs between the individual brand partners in a brand alliance (Simonin & Ruth, 1998; Votola & Unnava, 2006). Brands involved in hosting a mega sport event can affect each other positively and negatively. Literature states co-branding alliance that are perceived positively have positive a spillover effect on the individual brands forming the alliance (Simonin & Ruth, 1998; Washburn et al.,

2000). If the consumers perceive the brand alliance as negative, arguably the brand partners in the alliance will be perceived negatively too.

Previous studies on mega sport events

Studies investigating mega sport events show positive and negative consequences. For example, the 2007 Cricket World Cup is believed to have enhanced Barbados' brand image (Lorde et al., 2011). Mega sport events do result in enhancement of infrastructure, and an influx of 'new money' through tourism (Hall, 2012). Cities justify the huge hosting costs in terms of stimulation to the economy (Chalip & Costa, 2005), regenerating, promoting and re-creating the image of the entire host region (Lim & Weaver, 2014).

A mega sport event can have negative consequences for the host, leading to negative associations (Gursoy et al., 2017; Hall, 2012; Richards & Wilson, 2004; Solberg & Preuss, 2007). Outcomes for the host destination includes the high costs involved in hosting the event (Solberg & Preuss, 2007) and the promotion of political ideologies (Hall, 2012). A number of scholars argue that the cost of a mega sport event outweighs the benefits (Fourie & Santana-Gallego, 2011; Gelan, 2003; Solberg & Preuss, 2007). This was evident when destinations such as Poland's Krakow, Ukraine's Lviv, Sweden's Stockholm, Italy's Rome and Norway's Oslo dropped their bids for the 2022 Olympic Games. These cities dropped their bids due to consumers' negative attitudes towards hosting the event (Kenyon & Bodet, 2018; Preuss, 2015).

The 2016 Rio Olympics led to the demolition of an environmentally protected area to make way for a golf course, leading to resentment among locals (Gaffney, 2013; Gursoy et al., 2017; Hall, 2012; Zhang & Zhao, 2009). During the 2014 FIFA World Cup, 170,000 people were displaced in Brazil, and workers' labour rights were violated. The 2008 Beijing Olympics forcefully relocated residents from their homes, and a large number of workers' rights were violated in the construction of sports facilities for the mega event (Gursoy et al., 2017). It is evident mega sport event has the ability to effect consumer perceptions negatively and positively. However, limited research shows whether these negative and positive perceptions spillover to the brand partners in a mega sport event.

The spillover effect

The concept of the spillover effect is based on social identity theory and associative network theory (Anderson, 1983; Raufeisen et al., 2019). Social identity theory in a co-branding context explains the spillover effect in relation to human brands. The precondition for a spillover effect to occur is an individual's need to cognitively connect knowledge nodes in memory (Raufeisen et al., 2019). Associative network theory focuses on how the information is remembered and activated (Anderson, 1983). Memory or brand associations are perceived as visual observations of stored cognitive knowledge in the form of nodes in consumers' minds (Supphellen, 2000). Attitudes towards co-brands can spillover to all associated brand partners in the alliance. Perceptions toward each brand partner brand may change when consumers process information about the mega sport event.

A reciprocal spillover effect occur when the attitudes are transferred back and forth between brand partners (Raufeisen et al., 2019). These brands are described as separate entities purposefully engaging in partnerships to produce and benefit from spillover effects (Raufeisen et al., 2019; Simonin & Ruth, 1998; Votola & Unnava, 2006).

Transfer can occur to both the event and the host or in the reverse direction; the image transfer happens more from the event to the host brand image (Rocha & Fink, 2017). For example, a Formula One sport team minimised 'bad' image spillover from Vodafone with effective image crisis management (Kahuni et al., 2009). The literature on the spillover effect state negative information affects attitude formation more than positive information

(Pope, Voges, & Brown, 2009). Prior research demonstrated co-branding influences consumer perceptions such as reciprocal effect is critical to enhancing or diluting brand equity. Negative information of the alliance can backfire and dilute the brand equity of the brand partners. As unexpected risks and benefits of brand alliance can impact brand equity of the brand partners (Osselaer & Van, 2006); this study's research objectives (RO) are:

RO1: To investigate consumer awareness of the partners in a mega sport event brand alliance.

RO2: To investigate the brand image of the brand partners involved in a mega sport event alliance.

RO3: To investigate the spillover effect between the brand partners involved in a mega sport event alliance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Grounded theory was used due to the nature of the research, which involved collecting and analysing data simultaneously (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2007). This research was undertaken using a grounded theory methodology. Grounded theory consists of inductive strategies for analysing data—the data generates the theory (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2007). Qualitative research involves finding meaningful patterns through coding and categorising data (Wong, 2008). A qualitative approach will further aid in understanding the phenomenon of negative and positive spillover in a brand alliance. The tweet data were quantified to allow for analysis of social media commentary.

The researcher investigated by analysing patterns of perception regarding the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games by collecting nonparticipant observations expressed on social media. The Commonwealth Games was the focused on international multi-sport, mega sport event in this study, involving of 6500 athletes and officials from Commonwealth countries (Government, 2018). Social media mining is a nonparticipant observation process, which means the participants are not aware of the presence of a researcher. Social media mining is the process of extracting large-scale data and useful, actionable patterns from social media to gain insightful knowledge (Gundecha & Liu, 2012). Social media content is useful for understanding the underlying needs and desires of consumers regarding brands (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

More and more people are sharing their perceptions online for public viewing (Pang, Lee, & Vaithyanathan, 2002). Twitter is a popular social media (Andéhn et al., 2014), with 600 million users and over 250 million tweets daily (Wlodarczak, 2017). With the unprecedented rise of Web 2.0 technologies, consumers are increasingly engaged in social media (Darwish & Lakhtaria, 2011, p. 204). The rise of social media communication is affecting consumers' attitudes towards brands. (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). Overall evaluations of a brand are represented by brand attitudes, and positive consumer-generated content should positively affect brand attitude (Coulter et al., 2012).

The data was collected on Twitter the week before the event, the two weeks during the event and one week following the event. During these times, there was a high number of users tweeting and retweeting about the event (Batinca & Treleaven, 2015). Main key words were used that relate to the study on the mega sport event, such as commonwealth games, and official hashtags of the event such as: commsgames, commsgames2018, GC2018, CWG2018 etc. Deviating word searches were added to refine the search to include news headlines and the sports played on a particular date were researched on a daily basis. The aim being to get a holistic depiction of consumers' sentiment towards matters.

The character limitations on Twitter mean that tweets are usually straight to the point, which assisted the data mining process by using refined search terms. A plugin NCapture

screen scraper/grabber was used for data collection for analysis that was compatible with NVivo. The tweets collated by NCapture were imported into the NVivo software. The advantage of using the screen scraper was that no additional programming was needed.

During the data conditioning stage, a large number of noisy raw tweets needed to be conditioned into high-quality data that would allow the researcher to predict patterns (Gayo-Avello et al., 2013). Unrelated tweets, such as semi-colons, smileys and additional punctuation, were usually removed. The query terms used in this study were selected based on relevance to the mega sport event. The collected raw tweets were filtered to remove irrelevant data, such as duplicates, spam or off-topic tweets (Włodarczak, 2017).

The sentiment analysis consisted of identifying consumers' sentiment (Liu & Zhang, 2012). The NVivo sentiment analysing function grouped the tweets into nodes in terms of positive or negative sentiment. The nodes were further grouped into categories that were based on the themes identified. The sentiment analysis consisted of identifying consumers' sentiment (Liu & Zhang, 2012). A corpus of over 800,000 tweets was collected, reduced for relevance to less than 3000 tweets. NVivo 12 Plus edition was used to conduct a qualitative analysis the software has an auto code function for sentiment analysis. This 'identify sentiment' and classified tweets into six categories: very positive, positive, moderately positive, very negative, negative and moderately negative.

The final stage of this research involved comparing the emerging themes and categories in the existing set of data. A large number of tweets contained two or more brands. It was necessary to manually analyse each tweet individually to determine which brand was implicated the most. While a qualitative approach provides for an in-depth understanding of the data, quantitative analysis allows the researcher to draw factual conclusions.

FINDINGS

The findings indicate that consumers are aware of the event and host destination brands:

‘What a spectacular closing ceremony of the Commonwealth Games 2018 Great job in delivering a fantastic Commonwealth Games GoldCoast #Queensland #Australia #GC2018 @GC2018’.

The event brand is described as the Commonwealth Games, and the host destination was perceived as the Gold Coast, Australia. Tweets confirmed consumers' awareness and recognition of the event brand:

‘Absolutely loved the #**CommonwealthGames2018** Opening Ceremony’.

The following tweet indicates awareness of the host destination brand:

‘Eagerly anticipating the Commonwealth Games 2018 here at **Surfers Paradise, Gold Coast!**...’

Significantly, tweets show consumers awareness of the sports brand when expressing their opinions on the mega sport event:

‘With the Commonwealth Games Opening Ceremony only minutes away, my excitement for a few weeks of sport is well and truly here!’

The findings of consumers recognising the host destination, the event, and the sports brands when expressing their opinions regarding the mega sport event alliance. Interestingly, no reference was made to any sponsorship brands.

The table below displays a tally of the findings of these three brand coded tweets that contains sentiment. The combined section is a tally of the total tweets that contain sentiment about two or more brands in the mega sport event. Table 1 presents a summary of the frequencies of the tweets analysed by the three theme and by sentiment.

Table 1. Thematic analysis summary of the brand in sentiment categories

| THEMES | POSITIVE | NEGATIVE | TOTAL |
|---------|----------|----------|-------|
| EVENT | 595 | 688 | 1283 |
| HOST | 169 | 130 | 299 |
| SPORT | 874 | 91 | 965 |
| TOTAL | 1638 | 909 | 2547 |
| COMBINE | 510 | 463 | 973 |

Positive consumer sentiment

The findings presented in Figure 1 detail positive and negative consumer sentiment. 1638 tweets specifically referred to positive sentiment towards the brands in the alliance; 874 tweets referred to the sports brand; 595 related to the event brand; and 169 tweets related to the host destination brand. It would appear that consumers expressed more positive sentiment towards the sports brand than the event or host destination brand. These tweets were analysed in terms of the sports brand, the event brand and the host brand. Tweets showing positive consumer sentiment towards specific sports brand:

‘really enjoying such a great showcase of elite netball at its best @EnglandNetball Vs @SilverFernsNZ Definitely worth staying up for’.
 ‘Rugby 7s was the best! Massive day of fast rugby... scored some good seats too!’
 ‘Rugby7s women's final. I'm taking up this sport. Inspiring stuff from both Australia’
 ‘and New Zealand... womensrugby’
 ‘I really enjoying such a great showcase of elite netball’, and
 ‘loving the racewalk, makes me wanna go!’
 ‘I'm LOVING being right on the marathon course!’
 ‘Enjoying all the rugby7s action from @GC2018’

Based on these tweets, it is evident that consumers expressed positive sentiment towards the sports brands in the alliance. The high frequency of positive sentiment tweets indicates the importance of the sports brand to consumers. A tweet indicated a consumer's fondness for watching the sport swimming:

‘Whenever there's any kind of Games- Olympics, Commonwealth, whatever- I just want to watch the swimming. It's by far the superior sport’.

The event having the second-highest positive sentiment tweets showed a positive sentiment towards the event brand partner (595/1638). Tweets that illustrated a positive sentiment includes:

‘absolutely loved the CommonwealthGames 2018 Opening Ceremony’
 ‘Commonwealth Games opening ceremony is fantastic, telling an interesting story’
 ‘The Commonwealth Games was amazing.’
 ‘The opening ceremony is beautiful so far #gc2018.’
 ‘CommonwealthGames2018, It’s all very exciting!’
 ‘I am very much enjoying the #ComonwealthGames2018 opening ceremony’
 ‘What a great start to the GC Opening Ceremony’
 ‘Commonwealth Games Opening 2018!! Exciting times @thecgf’
 ‘How exciting. The Commonwealth Games opening ceremony not far off, heralding the start of what I hope will be a fab 11 day event in Q’ld’

The host destination brand received the lowest number of positive sentiment tweets (169/1638). Tweets that illustrated a positive sentiment includes:

‘Australia... is going to be an incredible host!’
 ‘Had an amazing time here at gc2018 !! Thanks for such a great games!’
 ‘Congratulations Gold Coast on a brilliant Commonwealth Games!’
 ‘Congratulations, and thanks #australia and #goldcoast2018 for the great games!!!’
 ‘Cngrats to Australia for being excellent hosts - a great Games for all involved!’
 ‘Great to see countries coming together to compete in the beautiful Australian Gold Coast’

Negative consumer sentiment

The 909 tweets specifically expressed negative sentiment towards the brands in the alliance, and of these, 688 tweets referred to the event brand, 130 related to the host brand, and 91 tweets related to a sports brand (see Table 1). It seems that consumers expressed more negative sentiment towards the event brand than the host and sports brands. These tweets were further analysed according to the event brand, host brand and sports brand.

The event brand received the highest number of tweets that expressed a negative sentiment (688/909 tweets). Tweets that illustrated a negative sentiment includes:

‘Why was the stadium empty for the closing ceremony plus coverage disgraceful’
 ‘I’ve been watching the commonwealth games over the 4 occasions & never seen an terrible ending like this before plus half empty crowds, ...commonwealth games’
 ‘closing ceremony is horrible!!’
 ‘The time it took to get medical attention was a disgrace GC2018 Commonwealthgames18’
 ‘Absolutely disgusting. Where were the medics? Scotland’s Hawkins looked in a bad way. Bad planning commonwealth games.’
 ‘Shouldn't take longer than 5minutes for medical help at an organised tournament’

The host brand received the second-highest number of tweets that contained negative sentiment (130/909). Tweets that illustrated a negative sentiment includes:

‘Classic Australians being culturally incompetent’
 ‘The Gold Coast is an utterly dreadful place’

‘This is what happens when you let politically correct morons have complete control over a sport event!’

‘Cannot believe what I have just witnessed in the Gold Coast...GC2018Marathon...people taking photos and not a bit of medical attention for Call Hawk... Total Disgrace. Total disgrace!!!!’

The sports brand received the lowest number of tweets with negative sentiment (91/909 tweets). The number of negative tweets was low, but the sentiment was strongly negative towards the sports brand for one specific topic, gender inequality. An athlete had undergone gender-changing medical procedures and competed in the women’s weightlifting category of the Commonwealth Games. Consumers seemed to perceive this as negative. An exemplar:

‘well you're not supporting Iuniarra Sipaia (who is still owed a gold which Laurel Hubbard (a man) was given, even though Iuniarra was the winning woman!).’

One tweet stated,

‘cheater injures himself, leaving him unable to steal the win’.

Consumers seemed to value gender equality in sport:

‘did you see laurelhubbard start off with 120kgs in the WOMEN'S wightlifting - what a man what a man what a mighty fine man RIPwomensSport.’

The negative sentiment suggests that gender inequality in sport affected the sports brand negatively. Tweets that illustrated negative sentiment includes:

‘It’s a biological bloke my dudes and shouldn’t compete against women!’

‘This is the end of women in competitive sports, begins’

‘There is no support of Laurel Hubbard who wonder why he never won anything and ‘the at age 39, lol 39, is favorite for gold.’

The findings are discussed according to the positive and negative spillover effects between the brand partners in a mega sport event.

Positive spillover

The transfer of positive associations from the sports to the event and host destination brands. The positive sentiment spillover to the brand partners in tweets like:

‘exciting watching the triathlon today at the Commonwealth Games Gold Coast 2018’.

The event brand tweets is about consumers stating excitement for the sports brand like:

‘How exciting are the commonwealth games...Amazing talent on show! Just incredible’.

Spillover occurs and the positive associations of the sports brand transfer to the event brand:

‘Really enjoying such a great showcase of elite netball at its best England Netball Vs Silver Ferns NZ Definitely worth staying up for’, and ‘I should sleep, but these commonwealth games are not going to watch themselves rugby7s GC2018’.

The findings show consumers perceived the sports brand in aligning with the host destination and event brands:

‘Amazing atmosphere and even BETTER swimming happening down here at the GC Aquatic Centre C’mon AUS.’ Tweets indicates, ‘rugby 7s was the best! Massive day of fast rugby... scored some good seats too! Commonwealth games rugby7s rugby girls Gold Coast 2018’.

Consumers expressed positive sentiment towards the host destination brand due to the host’s alignment with the sports, and the sports brand sentiment spillover to the event and host destination brands (see Figure 1). Figure 1 illustrates the positive spillover effects occurring in a mega sport event. Consumers express positive sentiment towards the sport brand and this spillover to the event and host destination brands.

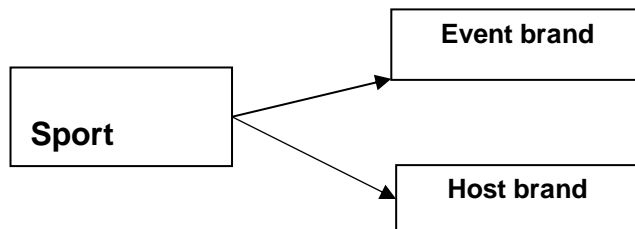


Figure 1. The positive spillover effect in a mega sport event

The findings suggest the close alignment of the event and the host destination brands. In a tweet, one consumer states:

‘I envy so much everyone who’s in the Gold Coast for the commies, it looks so beautiful Australia is my dream destination’.

The positive sentiment towards the event is reflected in the words and phrases ‘commies’ spillover to a ‘beautiful Australia’ and a ‘dream destination’. Another tweet states;

‘Congratulations, and thanks Australia and Gold Coast 2018 for the great games...’.

Positive consumer sentiment is reflected in the phrasing ‘great games’, which seemed to spillover to the host destination brand, with ‘congratulations...Australia and Gold Coast’. The findings of tweets indicating positive emotions, such as excitement, about the event:

‘COMMONWEALTH GAMES ARE HERE!! very exciting!!! #GC2018’.

These tweets propose there is a positive spillover between the brand partners. The sports brand associations triggered the most positive spillover in the alliance. The findings suggest a reciprocal spillover between the event and the host destination brands. Consumers perceived the association between the event brand and the host destination brand positively; for example:

‘What a spectacular closing ceremony of the Commonwealth Games 2018 Great job in delivering a fantastic Commonwealth Games GoldCoast Queensland Australia GC2018’.

Positive sentiment towards the event brand seems to transfer to the host destination brand, as shown with this tweet:

‘Congratulations, and Thanks Australia and Gold Coast 2018 for the great games’.

The event received favour by aligning with the host destination brand with positive sentiment such as:

‘what a great way to showcase the Gold Coast to the world - GC2018marathon’.

Negative spillover

Negative spillover effect do not seem to follow the same pattern as positive spillover. Indication in findings of reciprocal spillover effect between the event and host destination brands:

‘so embarrassed to call myself an Aussie after that dismal display to the world.’

The event brand suffered from negative associations due to the absence of the sports brand, with a huge number of tweets expressing negative sentiment:

‘disgrace GC2018 what an absolute disgrace and embarrassment that closing ceremony was’.

The neglect of the sports brand causes negative spillover to the brand image of the event and host destination brands:

‘Disgraceful not showing flag bearers and the athletes’. Additional tweets stated, ‘boring closing ceremony, It’s like a school festival, half of the stadium is empty, only the Northern stand is full. Families with kids and all Athletes are leaving by the halfway mark. Only Aus athletes are left in the stadium. Closing Ceremony GC2018’, and ‘....NO ATHLETES, STADIUM NOT FILLED...’

Neglecting the sports brand negatively affected the equity of the two brands involved in the mega sport event alliance. Negative perceptions of the event brand arising during the closing ceremony seemed to have a negative spillover effect on the host destination brand:

‘#GC2018 #Closing Ceremony Not just the closing ceremony but the Commonwealth Games are over as an ‘event’ they lacked any real interest, cities will avoid hosting them, a charming concept that interests few’

Attitudes towards the event brand were extremely negative with tweets like:

‘Closing Ceremony. So funny. It’s so bad! Everyone is leaving’

Consumers indicated an extremely negative attitude towards the event brand:

‘Proud of the Aussie athletes and their efforts in the Commonwealth Games but the less said about that closing ceremony the better!’

Consumers still appeared to value the sports brand the most in the alliance. This study finds the event organisers’ neglect of the sports brand gave rise to negative associations with the event brand, which transfers to the destination brand. Callum Hawkins, the leading athlete in the men’s marathon, collapsed in the final two miles with no medical aid in sight, and bystanders took photos of the distressed athlete. The untimely response of medical teams and the lack of general support offered to the injured athlete led to consumer outrage. Consumers expressed positive sympathy sentiment towards the athlete with tweets like:

‘hope u are okay’,

representing the majority of tweets with around 145 positive tweets.

Consumers expressed negative sentiment towards the event brand due to the organisers’ slow response to the injured sports athlete:

‘Big applause for the worst organisation ever for the CGF. You only had to look after the athletes and you dumped callhawk broken for more than 2 minutes without assistance while idiots taking photos disgrace’.

This further emphasises consumers perceived the sports brand to be neglected, and consumers attach negative sentiment to the event brand. Consumers felt outraged about the time it took to assist the athlete:

‘15 fucking minutes to get an ambulance to Callhawk after he collapsed in the marathon, absolute disgrace!’

Consumers seem to expect event organisers to be accountable for the sports brand. Consumers harboured negative sentiment towards the event brand, with no accompanying negative spillover to the sports brand:

‘organisers should have an inquiry into this absolute awful treatment of an athlete.’

The behaviour of the organisers seemed to result in a negative spillover to the host destination brand:

‘Aussie crowds should be bloody ashamed of yourself disgusting scenes callhawk heart of lion hope you get well soon..’

The event brand is perceived as money-seeking and shameful in their association with the incident:

‘... Today sports events are no longer about competing and spreading it globally. It’s about dollars...they get greedy...that’s why the Gold Coast was like a ghost town..’ ; and ‘Leading athlete in the marathon clearly in medical distress and no support for over 5 mins for callhawk Shameful moneybeforehealth Commonwealth2018...’

The host destination brand negative associations spillover to the event brand, as evidenced in tweets like:

‘GC2018Marathon Aussie crowds should be bloody ashamed of yourself disgusting scenes Call Hawk heart of lion hope you get well soon.’

The sports brand is so importance even Australians with strong social emotional ties to the host destination brand considers the host responsible for the neglect:

‘Hang your heads in shame Australian commonwealt games organises and that’s coming from an Australian!!!!’

Consumers blame organisers for the lack of care for the sports athlete, as it seemed that the organisers did not value the sports athletes. This finding correlates with sports literature suggests consumers value the high level of sports expertise involved in these events (Sassenberg, 2015). These findings emphasise the importance of sports expertise to the consumer and the brand relevance to organising a mega sport event.

DISCUSSION

The research draws eight conclusions. First, consumers see the sports brand as an independent brand separate from the host and event brand, supporting that a brand is something that creates a certain amount of awareness, reputation and prominence in the marketplace (Arai et al., 2014). This existence of the sports brand and the high positive sentiment of consumers indicate the sport brand to have the highest brand equity in the alliance. This changes all understanding in literature on a brand alliance of a mega sport event. This study collected consumers’ sentiment from a week before the mega sport event, till a week after. Consumers prioritised the sports brand from the beginning till the end of the mega sport event. Understanding a mega sport event as a brand alliance of three is a revelation to hosting a mega sport event. The sports brand is a key part in the alliance and directly affects the host destination and event brands.

The findings are discussed in answering to the objectives of this study, and a developed model that illustrates the spillover effect in a mega sport event. Consumers recognise the three brand partners in the mega sport event alliance as the Gold Coast, Australia as the destination, Commonwealth Games as the event and 18 sports, para-sports teams and athletes as the sports brand (Government, 2018). Tweets indicate the existence of the sports brand. Consumers are extremely highly aware of the sports brand. Even when consumers are not interested in the mega sport event, they still favour the sports brands.

‘as a ‘sports tragic’ it is strange to say but I find myself decidedly non-plussed by the Commonwealth Games only 40 minutes away from home’.

Second, the sports brand received the highest number of positive sentiment tweets (874/1638 tweets). This indicating the extremely positive brand image of the sports brand. These tweets indicate positive consumer sentiment towards the sports brand. Consumers showed excitement when referring to the sports brand athletics:

‘I was too excited to take photos but I’m LOVING being right on the #GC2018Marathon course! In this tweet... ‘exciting watching the triathlon today at the Commonwealth Games #GC2018’.

The strong positive sentiment towards the sports brand may be attributed to the experiential nature of sports. Tweets also show the ‘loving’ sentiment towards the sports brand based on sports’ experiential brand benefits experienced by the consumer. This finding links with research on the experiential nature of the sports brand (Bauer et al., 2008; Gladden & Funk, 2002). Researchers have previously identified numerous benefits associated with sports brand, such as the emotional attachment of fans (Parent et al., 2012).

This study constructs the understanding that brand image of sports positively influences the alliance. Consumers seem to enjoy experiencing the teams and their achievements in sports. The event brand received the second-highest number of positive tweets, and the host destination brand received the lowest number of positive tweets. Consumers also expressed positive sentiments about being able to watch the event and often referred to their emotion about the event. Consumers also expressed positive sentiment toward the host destination brand to the physical attributes of the destination. The remarkably high positive sentiment towards the sports brand must indicate a change in prioritising when organising a mega sport event.

The spillover

Third, positive spillover occurs between brand partners in the mega sport event alliance and increase the brand partners’ brand equity (see Figure 1). This study’s findings correlate with literature showing the positive brand equity of one partner positively influences the equity of the associated partners (Washburn et al., 2004). This finding is bolstered by prior research about the positive effect of the event on the host destination’s brand image (Daniels, Norman, & Henry, 2004; Florek et al., 2008; Fourie & Santana-Gallego, 2011; Green & Chalip, 1998; Kim et al., 2014). Daniels’s (2007) study illustrates the importance of the host destination in a mega sport event. These studies did not incorporate the sports brand in the brand alliance.

Previous studies show the spillover effect on the event brand to the host destination brand but not reciprocal spillover occurring between the brands (Kenyon & Bodet, 2018; Rocha & Fink, 2017; Xing & Chalip, 2006). The findings show consumers express both positive and negative sentiment towards the host destination brand, which transfers to the event brand (see figure 2). This contrasts to the prior understanding of brand image transfer, that image transfer occurs to the host destination rather than the event (Rocha & Fink, 2017).

Fourth, the findings indicate a reciprocal spillover effect occurs between the event and host destination brands. This is an over-all contrast to the body of knowledge on the brand alliance of a mega sport event (Kenyon & Bodet, 2018; Kim et al., 2014; Rocha & Fink, 2017). This finding links with research in branding literature showing a reciprocal spillover effect taking place in a brand alliance (Raufeisen et al., 2019; Smith, 2004). The sports brand is the cause of majority of the positive spillover this adds to understanding of importance of this brand to the alliance. Therefore, this model is proposed(see Figure 2).

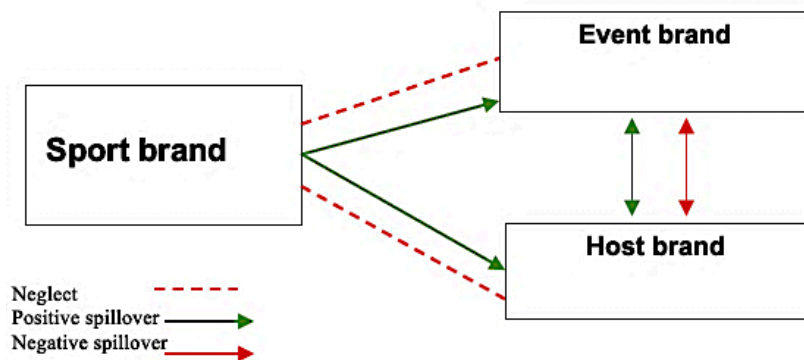


Figure 2. Proposed model of the spillover effect involved in a mega sport event

Fifth, findings of while consumers transfer their admiration of the sports to the event and host destination brands, they also, perhaps more viciously, transfer their disapproval, condemnation and shame regarding negative incidents. With negative information effects attitudes formation greater than positive (Pope et al., 2009). The neglect of the sports brand will lead to a negative alliance and worsening of both the partners brand image, correlating with literature. A brand alliance can be negative leading to a worsening of the brand partners image (Osselaer & Van, 2006) The associated brand partners depend on positive spillover of the sports brand. The event and host destination brands image are directly affected by the sports brand during a mega sport event. The spillover effect, is described as a the process of changing beliefs regarding one entity, which occurs as a result of the evaluations of another associated entity (Raufeisen et al., 2019). In a mega sport event context this study reveals to occur, but not to the sports brand.

Six, contradicting the entire premise of theory on the spillover effect (Osselaer & Van, 2006; Raufeisen et al., 2019). The sports brand is immune to negative spillover. The event and host destination brand do not dilute the sports brand equity. There is no risk involve for the sports brand from the alliance. There is significant risk to the brand partners in neglecting the sports brand. Kenyon and Bodet (2018) recommend that future research should explore both the domestic and international perceptions of a mega spot event, to determine the spillover effect that occurs in a mega sport event. The qualitative approach to analysis the large twitter data that included international consumers means this study can draw concrete conclusion. That if errors narrated in this study is repeated in future mega sport events the event and host destination brands will suffer similar consequences.

Lastly, the spillover effect occurring in a mega sport event alliance can be investigated more effectively when the sports brand is incorporated. The event's brand image can be damaged through negative associations stemming from neglect of the sports brands, which spillovers to the host destination brand. Findings in this study suggests the sports brand generate a spillover effect in a mega sport event alliance. The event brand image is implicated in negative associations that arise during the hosting of a mega sport event.

Studies by Kenyon and Bodet (2018) and Li and Kaplanidou (2013) state that the pre-existing reputation and the image of the host destination brand do not change during a mega sport eventing alliance. Xing and Chalip (2006) argued in the brand alliance of a mega sport event that the destination benefits because the desirable aspects of the event brand transfer to the destination brand. This study concurs with the finding that the host destination brand can be enhanced. The host destination brand can also be thoroughly damaged through hosting a mega sport event. The event and host destination suffer through negative reciprocal spillover:

‘Fuming with GC2018 organisers!’

Also seen in tweets like:

‘CommonwealthGames2018 GoldCoast2018 ought to be ashamed!!’

This finding concurs with literature showing spillover effects may occur both ways—in the form of positive and negative spillover (Raufelsen et al. 2019). This is a new finding in the brand alliance of a mega sport event. These two brands seem to be in close alignment and the spillover effect happens incredible easily between these brand partners. The event brand can be tarnished and changed, with consumers using terms such as ‘organisers’ to direct their negative attitudes towards the brand. The spillover effect occurs to the host destination’s brand, but the sports brand remained unchanged. Negative attitudes about the sports brand were only generated when the brands created its own negative associations, regarding gender equality.

Consequentially, organisers of mega sport events need to appreciate the sports brand importance to customers. It seems the brand alliance of a mega sport event relies on the image of the sports brand to be perceived successful by consumers. The sports brand seems to enter the alliance with a unique and fancied brand image, and the associated brand partners rely on the sports brand to increase their brand equity.

LIMITATION

This study major limitations are: first, the sentiment of consumers was collected on one platform, meaning this study is limited to twitter users. Second, there is limited knowledge to be gained of the demographic information of consumers using social media mining. The enhancement of the sports brand could not be accurately investigated with this method.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Since event is a multi-sport event, it explains why the event brand is not closely aligned with the sports brand. This might be different in a mega sport, single sport event, such as a World Cup. There may be more positive spillover occurrence between the event and sport brands in that alliance rather than a multi-sport event such as the Commonwealth Games. Further studies are needed into the gap on brand equity effect of the event and sport brand in mega sport event. The positive spillover on the sports brand needs to investigate further, does the event and host destination increase the sports brand equity. Mega sport event is associated with various important sponsor brands. Investigating all associations would go beyond the scope of this study and may be the subject of future research.

CONCLUSION

This study adds knowledge to literature on mega sport events by highlighting the importance of the sports brand. The importance and value of the sport athlete (Bauer et al., 2008; Gladden & Funk 2002; Sassenberg, 2015; Arai et al., 2014). The organisers of mega sport events should be aware of the highly experiential nature of the sport/s brand, and its importance to the consumer. Negative spillover occurs between the event and host destination for neglecting the sports brand, so precautions actions is needed by these brands to avoid this happening.

Overall, the findings highlight the positive consumer perceptions of the brands involved in a mega sport event. Neglecting the sports brand triggered negative associations and emotional responses to the event and host destination brands. For the event and host

destination brands, the spillover effect occurred in both directions, which highlights the importance of avoiding negative spillover effects. These findings add to the body of knowledge on cobranding by indicating that the alliance during a mega sport event consists of three brands. The event brands do suffer spillover effect in the brand alliance. Negative associations do transfer to its brand image in contradiction to prior research (Kenyon & Bodet, 2018; Rocha & Fink, 2017; Xing & Chalip, 2006). This research focus from a holistic perspective led to this discovery. This study proves the importance of the sports brand to consumers, and when it is not neglected, the event and host destination can build their brand image.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study proves that a mega sport event impacts consumers' perspective of the brand partners involved in the alliance. Furthermore, this influence may be most pronounced when the brand partners neglect the sports brand. Failing to understand the importance of the sports brand in a mega sport event alliance may have negative effects on the associated brand partners. The high priority consumers place on the sports brand may be due to the bias toward the sports brand (Arai et al., 2014). It seems that the sports brand partner is perceived by consumers as vital in hosting a mega sport event (Arai et al., 2014). The event brand and host destination brand need to value the sports brand in order to increase their brand equity. The findings link with research that indicates consumers form positive associations with brands that associate with a sports brand, such as high levels of emotional attachment and identification (Arai, Ko, & Kaplanidou, 2013; Gladden & Funk, 2001; Gladden & Funk, 2002; Ross et al., 2006).

5.1.1.1 *Research objective 1*

Research objective 1 aims to identify the brand partners that consumers perceive to be involved in a mega sport event alliance. Results suggest that consumers perceive three brands in the mega sport event alliance: the event, the host destination and the sports brands. However, the literature skirts around the idea of the event as a separate brand, referring to mega sport events such as the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup as powerful 'brand elements.' Studies investigate the brands involved in a mega sport event as including only two brand partners: the destination brand and the event brand (Kim et al., 2014; Kotler & Gertner, 2002). The findings also concur with a study that shows event image is a cumulative interpretation of associations attributed to the event by consumers (Gwinner, 1997) that links to the physical, emotional, social, organisational and environmental facets of the event (Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010; Parent et al., 2012). The event can be considered as a brand in itself. This study concurs that for organisers to effectively build a brand for their event, organisers need to be aware of factors likely to impact the brand creation process (Parent et al., 2012).

This study assumes that a high number of tweets represents a high level of brand awareness, as individuals only tweet about a brand that they are aware of. The number of tweets shows the event and sports brands enjoyed the highest level of brand awareness. The total number of tweets referring to the event brand was 1283, the host destination brand 299, and the sports brands 965. This findings links with sports research that shows awareness of sports team brands is already high (Bauer et al., 2008; Gladden & Funk, 1998). This study challenges the idea of the brand alliance of a mega sport event. As literature does not see the sports brand as part of the co-branding in the brand alliance of a mega sport event (Florek et al., 2008; Gursoy et al., 2011; Kaplanidou et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2014; Lorde et al., 2011).

5.1.1.2 *Research objective 2*

Research objective 2 investigates consumer sentiment towards the brand partners that consumers perceive to be involved in the mega sport event alliance. Results indicate that consumers express a positive sentiment towards the sports brand. Data analysis of the tweets indicated 874 tweets expressed positive sentiment about the sports, with the event brand receiving a total number of 595 tweets and the host destination receiving a total of 169 tweets. Of the three brands, the sports brand received 53% of tweets. The numerous positive tweets relating to the sports brand further confirm the positive brand image of the sports. This finding links with sports research that shows the sports team brand is responsible for high

levels of brand equity (Bauer et al., 2008; Gladden & Funk, 2002). Considering that brand equity encompasses the concepts of brand awareness and brand image (Keller, 1993), it is likely that the sports brand experiences a high level of brand equity in a mega sport event alliance.

The lesser role of the host destination and event brands is also evident in the small number of positive tweets relating to the host destination and the event brand partners. The findings indicate the host destination brand received the least number of positive and negative tweets; the host destination seems to be a tagged-on brand in the tweets as a hashtag. Mostly, tweets expressing positive sentiment towards the host destination brand were linked with the sports brand in the following format: GoldCoast2018 and gc2018[SPORTNAME], such as 'gc2018marathon or gc2018tabletennis'. Positive sentiment was expressed directly towards the sports and event brand partners, and consumers used words like 'exciting'. However, the positive sentiment expressed towards the host destination brand was always linked to the event or sports brand partners. Consumers expressed the most positive sentiment to the sports brand using phrases like 'loving the 7s rugby and the excellent sports on show' in tweets. The event is referred to in tweets by way of hashtags, such as CommGames, CWG2018 and commonwealthgames2018, often simultaneously referencing brand partners, including the sports brand, like Rugby7s, and the host destination brand, for example, GC2018. In contrast, most of the tweets expressing negative sentiment, referred to both the event brand and host destination brand partners in a tweet, referred to as 'organisers', indicating the perceived closely linked ties between these brand partners.

595 tweets expressed negative sentiment towards the event brand, and 169 tweets expressed negative sentiment towards the destination brand, while the sports brand received 91 negative tweets. Negative sentiment towards a brand partner may result in lower levels of brand equity, diluting the brand equity levels of the associated brand partners (Washburn et al., 2004). It is, therefore, tweets expressing negative sentiment express negative attitude towards the brand impacted on the event and host destination brands image.

This finding contradicts the literature on mega sport events that indicates the event brand functions as the salient brand in hosting a mega sport event, and the event brand's image is responsible for the spillover and strengthening of the host destination brand (Kim et al., 2014). Studies further show that indicate that the event image is responsible for an increase in consumers' visit intentions to a host destination and purchase intentions of products by the host destination (Kim et al., 2014). These studies do not recognise the importance of the sports brand as a partner in the mega sport event alliance. The sports brand is the salient brand in the brand alliance. This study argues that the event brand depends on the brand equity of the sports brand, which will ultimately spillover to the event and host destination brand partners.

The study's findings indicate the overall pitfalls of co-branding strategies for a mega sport event—unlike prior studies on consumer-based brand equity (Lim & Weaver, 2014), that focus on the negative or positive influences on only two of the brand partners: the host destination and event brands. The sports brand has to be front and centre to decisions making on what is staged and how in the closing and opening ceremonies a mega sport event. Consumers expressed serious disapproval for the event brand when the sports brand is not exhibited, presented or include heavily during these ceremonies. These findings are discussed further in the following section.

5.1.1.3 Research objective 3

Research objective 3 investigates the spillover effect occurring between the brand partners that consumers perceive to be involved in the mega sport event alliance. The spillover

phenomenon was observed when a tweet expressed sentiment towards two or more brand partners in one comment. Results indicate that spillover occurred between the brand partners in the mega sport event alliance. This research contradicts theory that shows brand spillover only occurs between two brands—that brand transfer theory is a process of transference of the positive image between two brands (McCracken, 1989). The tweets indicating consumer perceptions regarding two or more brand partners point to a spillover between the host destination, event and sports brand partners. It seems that the mega sport event alliance resulted in positive and negative spillover between the brand partners.

Positive spillover resulted mostly from the presence of the sports brand in the mega sport event alliance. For example, this positive spillover effect was evident in tweets such as: ‘Love waking up on a Saturday morning, putting on the rugby on tv with my breakfast and supporting the likes of Malaysia and Uganda! Commonwealthgames2018; GC2018 Rugby7s’, and ‘Yayyy...Gold run of India weightlifting team; GC2018Weightlifting; and, GC2018 venkatrahulragala’. This finding links with research that shows positive brand equity of one partner improves the equity of the associated partners (Richards & Wilson, 2004; Washburn et al., 2004). This finding is further supported by sponsorship research that indicates that aligning a sponsor brand image with a sports celebrity brand image resulted in positive spillover from the sports brand to the sponsored brand (McCracken, 1989). Based on the results, it is possible that a sports brand enters into a mega sport event alliance with an already attained brand image, and the associated brand partners rely on the sports brand to increase their brand equity levels.

Negative spillover resulted mostly from neglect of the sports brand. The findings show a negative spillover effect occurring between the event and host destination brands. This is evident in a tweet stating, ‘I’ve never yelled so much at a TV for someone to help a human in distress as I have watching the men’s marathon #commonwealth2018 #mensmarathon #gc2018marathon’. It is obvious that the spillover effect can be reciprocal, resulting in the host destination and event brands affecting each simultaneously. This finding is linked with research that indicates that brands have a reciprocal effect on each other during the spillover process (Votola & Unnava, 2006). The closing ceremony highlighted consumers’ strong sentiment towards the sports brand. Consumers hated that organisers did not give proper recognition to the sports athletes. The data showed a large number of tweets indicating consumer frustration with organisers for not prioritising the sports brand in the closing ceremony.

A major finding in this study was that the sports brand might not trigger a negative spillover to the associated brand partners. When the sports brand was perceived in a negative light, there were no tweets suggesting a negative spillover effect on the associated brand partners in the mega sport event alliance. For example, when a transgender male competed in the female category in weightlifting, a high number of tweets expressing negative sentiment towards the sports brand was generated. Consumers perceived this to be unfair and in opposition to gender equality in sport. Interestingly, the negative sentiment regarding the weightlifting athlete did not seem to spillover to the event and/or the host destination brands. Some tweets indicated that the athlete being allowed to compete was a big problem. However, all negative tweets were directed solely towards the sports brand, with no negative reference to the event and host destination brand partners.

In summary, a mega sport event may result in either a win-win strategy, a lose-lose strategy or a lose-win strategy. That is, in spite of current literature, a co-branding strategy does not always result in a win-win situation (Besharat, 2010). In a mega sport event, the event and destination brands are equally impacted, with both negative and positive consequences for the partners of the mega sport event alliance. The direct negative sentiment towards the event brand transfers to the host destination brand and vice versa. The major

finding of this thesis was the prominence of the sports brand in the win-win strategy, and the win-lose that occurs when the sports brand was neglected by the event and host destination brand partners. It is evident that the event and host destination partners need to leverage consumers' intense sports brand awareness and loyalty and the sports brand's positive image.

Organisers of mega sport events have to understand the importance of the sports brand in a mega sport event alliance. The overall brand equity of the mega sport event alliance can be significantly increased by positive consumer sentiment. This study suggests the brand alliance that exists during a mega sport event represents a pyramid style strategy, where the sports brand is on top and is supported by the host destination and event brand partners. The prioritisation of the sports brand in the co-branding strategy will result in a win-win for the associated brand partners in the mega sport event alliance.

Brand attitudes directly influence brand image (Faircloth et al., 2001), and the attitude of consumers is overwhelmingly positive and high for the sports brand. The configuration of the brand associations that consumers have in their minds strongly suggests that consumers hold the sports brand in the highest regard, higher than the event and host destination. The characterisation of a rich positive brand image is emphasised as individual nodes that are well-connected and quickly activate each other. The brand takes a clear differentiated position in consumers' mind and create unique associations that are consistently positive and emotional (Teichert & Schöntag, 2010). The sports brand is successful, because consumers differentiate the brands from the other brand partners. The sports brand thus has unique and extremely positive associations in the node networks in consumers mind, while the event and host destination brands are less differentiating, positive and emotional.

This study's findings indicate that negative incidents that occur during the mega sport event had a direct negative effect on the brand image of the event and host destination brand. All incidents that consumers responded to negatively was towards sports brands being neglected or not periodised in hosting a mega sport event. The micro-outcome of mega sport event, particularly on the brands in the alliance, is based on how the sports brand is utilised, supported and prioritised in the staging of the event. Consumers' association networks often contain more than one brand (Henderson et al., 1998). In mega sport event literature did not consider the sports brand to a partner node in the association network with the event and host destination brands. Current literature does not consider the event and host destination brand close aligned in consumers' minds (Kenyon & Bodet, 2018), while this study has made clear that consumers perceive a mega sport event, the event and host destination brands as closely aligned.

The closer the distance these is between nodes the closer the item is connect together for one item produce a spread of activation to other items that are closely connected in consumers' minds (Henderson et al., 1998). The event and host destination brand nodes are close to each other in the alliance, since these nodes are close together in the consumers' minds. The brand management strategy for these brands must be altered to avoid negative associations, since consumer perceptions of the sports brand tend not be prioritised in decision-making during a mega sport event. Findings prove that consumers seem to hold the event and host destination brands responsible for the sports brand being affected in the brand alliance during the staging of a mega sport event.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The research objectives for this thesis, and research paper are:

RO1: To investigate the brand partners that consumers perceive to be involved in the mega sport event alliance.

RO2: To investigate consumer sentiment towards the brand partners that consumers perceive to be involved in the mega sport event alliance.

RO3: To investigate the spillover effect between the brand partners that consumers perceive to be involved in the mega sport event alliance.

With respect to RO1, the following brands were recognised and perceived by consumers to be part of the mega sport event.

- Event brand
- Host destination brand
- Sports brand

Based on the thesis research, consumers distinguish these three brands as separate entities in a mega sport event alliance.

With respect to RO2, the research identified that the sports brand enjoys very positive consumer sentiment, with numerous positive tweets highlighting the significance of the brand to consumers. With over 874 positive tweets, the sports brand was the subject of the highest number of positive tweets. With 91 negative tweets about the brand, it also attracted the lowest negative sentiment from consumers compared to the event and host destination brands. The event brand had the most negative tweets with 688 tweets, and the second-highest number of positive tweets at 595. The host destination brand had the least overall positive and negative tweets according to the analysis.

With respect to RO3, the research added to the understanding of the spillover effect by demonstrating the value consumers place on the sports brand in a pyramid type of hierarchy. This thesis demonstrates the spillover in a mega sport event between brand partners. The research opens up new avenues of strategy management by conceptualising the spillover effect and how consumers perceive brand associations. Finally, the research paper in the thesis developed a model for understanding the spillover process in the alliance.

6.1 Limitations of the thesis

The most significant limitation of this thesis is the focus on one specific mega sport event, namely, the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games. The thesis attends to questions about consumers' perceptions of mega sport events that prior research did not adequately explore. However, because of the nature of social media data mining, the study was not able to examine the demographic characteristics of participants. Understanding consumer reasoning behind their sentiment towards the brands and perceptions about incidents cannot be investigated in detail with social media mining.

Furthermore, consumers of single-sport mega-events may have differing perceptions because the event brand and sports brand may be more closely aligned. Whilst this study was limited by its focus on one mega event, it does not negate the findings of the thesis. In

addition, the commitment levels of sports consumers were neither evident in the data. The commitment levels of consumers were previously found to influence their perceptions of the image of associated brand partners.

6.2 Future research opportunities on mega sport events

Throughout this thesis, a number of opportunities for future research have been presented, for example:

- Broader exploration into co-branding strategies for mega sport events in relation to consumer awareness and sentiments about the brand alliance and the associated brand partners
- Research into the reasoning and motivation to understanding consumers holding the event and host destination brands responsible for the sports brand
- Further investigation is needed to find the attributes and benefits consumers constitutes as part of the sports brand and the event brand in a mega sport event
- Further investigation into the two most vulnerable brands, the event and host destination brands, in managing the staging of the mega event
- New and more detailed investigations into the associations between the event and host destination brands responsible for the hosting of a mega sport event
- Research into mega sport events may also focus on single-sport events such as the FIFA World Cup.
- Empirical studies into how commitment to a sports brand influences consumer perceptions of a mega sport event alliance may add to the current body of knowledge on consumer behaviour in sport.

6.3 Final remarks

This thesis addresses the scarcity of co-branding strategy research exploring the brand alliances of mega sport events such as the Commonwealth Games. The study provided an in-depth examination of consumers' perceptions of a mega sport event to discover the value attached to the brands in the alliance. The thesis examined consumer sentiment about the brands through social media mining on Twitter during, before and after the event. This thesis conceptualised the spillover effect occurring between brands during a mega sport event.

This thesis encourages mega sport event organisers to focus on the equity of the brand partners in an alliance and to prioritise the sports brand as an important partner in the alliance. The importance of the sports brand partner was highlighted by investigating and identifying social media data patterns based on grounded theory research showing consumer sentiment expressed through tweets on social media. Finally, the thesis demonstrates the ability of the sports brand to influence consumer perceptions of other brands in the mega sport event alliance. This has significant implications for how brand images are formed in the mind of consumers during the hosting of a mega sport event. The vulnerability of the brand partners involved in hosting and staging a mega sport event was evident in the current study.

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