

An Examination of the Motivations for Sponsorship of Gay Games IX

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Abstract

Sport sponsorship has evolved into a significant component of the sport marketing mix. While sport sponsorship has emerged as a substantial topic in the marketing and management literature, there is minimal research investigating the growth and prevalence of sponsorship for amateur based sporting events, particularly sporting events which attract predominantly lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered participants. Therefore, this exploratory case study set out to examine the motivations of the sponsors of the 2014 Gay Games, in an effort to understand why companies chose to affiliate with the LGBT amateur sporting mega-event. Site observations, document collection and analysis, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 sponsorship decision-makers representing 13 companies in order to investigate reasons which led organizations to enter into sponsorship agreements. Findings indicated that motivations for sponsorship included support for an event with aligned mission and values, a desire to support the northeast Ohio community, and a personal connection to the LGBT community.

Keywords: Gay Games, motivations, sponsorship, case study

1. Introduction

Sponsorship of sport properties has grown into a multi-billion-dollar component of business (IEG, 2017) and a necessary revenue stream for the sport and recreation industry (Stotlar, 2013). Mullen, Hardy, and Sutton (2000) define sponsorship as “the acquisition of rights to affiliate or directly associate with a product or event for the purpose of deriving benefits related to that affiliation or association” (p. 254). The origins of sport sponsorship are traced to 65 BC, when gladiatorial games were financed to spur political agendas (Swaddling, 1999). The 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles offered sponsorship opportunities which included the right to use the Olympic logos and terminology in advertising and promotions; that decision has been credited as a watershed moment for sponsorship (Lough, 2000; Mullen, Hardy, & Sutton, 2000).

Throughout the evolution of sport sponsorship, businesses have been forced to face certain economic realities and carefully consider the partnerships into which they enter. The ability to understand the decision-making process as it applies to sponsorship selection can allow practitioners and sport managers to maximize the effectiveness of their sponsorship programs. While the literature base on sport sponsorship has grown significantly in the past two decades, there is a void of research centering on sponsorship of amateur sport and particularly the growing segment of LGBT focused sport. The purpose of this study was to ascertain the motivations for organizational support and partnership with the ninth installment of the Gay Games. The marginalization and social invisibility experienced by non-heterosexual athletes was the chief factor for Dr. Tom Waddell, a member of the 1968 United States Olympic Team, to create the Gay Games. For Waddell, it was important to create a space where individuals could participate in a supportive sport environment without concern for prejudice and discrimination (Krane, Barber, and McClung, 2002). The 2014 edition of the international LGBT sporting mega-event, held in Cleveland, Ohio, welcomed 30,000 participants and visitors, over 3000 volunteers, and featured 230 sponsorship agreements (Cleveland Foundation, 2014).

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Like many other amateur and recreational sport entities, LGBT focused sport properties and their organizers rely on sponsorship income as a significant component of the event's operating budget. This exploratory case study was guided by the following research question: Why did companies choose to engage in sponsorship of Gay Games IX?

Because of the emergence and evolution of sponsorships across various levels of sport, the economic and cultural impact of gay sporting mega-events, and the existing gap in the literature, this study constitutes a significant addition to the current literature on sport sponsorship. Additionally, because of the growth of LGBT sporting events and the increasing financial needs of executing those events, an understanding of sponsor motivations is a valuable asset to practitioners and future organizers of the Gay Games as well as other LGBT focused sporting events.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Sport Sponsorship

Sponsorship has been defined numerous ways throughout the literature. Meenaghan (1984) offers a commonly employed definition: "Sponsorship can be regarded as the provision of assistance either financial or in-kind to an activity by a commercial organization for the purpose of achieving commercial objectives" (p. 9). In its earliest forms, sponsorship was traditionally classified as a method of public relations (Meenaghan, 1984; Lough & Irwin, 2001; Wilkinson, 1994). However, a shift from philanthropically driven sponsorships to business driven objectives elevated sponsorship into a role as a self-named, essential component of the promotion plans of many organizations (Kitchen & DePelsmacker, 2004).

Similarly, sport sponsorship has been defined a variety of ways in the literature. Sandler and Shani (1993) offer the following commonly cited definition for sport sponsorship: "Sport sponsorship is the provision of resources by an organization directly to an event or activity in exchange for a direct association to the event or activity" (p.9). The end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st century saw substantial growth in the area of sport sponsorship. Review of the annual International Event Group's Sponsorship Report (2017) shows 19 consecutive years of growth for sport sponsorship in terms of dollars spent with a forecasted growth rate of more than four percent in 2018. Sport sponsorship has proven to be an attractive manner of reaching potential customers due to the widespread appeal of sport and opportunity for organizations to connect with potential consumers in the context of an activity that can be highly personal (Abrahamson, Forsgren, and Lundgren, 2003; Brassington and Petit, 2000).

2.2 Sponsorship Motivation

The existing literature base on sport sponsorship notes that motivations for corporate and organizational sponsorship vary greatly and have undergone a renaissance in recent decades. Wilkinson (1993) writes that the early days of sponsorship featured sponsorship primarily born of philanthropic motivations; companies did not focus on sponsorship as an important tool through which they could accomplish business objectives. The decision to enter into sponsorship agreements is determined after consideration of a range of emotional and rational motives (Arthur, Scott, & Woods, 1997). Emotional motives for entering into sponsorship agreements can include enhancing good will, supporting the community, personal interests of decision-makers, and strong identifications with one or more particular causes (Jobber & Ellis-Chadwick, 2016; O'Hagan & Harvey, 2000). Rational motives include the accomplishment of business-centric objectives and employment of sponsorship as a calculated corporate marketing tactic (Jensen & Cobbs, 2014; Lee, Hur, & Sung, 2015). Lough and Irwin (2001) write that companies and organizations are moving away from philanthropy as a motivating factor for engaging in sport sponsorship. Instead, companies choose to enter into sport sponsorship deals with a focus on the accomplishment business centric objectives.

2.3 The Gay Games

Dr. Tom Waddell, founder of the Gay Games, was a member of the 1968 United States Olympic Team. His experiences as a gay athlete drove him to create the Gay Olympics in 1980. Waddell envisioned a sporting and cultural event dedicated to diversity and inclusion (Litchfield, 2013). Waddell's original title for the event, the Gay Olympics, was changed after the United States Olympic Committee successfully sought a court injunction barring the use of the term Olympics (Symons, 2012).

Waddell witnessed the marginalization of sexual minorities in mainstream sport settings and desired to create a safe space for all to interact with their sport interests. For Waddell, it was important to create a space where individuals could participate in a supportive sport environment without concern for prejudice and discrimination (Krane, Barber, and McClung, 2002).

On August 28, 1982, 1,350 athletes from 12 countries gathered in San Francisco, California for Gay Games I (Symons, 2012). Waddell's journals discuss many challenges in the planning and execution of the first games, including skepticism from friends and colleagues, legal challenges, as well as the financial difficulties in producing the games. Waddell's hard work and dedication to Gay Games I paved the way for a culturally and socially significant event which allows for the sustenance of the gay community and its allies through the creation of shared meaning, solidarity, belongingness, participation, and equality (Symons, 2012).

In 2009, the Federation of Gay Games announced Cleveland, Ohio as the host of Gay Games IX, selecting Cleveland over bids from Boston, Miami, and Washington D.C. (Maag, 2009). In August, 2014, over 30,000 participants and guests visited northeast Ohio to volunteer, spectator, or participate in Gay Games IX. The 2014 Gay Games included a \$6.8 million operating budget, raised \$4.16 million in cash and in-kind sponsorships, and was responsible for a \$52.1 million economic impact in northeast Ohio (Cleveland Foundation, 2014; Rohlin & Greenlaugh-Stanley, 2014).

3. Methods

3.1 Design

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the motivations for company support of the Gay Games. This study utilized an exploratory case study design. The case study method emerged as the most suitable research strategy due to the question posed and the focus on contemporary events (Yin, 2009). Burns (1990) advances a number of explanations for carrying out case study research. Case studies can serve as valuable groundwork to major investigations by generating rich data which can suggest themes for more intensive examination. Second, case studies "have the aims of probing deeply and analyzing intensively" (p. 366) the many phenomena that make up the activities of the unit under study.

3.2 Data Collection

Evidence used in the completion and presentation of case study research can come from six sources: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation, and physical artifacts (Yin, 2009). The nature of case studies dictates the employment of multiple data collection strategies in order to provide meaningful findings. Case studies should incorporate a mixture of the acceptable sources but need not include all six (Yin, 2009).

The researcher used participant and site observation to gain an initial understanding of the real-life context of Gay Games IX; additionally, in-depth semi-structured interviews and document collection and analysis were used as instruments for data gathering. Following a thorough review of the pertinent literature and consultation with academics and practitioners, an 11 question interview guide was developed. The assembly of data using various sources allows for the data triangulation (Yin, 2009). The employment of various data collection procedures also allows for an examination of GGIX sponsorship from multiple perspectives, potentially adding additional dimensions not available from a singular form of data collection. Case studies utilizing more than one source of information are rated more highly, in terms of scientific quality, compared to studies that employ only a single data collection method (Yin, Bateman, & Moore, 1993).

3.3 Participants

A number of broad strategies exist for qualitative sampling (Creswell, 2014; Marshall, 1996). Simple random sampling refers to a sample design which allows for the random selection of units from a larger population in a way that every possible combination of participants is equally likely to be selected (Marshall, 1996). Stratified random sampling refers to a design which allows for a complete census of the pool of possible participants, a division of such participants into strata, followed by a random selection of participants within the various strata (Mirakhmedov, Jammalamadaka, & Ekstrom, 2015). Organizations which sponsored GGIX were classified into the appropriate stratum based on business size. The United States Small Business Administration guidelines were consulted to assign organizations to the correct strata.

Stratified random sampling was selected as the best way to obtain a representative sample for this study, allowing for random sampling while guaranteeing a representative sample with regard to organization size. “No technique not even random sampling, guarantees a representative sample, but the probability is higher for this procedure than for any other” (Gay, 1987, p.104). Microsoft Excel was employed to create a randomized list of potential participants. The researcher began at the top of that list and contacted members from each stratum until saturation (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2009) had been reached.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data from multiple sources informed this study. An inductive analysis occurred which allowed the researcher to identify emerging patterns, themes, and categories (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). Each source of data was employed to establish credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 2009). The analysis of collected data was facilitated through the use of *NVivo 11*, qualitative data analysis software (QSR International, 2017). Transcribed text from interviews, field notes, and documents was entered into NVivo in order to code, categorize, and construct themes. Each participant’s responses were compared to tables of other participants which allowed for constant comparison of data and aided in the emergence of developing themes (Merriam, 2009). Data was subjected to three methods of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Creswell 2014; Yin, 2009).

4. Findings

The rich and robust nature of the qualitative data allowed for the emergence of three themes related to motivation for sponsorship of Gay Games IX. Data analysis revealed that sponsors were motivated by the alignment of mission and values, a desire to support northeast Ohio, and a personal connection to the LGBT community. Those identified themes are presented here and are supported through the presentation of participants’ own words and direct quotes gleaned from public domain documents.

4.1 Alignment of Mission and Values

The alignment of the missions and values of the Games and the sponsoring organizations emerged as a significant motivational factor for sponsorship. The Federation of Gay Games (Mission and values, n.d.) lists their mission “to promote equality through the organization of the premier international LGBT and gay friendly sports and cultural event known as the Gay Games.” The organization works to create an inclusive environment regardless of sexual orientation, gender, race, religion, nationality, ethnic origin, political beliefs, athletic ability, physical challenge, age, or health status. Data obtained through participant responses and documents indicate that sponsors thought it important to support an event which was in alignment of their own missions and espoused their values.

Ellen spoke of the importance that mission congruence played in her organization’s interest in engaging in sponsorship with GGIX. “When we’re asked to do a sponsorship we ask does it support the mission. That is the starting component, that’s the first question I’m going to be asked when I bring something to the table...is what we’re sponsoring in line with our mission, is it in line with how we want to portray ourselves, is it in collaboration with the community?” Grace spoke directly about the role which mission played in motivating her organization to sponsor Gay Games IX, “We were trying to support a group that supports our mission which is to empower an inclusive community through education, outreach, and awareness while eliminating stigma. We wanted to support an event that helps further our cause.

”Shelly confirmed the importance of value alignment in her company’s decision to enter into a sponsorship agreement with GG9, “Well there were a number of factors that encouraged us to sponsor. First and foremost, we wholeheartedly support the mission of the Gay Games which is all about being yourself and doing your best, that’s a message that this world needs over and over again.”

Later when asked about the fit between Gay Games values and her company’s corporate culture she added, “For us integrity, leadership, and diversity are some of the most important virtues. Those fit so naturally with the Gay Games, the diversity piece is quite obvious, but in terms of integrity and leadership we really felt the Gay Games, particularly those being held in Cleveland in 2014 were being leaders by pushing LGBT issues to the forefront in an area that maybe had not had the conversation on that grand of a stage. To take ownership of a conversation that you know will make some uncomfortable because it is the right thing to do shows tremendous integrity and leadership and we knew there was no question we needed to financially support an event that could make those things happen.”

Participants and statements in public documents indicated that a perceived alignment of mission between the sponsors and the Federation of Gay Games as well as the existence of similar values served as a key motivation and justification for sponsorship of Gay Games IX. The alignment of mission was a key talking point for several participants representing not-for-profit organizations. They shared stories and viewpoints which indicated strong feelings that supporting the event may create an environment more conducive to the successful advancement of their own organizational agendas. Furthermore, many statements were made regarding specific, identified organizational and corporate values and how the Gay Games sponsorship provided a vehicle to broadcast and reiterate those values.

4.2 Support for northeast Ohio

Locally and regionally based participants in the study pointed to a love of community, the international platform to share northeast Ohio in a positive light, and the desire to support an event which had significant financial implications as key factors which encouraged sponsorship. Wilson was clear about the role community pride played in his company's decision to sponsor the Gay Games. "First, I saw the opportunity to bring big money into the community. I saw it as an opportunity to generate income for different organizations that serve the community. Secondly, it was my belief that the event could transform the city of Cleveland, position the city differently than it was perceived – as a blue-collar, hard-hat, redneck kind of joint – and it's not that way in Cleveland."

In a press release announcing the sponsorship agreement between Marriott Hotels and Gay Games IX, Renaissance Hotel Cleveland General Manager Theona Simbrat stated, "We are honored to have been selected as the official host hotel for the 2014 Gay Games. The Gay Games will no doubt serve to inspire our community and build awareness of Cleveland as a vibrant destination" (Marriott, 2014). Chris Conner, Chairman and CEO of the Cleveland headquartered Sherwin-Williams Company recognized the ability of their sponsorship to help promote the region, "The Sherwin-Williams Company is proud to join our community as one of many companies sponsoring the 2014 Gay Games. Sherwin-Williams and the northeast Ohio community welcome all the participants and dedicated volunteers and look forward to sharing our beautiful hometown with so many visitors from around the world. Our company has made this great city home for 148 years, and we know all who visit will enjoy Cleveland's people and attractions" (The why, n.d.).

Cleveland and northeast Ohio have experienced their share of difficulties in the past. Cleveland has been tagged the "Mistake by the Lake" and the home stadium for the Cleveland Browns has been dubbed the "Factory of Sadness". Monikers such as these have spread far and wide, casting the region in a negative light. The Gay Games presented the opportunity for locally and regionally based sponsors to change the narrative of the region. Participants spoke with great pride about positive strides which have been made in the region, and felt that successfully hosted Games would not only raise the stature of the area, but also provide the opportunity for visitors from all over the globe to witness Cleveland's renaissance. Sponsors viewed their sponsorship in a positive light because it provided necessary financial support for an event which allowed them to share their piece of the world while also positively impacting the economy of the region.

4.3 Personal Connection to the LGBT Community

The third theme which emerged through data analysis was the close personal connection between decision-makers and the LGBT community. These connections existed either through their own identification as a member of the community, or due to close ties to members of the LGBT community. Nine of the 14 participants in the study voluntarily self-identified as a member of the LGBT community through the course of dialogue concerning the decision to engage in Gay Games IX sponsorship. Those respondents spoke with great pride about the ability to act as a catalyst for their businesses and organizations to sponsor an event which represented a key component of their personal identities.

When asked about the process which led to the decision to sponsor Gay Games IX, Evan replied "Well, first, I was born in 1975 as a gay man." Later, he revisited the role that his personal connection to the cause played in sponsorship of the Games, "The real reason, what my motivation is for everything I do for the LGBT community, is to help bring about acceptance so that kids growing up don't have to go through the shit I went through!" Zeke echoed those sentiments recognizing the Gay Games as the "biggest, best, most exciting cultural event that identified with my life that I think I will ever see in Cleveland."

Reverend J. Bennett Guess, the first openly-gay national officer within the United Church of Christ explained his organization's sponsorship of the Gay Games, "The UCC can play an integral and important role in dispelling the pervasive myth that all people of faith are anti-gay, and we are excited to share our message of extravagant welcome and radical inclusivity" (Moujaes, 2014). A number of additional participants shared that their involvement with strategic planning for the Games helped to motivate their sponsorship of the event. Nicki exemplified this, sharing, "My first involvement with the Gay Games came in the form of joining one of the planning committees. I got involved through befriending a couple of members of the gay community. I heard about how it would benefit us...I approached my boss, he said yes, so we did it."

Wilson's participation in the Gay Games management played a role in the sponsorship by his company: "I was asked to take a leadership role in it. So I got on the board and was helping with the development committee. If I was going to be asking other organizations for substantial money, and if we were truly committed to the event, then we needed to step up and give a substantial amount."

While the level and intimacy of the connection to the LGBT community varied, an analysis of the data clearly indicates that the personal connection to the community played a significant role in motivating organizations to participate in sponsorship of Gay Games IX. Sponsorship of the event afforded the opportunity for individual decision-makers to support an event to which many related on a personal basis. Several participants spoke with great pride about their ability to publicly support an event which meant so much to them and other LGBT individuals within their organizations. Board and committee driven decisions provided for the opportunity for organizations to recognize and support the efforts of their employees with respect to Gay Games IX. As Evan shared, "When there's a personal connection to a sponsorship, it means more."

5. Discussion

Employing an exploratory case study method, this study sought to investigate the motivations of organizations which engaged in sponsorship of the 2014 Gay Games. This research lays the foundation in order to address an existing gap in the literature regarding sponsorship of amateur sporting properties, particularly LGBT themed amateur sporting properties. Motivation is the driving force of behavior that causes individuals to act in a certain way so that needs will be fulfilled (Kleinginna & Kleinginna, 1981). Researchers have examined motivations for sport sponsorship from a variety of angles and noted a dramatic shift in philosophy of corporate sponsorship, moving from philanthropic motives in the 1960s and 1970s to motivations driven by business-centric objectives in the present day (Dolphin, 2003; Lough & Irwin, 2001). However, the findings from this study indicate that philanthropic motivations played a significant role in encouraging partnership with Gay Games IX. Identified motivations for the present study were an alignment of mission and values, support for northeast Ohio, and a personal connection to the LGBT community.

5.1 Alignment of Mission and Values

The results of this study indicate that an alignment of mission and values was viewed as an important consideration and motivation for corporate level sponsorship of Gay Games IX. The Gay Games works to create an inclusive environment regardless of sexual orientation, gender, race, religion, nationality, ethnic origin, political beliefs, athletic ability, physical challenge, age, or health status. Numerous participants as well as documentary evidence referenced mission and values as a significant factor in their consideration process.

The competition spaces for sport and leisure pursuits have long been recognized as spaces where individuals could exert their own power, physical dominance, and superiority (Plymire & Forman, 2000). However, that dominance and superiority is rooted deeply in a heterosexist foundation (Cunningham, 2012) where hegemonic masculinity (Chenn & Curtner, 2013; Swain, 2006) serves to stigmatize members of sexual minorities. LGBT individuals participating in sport and leisure pursuits are often exposed to a multitude of prejudices. Corporate sponsors of Gay Games IX engaged in sponsorship in order to provide the opportunity for individuals and groups to engage in their sport and leisure pursuits in a setting free of stigma and ostracism. Financially supporting the event led to the opportunity for individuals to inventory their preconceived notions and biases with regard to sexual minorities. A multitude of participants as well as documents offered statements which indicated that decision-makers within organizations take their responsibility to encourage diversity and respect for all people as a serious and substantial charge. Participants indicated that sponsorship of the Gay Games provided the opportunity to take a much-publicized stance on issues surrounding stigma, diversity, and inclusion.

These findings support previous work which indicates that sponsorships provide the opportunity for an organization to share its self-image with the public (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). Alessandri (2001) writes that a mission statement is a projection of corporate identity. The Gay Games provided the opportunity for a number of organizations to further causes that directly related to their own stated missions, particularly not-for-profit organizations. Not-for-profit sponsors were particularly interested in advancing their own missions through sponsorship. Numerous decision-makers within not-for-profit organizations referenced the idea that by supporting the Gay Games, they were in fact contributing to the creation of an environment which would make it easier for their own operations and accomplishment of their own mission. Zullo (2013) writes that sponsors focus most heavily on sponsorship of programming which can result in significant returns. In the case of not-for-profits, those returns are in fact the accomplishment of mission.

Sponsors indicated that they were hoping to support the mission and values embodied by the Gay Games which were also engrained in their own corporate cultures. By sponsoring the Gay Games, sponsors were looking to positively impact the lives of participants by making stigma free spaces for sport and leisure available, publicize their organization's commitment to diversity and inclusion, and advance their own missions when possible.

5.2 Desire to support northeast Ohio

A commitment to the community emerged as a key motivation for the sponsorship of Gay Games IX within locally based organizations. Data extracted from documents as well as the words of participants pointed to the desire to support the community as an impetus for support. This theme was represented through the words of a number of individuals spanning many industries and representing all types and sizes of organizations. Three key issues emerged with regard to support stemming from a commitment to the community.

First, sponsors of the Gay Games believed the event presented northeast Ohio, Akron, and Cleveland with the ability to change worldwide perceptions and misconceptions of the region. Numerous participants referenced the ability of the Games to bring visitors and media from around the globe to experience the area. Cleveland, in particular, has suffered many jokes and insulting monikers including its infamous dubbing as the "Mistake on the Lake". Sponsorship for international events presents a unique opportunity for sponsors to showcase their region to the world, allowing for a demonstration of pride (Apostolopoulou & Papadimitriou, 2004).

Second, sponsors also saw the opportunity for the Games to change the viewpoint that Cleveland, Ohio, and the Midwest were closed minded with regard to diversity and acceptance of members of sexual minorities. Sponsoring organizations desired to create a successful and welcoming event in order to show the world a side of the region they might not expect. Finally, sponsors recognized the potential economic impact the event could have on the region. Mullen et al. (2000) write that sponsorship has a substantial ability to position corporate sponsors as concerned and interested citizens within a community. A number of data points indicated that sponsors desired to provide support and resources for an event, which in turn could result in significant financial returns, if not for their individual organizations, for the good of the community. These findings support previous literature which posits that community goodwill and involvement are important considerations for sponsorship of sporting events and properties (Dolphin, 2003; Irwin & Sutton, 1994; Jobber & Ellis-Chadwick, 2012; McCook et al., 1997). A number of organizations used that precise term, goodwill, in discussing their decision to engage in sponsorship of Gay Games IX.

5.3 Personal Connection to LGBT Community

The data indicate that a close personal connection to the LGBT community was also a powerful motivating factor for sponsorship of Gay Games IX. Of the 14 participants who engaged in semi-structured interviews, nine self-identified as members of the LGBT population. Several participants also indicated close friendships or relationships to LGBT individuals as an impetus for involvement and sponsorship. Additional support for this theme was drawn from data gathered via documents.

As mentioned, a number of participants self-identified as members of the LGBT community during semi-structured interviews. Additionally, a number of individuals managing the Gay Games IX sponsorship process for their organizations self-identified as members of the community through public documents. The Gay Games sponsorship provided the opportunity for a number of individuals to support an event which resonated with a key part of their personal identities.

Additionally, a number of non-LGBT individuals involved in sponsorship decision making were closely connected to the LGBT community either through the foci of their organizations, friendships, or through participation on strategic planning and management committees for Gay Games IX. Those relationships and ties also acted as catalysts for discussions and action on GG9 sponsorship.

The decision to sponsor Gay Games IX due to identification as a member of the LGBT community or through a close personal connection to the event supports the previous sport sponsorship literature. Numerous participants indicated that they initiated contact with Gay Games organizers in order to engage in the sponsorship relationship. Wilkinson (1993) describes this situation as a proactive sponsorship situation, where corporate decision-makers actively seek out sponsorship due to their perceived attractiveness to the corporation. The data suggests that a number of individuals were motivated to sponsor an event which resonated with their sexual identity, an action which the literature labels an emotional buying motive (Arthur Scott, & Woods, 1997; Wepler & McCarville, 1995).

While the emotional aspects of sponsorship purchase are rarely discussed in the literature (Arthur, Scott, & Woods, 1997), they can be a vital consideration in the corporate sponsorship decision making process (Wolter, et.al., 1989). The high level of involvement in the Gay Games IX strategic management and planning process which in turn led to sponsorship decisions supports Oneal, Finch, Hamilton, & Hammond's (1987) and Meenaghan's (1994) work which suggest that sponsorship decisions are often predicated on the personal interests or desires of the sponsorship managers or organizational executives. The data suggest that identification as a member of the LGBT community and personal involvement in the planning and execution of the event motivated sponsorship of Gay Games IX.

6. Implications and Conclusion

6.1 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The lack of empirical research relating to corporate sponsorship of gay sporting mega-events was a chief factor which encouraged the undertaking of the present study. However, because there is minimal literature relating specifically to the topic, this research was genuinely exploratory. Because of this fact, findings were compared only to the existing general sport sponsorship literature base.

This study constitutes the first research regarding motivations for sponsorship of a gay sporting mega-event. The study sought to examine in depth the phenomenon of growing financial sponsorships of gay amateur sporting events. With the historical growth of sport sponsorship and sporting organizations faced with budgetary constraints, it is more than reasonable to surmise that sponsorship of the Gay Games and similar events will continue to be valued by a variety of actors. The current study presents a methodologically sound template for further empirical research delving into the topic of sponsorships for stigmatized and marginalized populations as well as less studied areas of sport sponsorship.

Due to a void in the existing literature on sponsorship of LGBT sporting events, this exploratory study was conceived. While this study did produce rich and robust data on the topic, it is still a phenomenon that must be further investigated. One recommendation for further investigation of the topic is the execution of a mixed-methods study. The qualitative methodology employed for this study provided the opportunity for deep and meaningful dialogue regarding the phenomenon. However, a mixed methods study employing quantitative instruments while also incorporating open ended questions could provide significant amounts of pertinent data to add to the currently small knowledge base regarding the issue.

6. Conclusion

The findings of the current study indicate that philanthropic considerations acted as the most significant catalysts for entering into a sponsorship agreement with the Federation of Gay Games and Gay Games IX. While business-centric objectives were referenced, philanthropic motivations were referenced and evidenced at a significantly higher rate in the data. These findings challenge a growing sport sponsorship literature base, which suggests that philanthropic motives are no longer a significant determining factor in sponsorship selection (Copeland, Frisby, & McCarville, 1996; Lough & Irwin, 2001; Wilkinson, 1993), and represent a view of sponsorship more consistent with sport sponsorship during its initial stages.

Sponsorship of Gay Games IX was a complex and multi-layered process, as reflected by the themes which emerged from this study. However, as the existing literature indicates, sport sponsorship is a process which has experienced significant changes and evolution in a relatively short period of time.

This study offers evidence that sponsors are willing and able to provide financial support for an event even when it appears that the return on investment might be less for the individual organization and more for the benefit of the community as a whole. Gay sporting mega-events have grown tremendously both in scope as well as financial significance, as such, this is a phenomenon that sport and leisure researchers should continue to investigate through a variety of methods in order to improve the understanding and execution of these valuable partnerships.

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