

Conceptual and Semantic Analysis in Ambush Marketing Utilizing LEXIMANCER Software Tool

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Abstract

Ambush marketing, which refers to a variety of activities undertaken by rivals of the official sponsor of an event or an activity etc that could confuse the public as to the real sponsor, has become a controversial topic in both academic and industrial realms. This study utilizes conceptual and semantic analysis software called LEXIMANCER to explore the essential concepts of ambush marketing, to understand general conceptualization framework of the subject ambush marketing, and to systematically compare differing perceptions from academic and industrial fields. The results indicate that (1) academic and industrial groups have different conceptualization contents, and the findings contest academic common belief that industry always depreciates this practice (Murphy, 1998); (2) academic views are trying to give statements of their opinions, while industrial views tend to raise questions and problems; (3) academic researchers consider more about “*decision*”, “*issue*”, “*results*”, “*future*”, “*respondent*”, and “*effects*”; while industrial managers concern more about “*director*”, “*ad*”, “*link*”, “*TV*”, “*people*”, “*athletes*”, and “*campaign*”.

Keywords: LEXIMANCER, ambush marketing, content analysis

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Introduction

Although sponsorship has become an important marketing tool (Sponsorship Research International, 2000; IEG, 2007; Stotlar, 2004), a counter-strategy which is named *parasitic* or *ambush marketing* is developed increasingly prevalently in the field of sponsorship. As an illustration, the Fuji versus Kodak case in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics is probably the most famous case of ambush marketing. Fuji was an official sponsor of the Olympics, while one of its main competitors, Kodak, sponsored ABG television's broadcasts of the games and became the “official film” supplier to the U.S. track team, through which Kodak confused consumers who identified Kodak as the sponsor of the Olympics instead of Fuji (Payne, 1991).

Since developed, the topic of ambush marketing has captured attentions from both academic researchers and industrial managers. First, the debate between whether ambushing is a creative tactic or an unethical intrigue never stops (O’Sullivan and Murphy, 1998; Townley and Harrington, 1998; McKelvey and Grady, 2004; Payne, 1998; Kent and Campbell, 2007). From the industrial perspective, how people think about ambush marketing mainly depends on who they are. Accordingly, the official sponsors of an event will accuse this practice, while their competitors who are not sponsors welcome this practice as a powerful marketing weapon. Besides, the event owners will do everything possible to protect their sponsors from ambush marketing in order to hold the sponsorship relationships. For instance, the IOC has a cutting-edge anti-ambush program and has introduced measures to protect its position since the Fuji versus Kodak case in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics (Payne, 1991).

Based on the discussion, some questions arise: How do academic researchers and industrial managers understand ambush marketing based on concept construction? Do academic researchers perceive the same as industrial managers? If not, how and why do they think differently? Therefore, this article has two purposes: one is to understand the research overview of the subject *ambush marketing*, based on a conceptual analysis on the most leading published marketing articles; the other is to explore the essential concepts of ambush marketing and to use semantic analysis to systematically compare differing perceptions from academic and industrial fields. The article utilizes *LEXIMANCER* software tool to achieve the two different goals.

Literature Review

Meenaghan (1998a) defines *parasitic* or *ambush marketing* as marketing communication that “involves a company seeking to associate with an event without making payment to the event owner and often in direct conflict with a competitor who is a legitimate and paying sponsor” (Kent and Campbell, 2007). Sandier and Shani (1989) defines ambush marketing as marketing practice by which “companies try to create the perception that they are associated with an event without actually being a sponsor”. This practice as well reduces the effectiveness of the sponsor’s communications while undermining the quality and value of the sponsorship opportunity from the event owner (Meenaghan, 1998a).

Cornwell and Maignan (1998) state that, although the practice of ambush marketing was considered suspicious or even illegitimate, it has involved to an acceptable marketing strategy over the years. However, the ethical and legal issues of ambush marketing have been discussed all through, and the debate never stops. O'Sullivan and Murphy (1998) indicate four ethical perspectives including utilitarianism (which emphasizes on the consequences), duty-based ethics (which emphasizes on the intentions of the decision maker), stakeholder analysis (which examines the impact of a decision upon a wide range of individuals or groups), and virtue ethics (which places the focus on the person or organization and not on the decision) can provide a framework for the debate on the ethics of ambush marketing.

However, in practice, it would be unfair to accuse a company according to the consequences of coincidental ambushing if there is no real intention, while on the other hand whether there is real intention of ambushing cannot usually be perceived. Townley, Harrington and Couchman (1998) highlight the dangers posed by ambush marketing and try to develop a strategy to prevent the impact of ambush marketing by controlling the intellectual property, the event environment, and the event partners. However, they as well admit the limitation the laws of many jurisdictions in protecting sponsors' benefits.

Besides legal and ethical issues related to ambush marketing, the majority of previous ambush marketing research in the marketing literature has as well focused on the effectiveness of ambush marketing and consumer awareness of ambush marketing (Kent and Campbell, 2007). McDaniel and Kinney (1998) design an experimental manipulation to find out that ambushing can be effective and that consumers' recall of actual sponsors is fleeting, as well as that ambushers can benefit from purchasing media, which are already perceived and accepted by industries. It is as well found that consumers usually have little knowledge or interest in which company is the official sponsor and which is ambushers (Shani and Sandier, 1998; Lyberger and McCarthy, 2001).

In practice, stakeholders of events and other entities concern more on how to prevent the impact of ambush marketing. The International Olympic Committee took actions such as cybersquatting domain names including all relevant words incorporating the Olympic Games and lawsuit to actions which violate the sponsor relationships (McKelvey and Grady, 2004; Payne, 1998). However, there are still loopholes, such as sponsoring athletes and thematic advertising creating associations by using controversial colours and characters, which are available to those companies that intend to engage in ambush marketing tactics (McKelvey and Grady, 2004).

In summary, there seems to be deviation between researchers' and stakeholders' foci on ambush marketing: researchers tend to find out the nature of ambush marketing and the effectiveness of different ambushing tactics, while stakeholders tend to discuss how to prevent or react to this sort of actions. And it is very important for marketers to learn what researchers have found in ambush marketing to either design relevant strategies or better react to the impact of it; as well it is benefit for researchers to learn what issues marketers are concerning and what language they are using in the content of ambush marketing.

Methodology

LEXIMANCER is a text analytics tool that can be used to analyse the content of collections of textual documents and to display the extracted information visually. It provides a means of quantifying and displaying the conceptual structure of a document set, and a means of using this information to explore interesting conceptual features (*LEXIMANCER Manual*, 2008).

The study selects two different groups of articles (academic and industrial), and analyses them using *LEXIMANCER* software tool. A database based article searching is utilized. Thirty (30) academic articles (scholarly journals, including peer-reviewed) and fifty-five (55) industrial articles (from magazines, trade publications, and newspapers) are found indicating the keyword as “ambush marketing” in the databases of *EBSCO*, *JSTOR*, and *ProQuest*. The methodological steps are proposed as follow: pre-test part (including data sources specification, data collection procedure, and data usability analysis); setting adjusting part (concepts merging and deleting); and basic results analysis (concepts map, thematic summary, concepts ranking etc).

Results and Data Analysis

The first part of this study is to understand the evolvement and general research framework of the subject ambush marketing, and to find out relationships between essential concepts in this subject. Therefore the first project utilizing *LEXIMANCER* software tool is run under the document set of the 30 academic articles. The concept map with themes of ambush marketing research is shown in Figure 1.

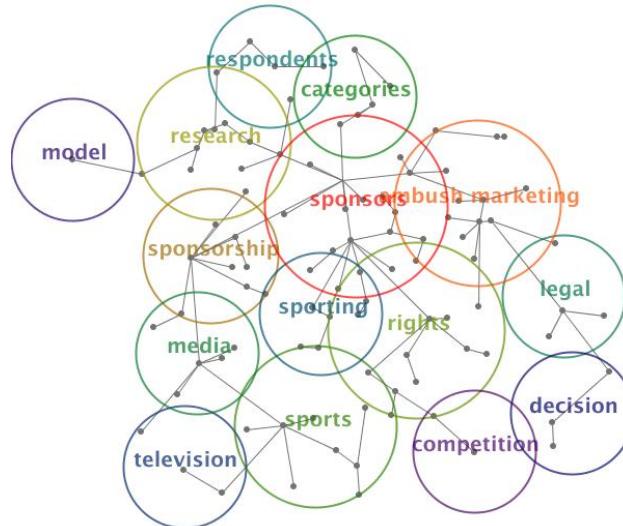


Figure 1: Thematic Map of Ambush Marketing Research

From the summary generated by *LEXIMANCER*, the top five themes in the selected literature of ambush marketing are “*sponsors*” (100%), “*ambush marketing*” (98%), “*sponsorship*” (39%), “*research*” (32%) and “*rights*” (28%), indicating that key targets of ambush marketing research are “*sponsors*” and key issue discussed is “*rights*”. As indicated in the summary, *sports*, *categories*, *media* and *legal issues* are also very important in this research realm. From the concepts ranking, the name-like concepts ranking illustrates that “*Olympic*” (Count 133; Relevance 10%), “*Meenaghan*” (99; 7%), “*IOC*” (96; 7%) and “*NFL*” (58; 4%) are top four ranked names, which indicates that research in these articles mostly focus on ambush marketing issues in Olympic, while some focus on NFL. The rank also indicates that Meenaghan is the most referred researcher, which suggests Meenaghan’s eminence in ambush marketing research. The Word-like concepts ranking shows that, besides the absolute essential concepts in ambush marketing such as “*sponsorship*” (1375; 100%), “*sponsors*” (1246; 91%), “*ambush marketing*” (1025; 75%), “*ambush*” (976; 71%), “*marketing*” (916; 67%) and “*event*” (852; 62%), there are also several important concepts in research realm such as “*official*” (437; 32%), “*consumers*” (413; 30%), “*sports*” (384; 28%), “*advertising*”

(368; 27%), “rights” (314; 23%), “association” (312; 23%), “companies” (310; 23%), “activity” (301; 22%) and “brand” (286; 21%).

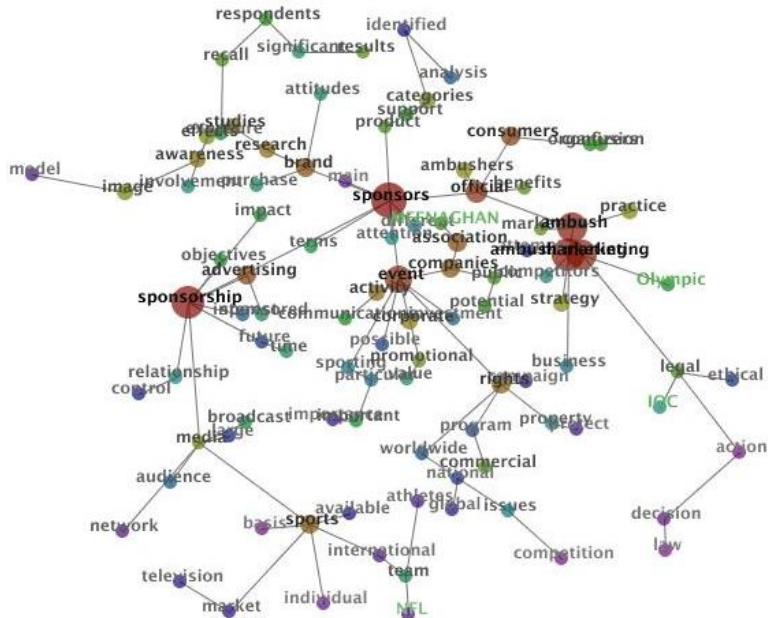


Figure 2: Academic Concept Map in Ambush Marketing

Figure 2 summarizes relationships between each pair of concepts that represent words that are used in association with each other. Adjacency indicates that two concepts are usually connected in similar conceptual contexts, which means the same text is often coded as both of these concepts, e.g. co-occurrence. For instance, the concepts “awareness” and “image” and “purchase”, which are close to each other, are usually used together.

The second part of this study is to use semantic analysis to systematically compare differing perceptions from academic and industrial fields. Therefore the second project utilizing *LEXIMANCER* software tool is run under the document set of both folders including the 30 academic articles and the 55 industrial articles.

Figure 3 is shown to illustrate an overview of the cognitive structure and the relationship between academic research and industry regarding ambush marketing. The two tag classes, which represent individually academic and industrial points of view, are positioned around the edges of the map. The two groups are quite far away from each another, which indicates that the two groups have different conceptualization content. According to the findings, academic and industrial beliefs are the same in most cases. For instance, academic and industrial definitions of ambush marketing are almost the same, except that in the industrial definition it is emphasized that “*when planned and implemented carefully, is not illegal and can be an effective promotional strategy*”. This contests academic common belief that industry always depreciates this practice (Murphy, 1998). There is also divergence between academic and industrial views. For example, academic views sponsorship as a multifunctional practice including communication instrument and commercial investment, while industry views as “*financial investments*”. Another interesting phenomenon is that, academic views are trying to give statements of their opinions, while industrial views tend to raise questions and problems. For instance, when discussing advertising, the academic makes a judgment of “*the section on minimizing damage caused by ambushing*”; meanwhile, the industry states that the government’s practice will be “*following pressure from the advertising industry*”.

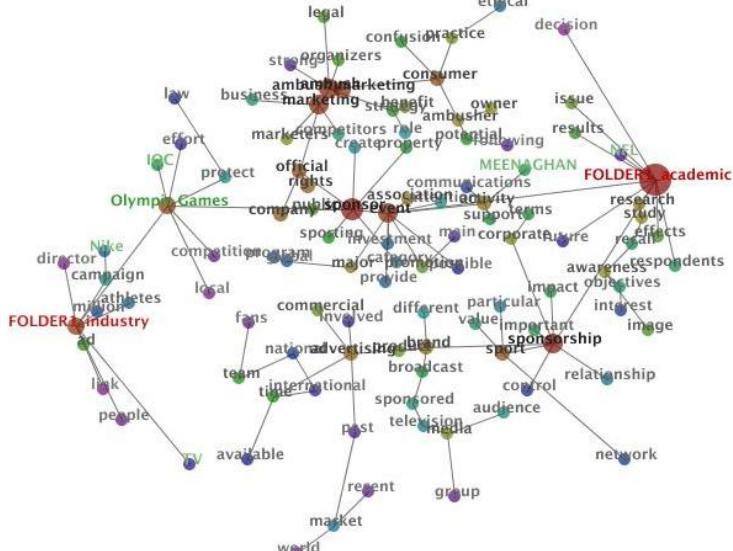


Figure 3: Concept Map from Academic and Industrial Perspectives

In addition, co-occurrence is used to describe the relationship between two concepts that are connected in similar conceptual contexts. “Confusion” and “organizers” are almost closer than any other two concepts on the map, however, when traced to the texts where show the co-occurrence, the two concepts co-occur in 29 places, 27 of which are in the same article, while one of the other two appears in the same author’s article. “Legal” and “ethical” co-occur in 9 articles, published from 1996 to 2007. This phenomenon suggests that legal and ethical issues related to ambush marketing remain in serious attention.

Discussion and Implications

From the comparison of perceptions from academic and industrial fields, academic views are trying to give statements of their opinions, while industrial views tend to raise questions and problems. For instance, when discussing advertising, the academic makes a judgment of “*the section on minimizing damage caused by ambushing*”; meanwhile, the industry states that the government’s practice will be “*following pressure from the advertising industry*”.

In summary, the study indicates that academic researchers consider more about “*decision*”, “*issue*”, “*results*”, “*future*”, “*respondent*”, and “*effects*”; while industrial managers concern more about “*director*”, “*ad*”, “*link*”, “*TV*”, “*people*”, “*athletes*”, and “*campaign*”. The findings further demonstrates although academic researchers do their research about ambush marketing mostly through discussing the Olympics, “*Olympic Games*” is more an industrial topic in fact. Accordingly, the results show academic researchers and industrial managers think in different principles and act in different ways on the same issues.

This article provides some insights into the different foci of both academic researchers and industrial manager on the topic of ambush marketing. Although both sides hold similar views on the issue, they are out of different considerations. This can provide some help to both academic and industry to understand each other due to their different starting points in studying this issue.

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