

# **The changing nature of ambush marketing: a content analysis of ambush marketing commentary of the London Olympics**

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## **Abstract**

Global sporting events such as the Olympics require large sums of money to host successfully. Much of this funding is sourced from private sector sponsors who contribute significant sums of sponsorship revenue to the organisers of the events. Rather than paying for sponsorship, companies can achieve an association with the event by ambushing it.

Successful ambushing tactics have evolved with each global sporting event. Previous ambushes used direct methods such as broadcasting or advertising. With strict regulations and policing of the event, these methods were no longer effective; rather, the changing environment of global sporting events has required ambush methods to evolve into more subtle yet highly effective techniques.

The paper provides an analysis of the changing nature of ambush marketing by presenting a content analysis of over one million words using Leximancer software through which the online reporting and commentary of ambush marketing before, during and after the London Olympic Games were tracked. Despite a stricter regulatory environment, ambush marketing is still found to be effective albeit in a different form. Implications for official sponsors, ambushing companies and governmental bodies are included.

## **Key phrases**

*ambush marketing; content analysis; Leximancer; London Olympic Games; sponsorship*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Official sponsors of an event often fear ambush marketing. The bigger the event, the greater is the cost of sponsorship. Global sponsorship spend is at an all-time high with sports sponsorship accounting for two thirds of the total spend (Delia 2014:551).

Sponsorship of global sporting events has become a commonly used tool in marketing communications (Carrillat, Colbert & Feigné 2013:1) with advertising being linked directly to sponsorship investments (Cornwell, Weeks & Roy 2005:21). Sponsorship provides a valuable brand-building platform (Kelly, Cornwell, Coote & McAlister 2012:15; Zdravkovic & Till 2012:1).

Millions of dollars were spent on official sponsorship of the London Olympic Games (Taylor 2012:459), but as the cost of sponsorship increases, so too does the threat of ambush (Farrelly, Quester & Greyser 2005:346; Meenaghan 1998:319). One of the reasons that ambush marketing is such a significant threat to sponsorship (Burton & Chadwick 2009:303; Mazodier, Quester & Chandon 2012:209; Sheridan 2010:47) is because it is persistently effective (Lefton 2003:9; Pitt, Parent, Berthon & Steyn 2010:287).

The tactics of the ambusher need to be one step ahead of those of the official sponsors. Understanding the evolving nature of ambush marketing is important to marketers of both ambusher and sponsoring firms but also to global event organisers who attempt to safe guard sponsor investments that are necessary for the hosting of major global events.

The purpose of this study was to provide a structured analysis of the reporting, commentating and discussion of ambush marketing of a global sporting event, using the London Olympics as the case study. This was achieved through using the content analysis tool Leximancer to analyse text extracted from online sources over three discrete time periods, namely; before, during and after the Olympic Games.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are several definitions of ambush marketing together with some confusion about what constitutes an ambush (Pelanda 2011:101; Stuart 2011:2). This may be because the nature of ambush marketing has changed over time. Burton and Chadwick (2009:305) define ambush marketing as

*“a form of associative marketing which is designed to capitalise upon the awareness, attention, goodwill and other benefits generated by having an association with an event or property, without an official or direct connect to that event or property”.*

The ambushing company attempts to confuse the consumer so that they believe the ambushing company is an official sponsor (Jothi 2015:119; Meenaghan 1996:106; Sandler & Shani 1989:11).

The authors use a broad definition of ambush marketing and define it as:

*an association of a non-sponsoring brand with the event or its participants.*

One of the earliest examples of ambush marketing was in the 1984 Olympic Games when Kodak ambushed Fuji by sponsoring the broadcasters of the Olympic Games. Since then, numerous companies have used a number of ambush tactics (Fenelon 2012:23) including sponsoring a sub-category of the event, contributing to the players pool, advertising during the event, and other, miscellaneous ambush strategies (Bhattacharjee & Rao 2006:129; Crow & Hoek 2003:3-8; Lyberger & McCarthy 2001:131; Meenaghan 1998:310-313) including consumer promotions, congratulatory messages (McKelvey & Grady 2008:557), pourage agreements and corporate hospitality and ticketing (Bhattacharjee & Rao 2006:129-130). Pourage agreements restrict the availability of drinks and food at an event to the official drinks and food sponsors. For example, Anheuser Busch's Budweiser was the only beer available at the 2010 World Cup soccer stadia (The Guardian 2010:Internet).

Ambush marketing has more recently evolved from broadcast sponsorship campaigns and advertising to more creative and associative marketing efforts away from the actual event. This can include the use of spectators or fans to promote the brand (Burton & Chadwick 2009:310), such as the use of the orange dressed ‘Bavaria Blondes’ (Berger-Walliser, Williams, Walliser & Bender 2012:3). Debates relating to the impact of ambush marketing have centred mainly on legal and ethical issues as well as consumer perceptions. While both sponsors and sport property owners believe ambush marketing is unethical (Crompton 2004:10), research on the effects of ambush marketing has been mixed. Some studies have found a negative effect for the official sponsor (Farrelly *et al.* 2005:246) as ambush marketing campaigns cause consumers to mistake the ambushers for sponsors (e.g. Hoek & Gendall 2002:89; Sandler & Shani 1989:14).

Research also shows that attitudes towards ambushers were negative when consumer involvement with the event was high (Farrelly *et al.* 2005:247; Mazodier *et al.* 2012:209; Meenaghan 1998:319). Other research indicates that public sentiment towards ambushers is apathetic at best (Lyberger & McCarthy 2001:137; Pitt *et al.* 2010:289; Portlock & Rose 2009:285). In fact, aggressive responses from sponsors (or event organisers) can cause consumers to view these parties as bullies (Pitt *et al.* 2010:288) further enhancing the positive effect for the ambusher. Herzog and Nufer (2014) found that ambush marketing has a positive impact on the ambusher's performance.

Alongside the changing nature of ambush marketing and the on-going debates on the impacts of ambush marketing, the London Olympics were also unique in that these were the first Games where anti-ambush legislation was so prevalent together with the first real presence of social media.

### **3. THE 2012 LONDON OLYMPICS – THE STRICTEST GAMES EVER**

Global sporting events such as the Olympics are so complex and expensive that they require private sector funding (Preuss, Gemeinder & Seguin 2008:243). It was anticipated that forty percent of the £9.3 billion required to host the London Olympic Games would come from private sector sponsors (Fenelon 2012:20). Given the significant amount of sponsor contribution to the Games, it is necessary to protect the sponsor rights from attempts of ambush marketing. Legislation and product category exclusivity are ways to protect sponsors (O'Sullivan & Murphy 1998:363). Anti-ambush policy and legislation has not only been found to be a requirement (Bhattacharjee & Rao 2006:143) but the most effective emergent deterrent (Burton & Chadwick 2009:132). The United Kingdom, Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand, have all enacted such legislation (Corbett & Van Roy 2010:338; Scassa 2011:354). Furthermore, Burton and Chadwick (2009:310) found that there has been a shift in focus from the media 'naming and shaming' ambushers to communicating the progressively stricter measures taken to prevent them. Each new event brings new protection measures (McKelvey & Grady 2008:580) while some have argued that the more recent enactments have been overboard and too restrictive (Corbett & Van Roy 2010:338).

The London 2012 Bill banned the use of numerous words associated with the Olympics, including 'Games', '2012' and combinations of 'Gold', 'Summer', 'Medals' (Portlock & Rose 2009:284). Further precautionary measures with respect to the London Olympics included regulations creating 'safe zones' where sponsors have sole rights in this area. There were also 'no fly' zones restricting access from the air to the Olympic Park (Fenelon 2012:23). Dore (2006:19) explains that:

*"unlike other governments that have restricted anti-ambush marketing legislation to a civil matter, Britain's legislation includes criminal sanctions for ambush marketing".*

In total, twenty four statutory instruments and five acts of Parliament were implemented for the London Olympics (Bowcott 2012:Internet). Ormsby (2012:Internet) describes these as the strictest rules ever for the Olympic Games. The social media site Facebook was "forced to drop all advertising around its official Olympic pages" (Fenelon 2012:23).

Accompanied by the strict legislation for the London Olympics was a plethora of rules granting officials power to police the Games against an ambush. McKelvey and Grady (2008:565) comment that onsite policing is arguably the most aggressive anti-ambush tactic and has the potential to draw negative publicity to sponsors and the event and alienate fans. In addition to this, with the London Olympics having the strictest legislation of any Games, Fenelon (2012:23) observed that there was the possibility of the Organising Committee isolating the public from the Games.

Further, Ellis, Gauthier and Séguin (2011:307) and Pitt *et al.* (2010:287) warn that such a restrictive anti-ambushing policy can lull sponsors into a state of false security which leads to a failure to adequately leverage the sponsorship opportunity.

The other unique characteristic of the London Olympics was the presence of social media. These Olympic Games represented the first digital games with the explosion of social media which was not present at the previous Beijing Games (Kortekaas 2011:Internet). Social media makes relationship building and maintenance with fans or other audiences much easier and potentially longer lasting than the event itself (Andrews 2011:Internet). Additionally, while the athlete and spectator apparel at events may be controlled, their personal discussions, photos and tweets in social media seem far less easy to manage thus presenting an additional challenge to sponsors and event organisers.

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Given this backdrop to the London Olympics, and the debates around ambush marketing in the academic literature, the authors apply an associative network theory lens to track the online commentary and reporting around ambush marketing before, during and after the Games to determine the key associations and discussions from the perspective of public opinion presented in the popular press and online fora. Associative network theory holds that information is stored in nodes with links or associations between the nodes forming an interconnected network (Anderson 1983). Associative network theory has been used in a number of studies related to sponsorship and ambush marketing studies (e.g. Breuer & Rumpf 2012; Wolfsteiner, Grohs & Wagner 2015).

#### **4. METHOD**

Two researchers, one in the UK and one in South Africa, collected data by entering the search term “london olympics ambush marketing” into Google. Google accesses webpages on the net and therefore includes online publications such as news sites, blogs, special interest sites and official event organiser webpages. There is growing recognition of Google as a source of useful research data (e.g. Choi & Varian 2012; Herzog & Nufer 2014). Two researchers were used to divide the data collection exercise with each researcher collecting data on alternate weeks. While the two researchers alternated the collection of data weekly, no differences could be seen in the types of websites, or in the origins of those websites between the data collected by the two researchers.

The search was conducted each day for the period 27<sup>th</sup> June to 11<sup>th</sup> September 2012. This period was divided into three sub-periods. The first sub-period included the dates from 27<sup>th</sup> June to 26<sup>th</sup> July 2012 i.e. the month ‘prior’ to the Games. The second sub-period included dates from 27<sup>th</sup> July to 12<sup>th</sup> August 2012, i.e. the period ‘during’ the Games, and the third sub-period included the dates 13<sup>th</sup> August to 11<sup>th</sup> September i.e. the month ‘after’ the Games.

All relevant material (i.e. dealing with ambush marketing and the London Olympics) was included. However, on some days during the Games there was a high number of links posted under the search terms. Where this was found, the researchers limited the number of links copied to the Word document to within the first full ten pages of Google. The decision to impose this limit was due to both time constraints and to ensure that the content of the

articles remained relevant to the search term used. There were some links where it was not possible to extract the text. These were either links that had expired, were copy-protected or pdf documents that could not be copied.

The types of articles that were included were those posted on news sites, embedded sites and special interest sites. The articles and postings were written by journalists, marketing practitioners, lawyers, government officials, government papers, bloggers and members of the public. The content could be considered to be a mixture of neutral, pro and anti-ambush marketing articles.

The results of the searches were visually checked to confirm that each link was relevant to the London Olympics and ambush marketing. The main article contents were copied to a Word document and any photos or comments on the article were excluded. Each article was then checked by removing irrelevant words such as 'link', 'share' and the URL address itself of the article. There were several instances where the same article appeared multiple times but under a different link. Where this was the case, the contents of the same article were included. In instances where it was a repeated link, only one copy was included.

For each of the three periods, all the articles were then combined into a single Word document and run through Leximancer to undertake the content analysis. Campbell, Pitt, Parent & Berthon (2011:91) describe the way Leximancer works as follows:

*"Leximancer uses a machine-learning technique, in a grounded fashion, to discover the main concepts in a corpus, and how they relate to each other. To make out concepts in the corpus and how they interrelate, Leximancer does both a conceptual (thematic) analysis and a relational (semantic) analysis. Once a concept has been identified, Leximancer builds a thesaurus of words that are closely related to the concept, thereby giving its semantic or definitional concept".*

Leximancer meets the important reliability criteria of reproducibility and stability (Rooney 2005), and has been found to be valid for the extraction of rich and complex information (Smith & Humphreys 2006). A total of 406,354 words were included in the data set for the 'before' period, 413,433 words in the 'during' set and 278,083 words in the 'after' set.

All the comments and reports were written in English which meant that there was no need to deal with any translation issues.

## 5. RESULTS

Leximancer extracts themes and concepts, where each theme represents a cluster of concepts. By analysing the themes and concepts before, during and after the Games, it is possible to observe the nature of discussion around the Games from a 'birds-eye' view. Leximancer (2012:Internet) defines a theme as:

*"A group or cluster of concepts that have some commonality or connectedness as seen from their close proximity on the concept map."*

Throughout this paper, themes are presented in **bold** while concepts are presented in *italics*. In the following section the concepts maps of the three periods are presented, discussed and then compared. In the Leximancer-generated maps each theme is colour coded, with warm colours (shades of red and brown) denoting the most important themes, and cool colours (shades of green, blue and purple) denoting the less important themes.

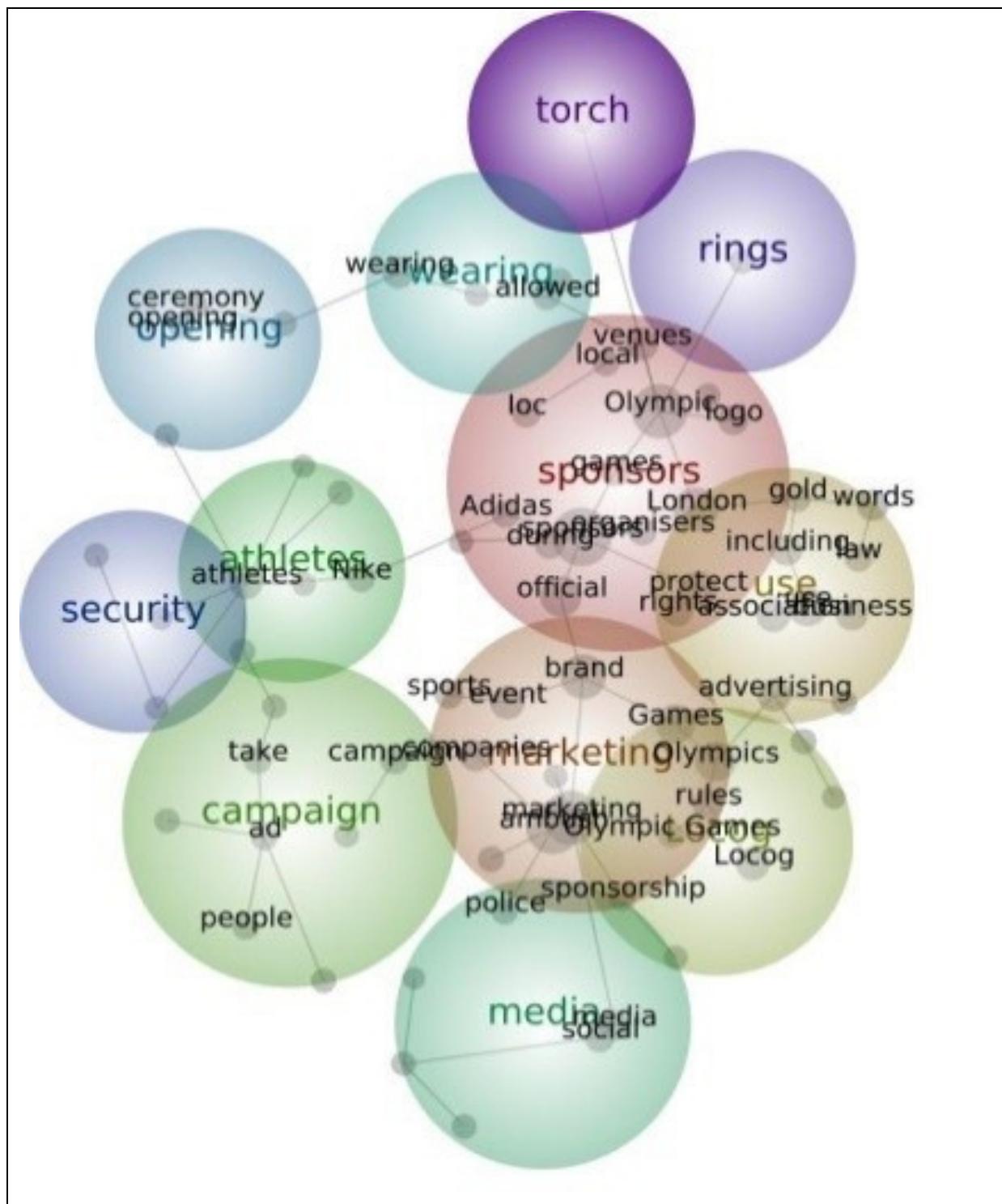
The discussion of the themes in each section is ordered by importance of the theme, i.e. the most important themes are discussed first and in more detail. Concept dot sizes represent the frequency of occurrence while lines represent the relationships between concepts (Leximancer 2012:Internet). Due to the proximity of some of the concepts to each other, some overlap of the concept names is unfortunately unavoidable. It is hoped that the discussions below help to clarify the concepts. More explicit detail is provided for the 'before' section to assist the reader with the interpretation of the Leximancer data. From the Leximancer ranked theme data, the percentage displayed with the main themes represents their relevance in terms of connectivity.

### 5.1 Results for the period 'Before the Games'

Figure 1 presents the concept map for the period before the Olympic Games. The themes and concepts of this map are discussed below.

Theme: **sponsor**

Concepts: *official sponsors, London Olympics, games, organisers, International Olympics Committee (IOC), logo, protect, rights, local, venues, during, Adidas.*



**FIGURE 1: Concept map for the period before the London Olympics**

Source: Leximancer-generated concept map

The **sponsor** theme, in the largest red bubble, had 100% connectivity and is thus the dominant theme in the concept map including a number of the most important concepts within the corpus, denoted by the larger black dots.

The **sponsor** theme, in the largest red bubble, had 100% connectivity and is thus the dominant theme in the concept map including a number of the most important concepts within the corpus, denoted by the larger black dots. By reviewing the specific text Leximancer extracts related to the concepts, it is evident that these concepts addressed the importance of the *sponsors* to the *London Olympics* and the *protection* afforded these *official sponsors* by the *Olympic games organisers* and the International Olympics Committee (IOC). This *protection* included the exclusive *rights* to use the *logo*, and to marketing activities in the *local venues, during the games*. These concepts highlight the strict regulations put in place to *protect official sponsor rights*. Indeed there was a lot of commentary around how strictly these *rights* were being *protected* by the *London Olympics Committee*, particularly with respect to the symbols associated with the *games* such as the *logo* or the Olympic rings. While various *sponsors* are mentioned occasionally in the text supporting these concepts, *Adidas* was the most frequently mentioned and thus appeared as a concept. Interestingly, *Adidas* (official sponsor) appears in the **sponsor** theme, rather than in the **athletes** theme, hence the association of *Adidas* with concepts such as *official* and *sponsor*.

*Theme: marketing*

*Concepts: Olympics, Games, ambush marketing, sports, event, brand*

The **marketing** theme had connectivity of 89% and contained key concepts related to commentary about the anticipated *marketing* and *sports* sponsorship activities to take place at the *London Olympics*. The *Games* represent a major sporting *event* which is particularly attractive for *ambush marketing* by *companies* and *brands* that are not official sponsors.

*Theme: Use*

*Concepts: law, use, words including gold, advertising, association, business, rights, protect, London*

The **use** theme deals mostly with the *law* controlling the *use* of *words including gold* and *London* amongst others as well as the *use* of *protected symbols and marks*. The restrictions

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prevent any *advertising* which creates an *association* between the *business* and the Olympics without paying for it. Sponsors exclusivity and intellectual property *rights* are thus *protected*. The **use** theme overlaps with the **sponsor** theme to a large extent with the concepts *London*, *protect* and *rights* being common to both. Although 'use' is a vague term, in the context of the Olympic Games it can be seen to represent the 'use' of Olympic symbols, wording or sponsor rights.

Moving now to the cooler coloured theme bubbles (greens and then blues and purples), ie those that are less important in capturing the discussions in the corpus, it can be noted that these themes contain fewer and smaller concept dots. These less important themes are briefly discussed.

LOCOG is the acronym for the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games. The **Locog** theme includes the concepts related to the *Locog rules* governing *sponsorship* of the Games. The concepts *Games*, *Olympics*, *rules* and *sponsorship* occur in both the **marketing** and **Locog** themes. The **media** theme indicates that *social media* in particular, was a key concept reported on. These two concepts are in very close proximity and are also strongly linked to the *marketing* concept. Text references are to new media with a frequent mention of the threats to Twitter accounts in breach of the strict regulations. Speculation about whether the London Olympics would be the 'Social Olympics' is frequently found. The **campaign** theme indicates the importance of *advertising campaigns* in leveraging sponsorship.

The **athletes** theme contained two main concepts: *athletes* and *Nike*. The *Nike* concept relates to commentary of Nike's previous ambush activities, for example at the 2010 World Cup and to its campaign called 'Find Your Greatness' which was launched as a YouTube video earlier in the year. Instead of showing Olympic *athletes* in London, England, the video shows ordinary *athletes* in numerous other cities and towns named London e.g. London, Ohio, and Little London, Jamaica. The video makes the statement that "Somehow we've come to believe that greatness is reserved for the chosen few, for the superstars. The truth is, greatness is for all of us". The closer association of *Nike* with *athletes* should be contrasted with the association of *Adidas* with *sponsors*. This would suggest that *Nike* is more of a 'people's champion' brand worn by the *athletes* rather than the *official* corporate *sponsor* namely *Adidas*.

The **wearing** theme revolves around more restrictions placed by the IOC on what spectators would be *allowed* to wear and not wear to the venues.

The *wearing* concept reflected fairly disgruntled commentary about what some termed 'draconian rules'. The statement made by Lord Coe, chairman of LOCOG about spectators not being allowed to wear non-sponsor clothes and if they did, would not be let into the stadium, featured frequently.

**Security**, the Olympic **torch** and **rings** and the **opening ceremony** were the least important but still relevant themes (blue and purple bubbles).

Overall the main themes exhibit a strong focus on the highly regulated nature of the London Olympics and the extreme lengths that the IOC and LOCOG's have gone to protect the official sponsors.

## 5.2 Results for the period 'During the Games'

Figure 2 presents the concept map for the period during the Olympic Games.

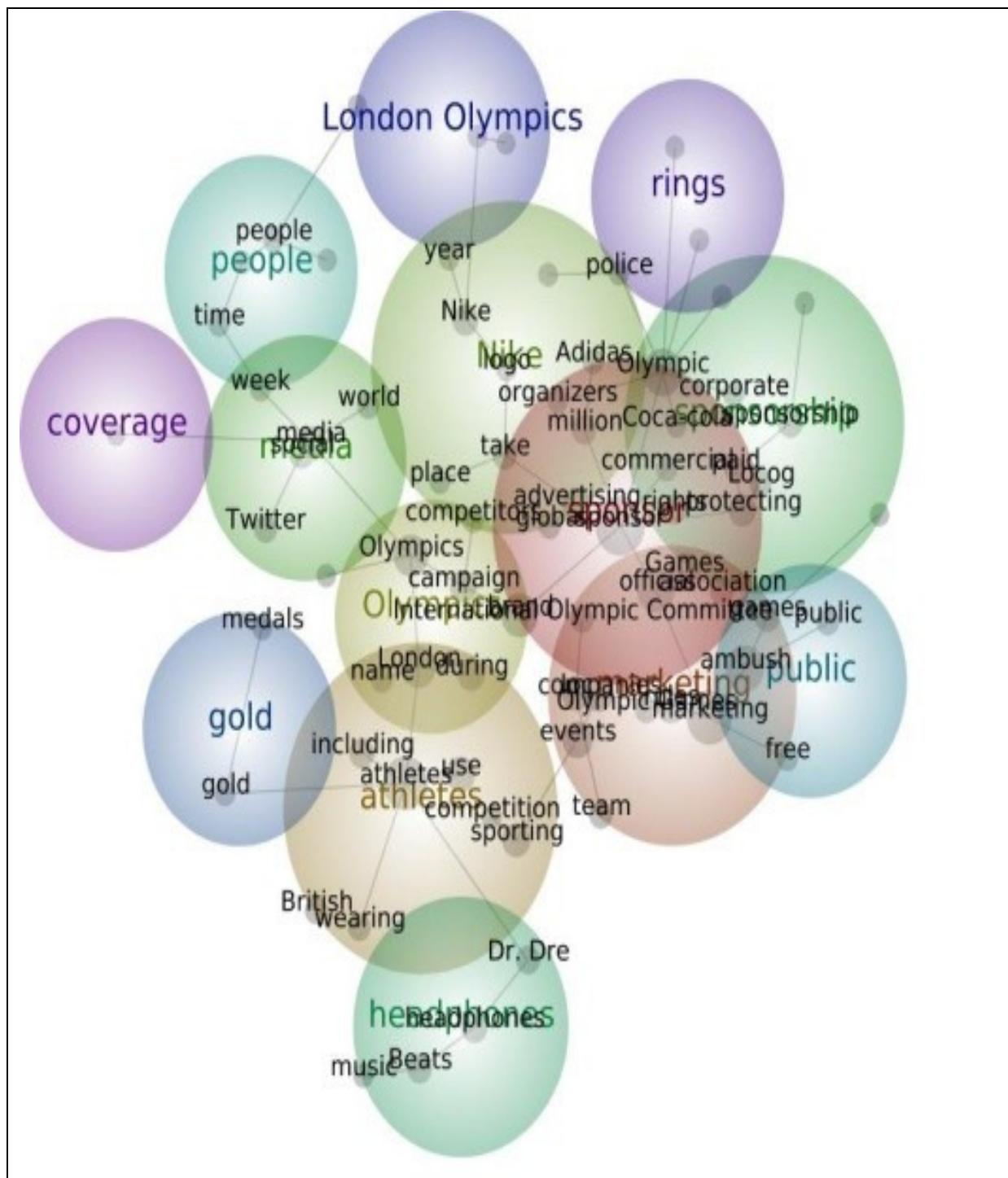
During the Games as seen in Figure 2, some of the key themes remained the same, while other new ones were introduced.

The **sponsor** theme (the red bubble) had 100% connectivity and is thus the dominant theme in the concept map. This theme included a number of the most important concepts within the corpus which addressed the activities of *official sponsors* of the *Olympic Games* with many of the sponsors being mentioned in text references.

Two official sponsors of the Games, *Coca-Cola* and *Adidas* are contained as concepts with *Adidas* intersecting with the theme of **Nike**. There is significant overlap of the **sponsor** theme with the **Nike**, **sponsorship** and **marketing** themes. **Nike** was thus clearly being discussed in relation to the sponsors with the key sponsor under attack being *Adidas*.

The only other official Olympic sponsor within the **sponsor** theme is that of *Coca-Cola*, so of all thirty two official sponsors only two sponsors were mentioned enough to constitute a concept. This seems to indicate that there was not much anticipation of ambushes for most of the sponsors.

Another major focus in the **sponsor** theme is the acknowledgement of the *millions* spent by sponsoring *brands* and the various *advertising* campaigns used to activate the sponsorships.



**FIGURE 2: Concept map for the period during the London Olympics**

Source: Leximancer-generated concept map

The IOC's efforts in *protecting the rights* of these sponsors was again covered but not to the same extent as found in the month prior to the Olympics. As expected, the **sponsor** theme overlapped considerably with the **sponsorship** theme. The primary concept: *sponsorship* revolved around the development of the sponsorship programme and its necessity in the hosting of the Games. The association with this theme is more centred on ensuring the protection of the rights of the official sponsors and on the commercial side of sponsorship such as in the *money, paid* and *corporate* concepts.

The **sponsor** theme however unexpectedly also overlapped significantly with the **Nike** theme. **Nike** was the only brand to have a mention frequency and connectivity high enough to represent a separate theme. This is due to discussion of *Nike*'s previous ambush attempts and particularly *Nike*'s 'Find Your Greatness' campaign which, as was found before the Games, is discussed and acknowledged as a clever campaign which is not considered by LOCOG to be an ambush and which therefore "takes them right up to, but not over, the line".

Interestingly, during the Olympics there is also a major overlap between the **sponsor** and **marketing** themes. This contrasts the period before the Games when these themes were quite separate.

The second most important theme, **marketing** had connectivity of 80% with discussion of the *marketing* campaigns of both sponsor and non-sponsor *companies*, the most notable *ambushers* being the Dr Dre, Nike and Paddy Power campaigns which managed to sidestep the strict *IOC rules*. There is also similar discussion to that found before the Games on the need for the strict IOC rules to prevent non-sponsor *association* with the *games* so as to ensure that *events* such as the games can continue both in terms of attracting sponsors and securing the bid to host.

As may be expected, the **athletes** theme (45%) had far greater prominence during the Games and was the third most important theme with concepts including the *use, sporting* and *including* concepts. While this theme before the Games related to companies 'use' of athletes, the theme during the Games focuses on the actual athletes and large part of the discussion around the *athletes* concept has to do with the athletes' protests against Rule 40 and the IOC defence and explanation of this rule.

The overlap with the **headphones** theme is evident in the amount of text covering key athletes *wearing* the Dr Dre headphones and thus gaining the Beats brand publicity. Beats is a brand of headphones that are made by Dr Dre, the ex-rapper. During the Games, especially in the aquatics arena, but also at other events such as tennis and gymnastics, many athletes took to wearing these headphones. This is an interesting ambush as it did not come from one of the anticipated ambush companies that one might expect, rather it can be seen as a 'left-field' ambush that caught the Olympic authorities unaware. This was perhaps one of the most successful ambushes during the Games due to its prevalence among many athletes and the high profile of some of the athlete such as 15 times gold medal winner Michael Phelps regularly appearing with them.

The **Olympics** theme had a connectivity of 40% and covers the concepts of *Olympics*, *London*, *campaign* and *during*. There is some discussion here of the sheer size of the *London Olympics* and its attractiveness to both sponsors and non-sponsors. Various sponsors such as P&G, Adidas, Coca-Cola and Visa and various current and previous ambush campaigns are mentioned. The need for LOGOC and sponsors to monitor and respond to social media *campaigns during* the Games is also mentioned.

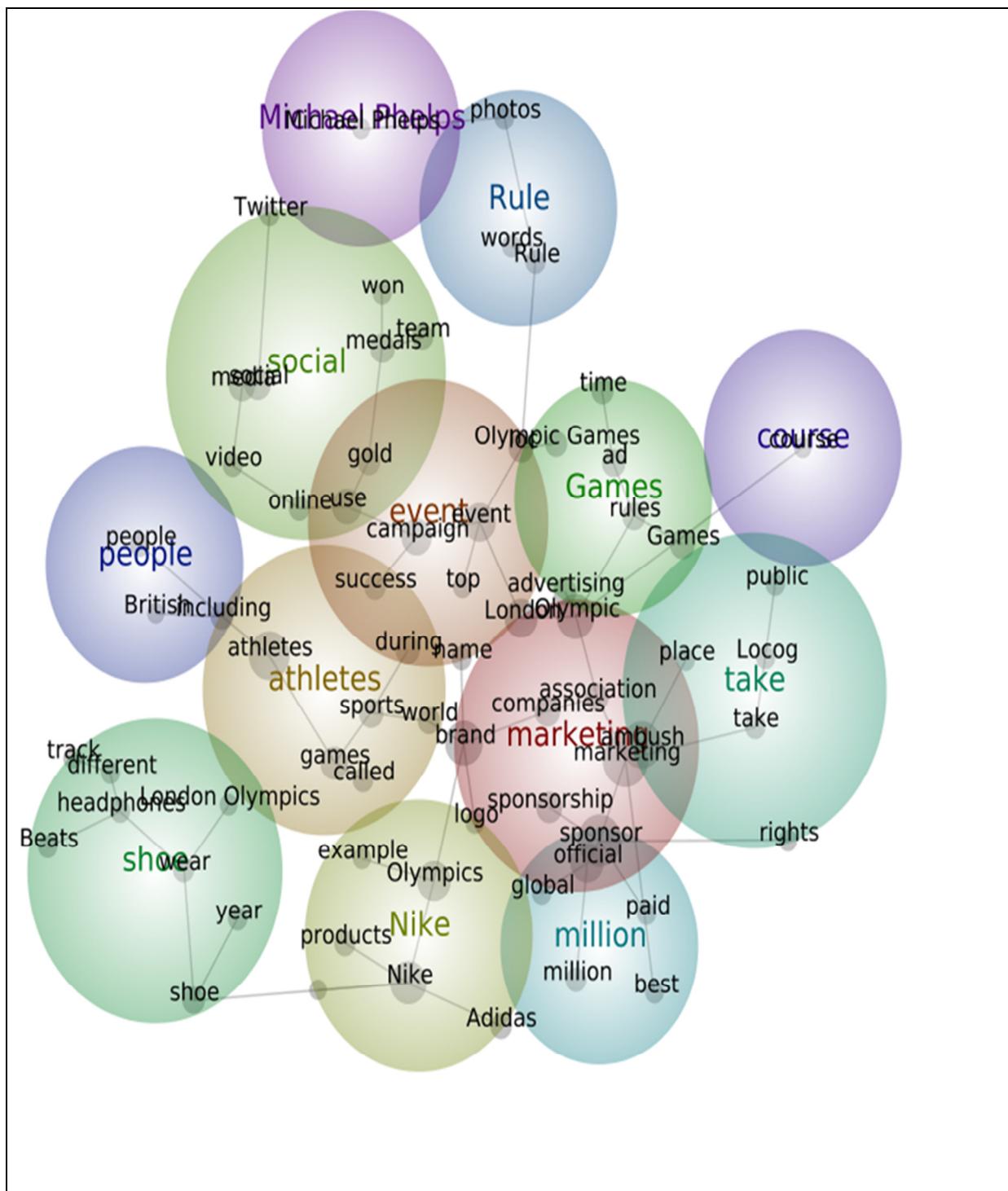
The **media** theme once again emerged as a theme and again included the concepts *media* and *social*. What is different about this theme during the Games is that the *Twitter* concept is also included with discussion of the platform's ability to provide live updates. Least important but still relevant themes (blue and purple bubbles) included the **public**, **rings**, **London Olympics**, **people**, **coverage** and **gold**.

Overall the main themes during the Games while still emphasising the highly regulated nature of the London Olympics and the lengths that the IOC and LOCOG have gone to to protect the official sponsors, now show an emergence of more discussion on the ambushers with Nike and Dr Dre featuring prominently. Both these ambushers appear to have 'tiptoed' around the IOC and LOCOG legislation and rules. The role of social media is highlighted.

### 5.3 Results for the period 'After the Games'

Figure 3 presents the concept map for the period after the Olympic Games.

In the period 'after'; the **sponsor** theme drops out and is replaced with **marketing**, **event** and **athlete** themes as the dominant themes (red to brown bubbles).



**FIGURE 3: Concept map for the period after the London Olympics**

Source: Leximancer-generated concept map

The **marketing** theme had 100% connectivity and reflects similar concepts to those found in previous periods. The **event** theme (39%) overlapped with four other themes. There were larger overlaps with the themes of **athletes** (39%) and **social** (28%) and to a lesser extent with **games** (23%).

Within the **event** theme the central concepts of *campaign*, *event*, *success* and *top* indicate the discussion that the event was reported as a '*top*' *event* or a *successful* Olympics but also in that the *event* was *successful* in terms of preventing or containing any ambush marketing campaigns. The **event** theme overlapped with the theme of **athletes** (39%) which contained the concepts *athletes*, *sports* and *games*. *Sports athletes* at the Games faced considerable restrictions and much of the discussion was about Rule 40 which restricted *athletes*' tweets but did not prevent individual *athletes* from wearing non-sponsor brands in their events thus allowing the Nike Volt impact.

Moving to the slightly less important (green bubbles) themes, the **Nike** theme also contained the concepts of *Nike*, *Olympics*, *products*, *logo* and *example* and much of the discussion was around the main *example* of Nike's products, the neon/ florescent shoe which did not require people to see the *logo* to realise it was a *Nike* shoe. The theme of **Nike** unsurprisingly contained the concept of their official rival sponsor of the Games, *Adidas* and discussion often centred on the fact that the *Nike* shoe was so much more striking than that of *Adidas*. The 'shoe wars' were predicted to raise problems in the 2012 Games (Taylor 2012:462). Similar to the other two periods, the theme of **social** (28%) emerged, including concepts such as *social*, *media*, *video*, *online* and *Twitter*. *Social* and *media* emerge as central concepts supporting the involvement of *social media* with the Games. There is a fair amount of discussion around the tweets by and about the gold medal winners. Interestingly *Twitter* appears on the peripheries indicating that it was generally successfully contained during the Games.

The theme of **shoe** is an interesting addition to the map. This theme includes concepts such as *wear*, *headphones*, *beats*, *track*, *different* and, *London Olympics* and actually contains a great deal of the discussion surrounding the main ambush marketing examples evidenced in the London 2012 Olympics that being by Nike and Dr Dre. A great deal of the discussion in this theme was about athletes *wearing* the Nike Volt *track* shoe which was actually a collection of sixteen different types of running shoe designed specifically for the London

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Olympics. Discussion also centred on how the colour chosen stands out and contrasts most with the *track* colour and is the colour that the human eye is most sensitive to. There was also discussion around the *wearing* by prominent athletes, of the Dr Dre's *Beats headphones*.

Least important themes (blue and purple bubbles) in this period included **course, take, million, people, Rule** and **Michael Phelps**. Although with a very small connectivity percentage, perhaps the most interesting addition to the map after the Games was that of **Michael Phelps**. **Phelps** was one of many high profile athletes who wore the Dr Dre Beats headphones to either the start of races or to the medal ceremonies. In addition to this, the swimmer appeared in a Louis Vuitton advert after the Games which received a significant amount of exposure. Neither Dr Dre nor LVMH (owners of the Louis Vuitton brand) were official sponsors of the Games. The **Phelps** *photo* taken for the Louis Vuitton advert and purportedly "leaked" to the press was still in breach of **Rule** 40 as it appeared 3 days prior to the lifting of the **Rule** 40 ban. This explains the overlap with the **Rule** theme which contained the concepts of *photo* and *rule*. This observation indicates an interesting point relating to when an ambush can occur for it to qualify as an ambush as this advert appeared only after the main Games had concluded (the Para Olympics were running during this period). Finally, the theme of **people** included concepts such as *people* and *British*, suggesting the Games were very much an inclusive event, for the *people* and something that was very *British*.

## 6. DISCUSSION

This discussion centres on the similarities in the maps and themes found across periods, then the differences between the periods reflecting the changing nature of ambush marketing.

Table 1 presents a summary of the themes across the three periods.

### 6.1 Similarities in the concept maps across the periods

There are several similarities between the Leximancer maps for the periods 'before', 'during' and 'after' the Games. All periods produced complex maps with a similar number of key themes between twelve and fourteen, with two themes appearing across all three periods, namely **marketing** and **athletes**. While the theme **marketing** is unsurprising given the specific search terms used and the fact that ambush tactics are seen as part of marketing

strategy, the **athletes** theme indicates that the connection between the athletes and ambushing was being discussed throughout the periods.

Thus even before the Olympics Nike's 'Find your greatness' ambush focused on 'everyday' athletes, while the discussions during and after indicate a shift of emphasis to ambushing via the Olympic athletes. This is in contrast to the early ambush attempts in which broadcast advertising was the primary tactic used, and even 2010 ambushing where spectators were the primary avenue for the ambush. This supports Burton and Chadwick's (2009:310) statement that ambush marketing is constantly evolving.

**TABLE 1: Themes in each period order by significance**

No. of themes	Before	During	After
	12	14	13
Central themes (earth colours – red, brown and then green )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ sponsors</li><li>▪ marketing</li><li>▪ use</li><li>▪ Locog</li><li>▪ campaign</li><li>▪ athletes</li><li>▪ media</li><li>▪ wearing</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ sponsor</li><li>▪ marketing</li><li>▪ athletes</li><li>▪ Olympics</li><li>▪ Nike</li><li>▪ media</li><li>▪ sponsorship</li><li>▪ headphones</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ marketing</li><li>▪ event</li><li>▪ athletes</li><li>▪ Nike</li><li>▪ social</li><li>▪ Games</li><li>▪ shoe</li></ul>
Secondary themes (blue and purple)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ opening</li><li>▪ security</li><li>▪ rings</li><li>▪ torch</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ people</li><li>▪ public</li><li>▪ gold</li><li>▪ London Olympics</li><li>▪ rings</li><li>▪ coverage</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ take</li><li>▪ million</li><li>▪ rule</li><li>▪ people</li><li>▪ course</li><li>▪ take</li><li>▪ Michael Phelps</li></ul>

Source: Authors' compilation from data analysis

*Nike* appeared as a concept before the Games and as a theme during and after the Games. This would indicate that although the text does not necessarily associate the Nike brand with being an official sponsor, there seems to be an association with Nike in a wider context with being an ambusher together with an association of the London Olympics. **Sponsors** and **media** themes were evident before and during the Olympics reinforcing the critical role played by **sponsors** but also acknowledging the role of the **media** and especially social media in the London Olympics.

## 6.2 Differences in the concept maps across the periods

There were some themes found only in the period 'before' such as **Locog**, **campaign** and **wearing** reflecting the pre-Olympics media coverage of the restrictions imposed by LOCOG on the **use** of symbols including the **Olympic rings** and words in advertising **campaigns** and the **wearing**, by **athletes** and audiences, of non-sponsor brands.

Less significantly and somewhat expected were themes such as the **Opening** ceremony, the **Olympic torch** that travelled around various parts of the UK. This is contrasted with themes such as **Nike** and **headphones** which appeared as important emergent themes 'during' the Games. These include the concepts of *music*, *Beats* and *Dr Dre*. This period also includes the theme **Nike**, which includes the concepts *Nike* (ambushing company) and *Adidas* (official sponsor).

The themes 'during' the Games also appear to be more tightly clustered than the other periods, indicating a greater degree of concentration and overlap of the key themes. This is in contrast to the period 'before' where there are distinct and separate conversations occurring.

'After' the Olympics, themes of **event**, **social** and **shoe** emerged as new themes. Despite the strict legislation and policing of traditional and social media, ambush marketing did occur perhaps most significantly by Nike and its Volt track shoes, but also other non-sponsors whose products were worn by the athletes at the events. **Rule 40** and particularly the restrictions on athletes' tweets, caused a fair amount of negative media coverage and was perhaps the most controversial of the anti-ambush legislation. A less dominant, but interesting theme was the **Michael Phelps** theme, the only named athlete amongst the themes. This inclusion again indicates evidence of ambush marketing, this time by Louis Vuitton as well as the link to Dr Dre previously mentioned.

Comparing the concept maps across the periods, the Leximancer analysis illustrates the changing nature of the public debate around ambush marketing during each of the periods shifting from a high level general discussion around ambush marketing to more specific events or incidents of ambush marketing. The context of the discussion of some themes also changed, such as **wearing** which when initially reported was more associated with the public wearing items of clothing to the athletes wearing the items. Once an ambush event occurs,

this tends to generate quite a lot of focused discussion around the event, although that discussion tends to be contained to the ambush event itself rather than a wider application.

## 7. LIMITATIONS

The authors recognise that limitations apply to the research undertaken for this study. These limitations arise from both the method of data collection and the interpretation of data.

One limitation was that the data was only extracted from an online source, which limits the amount of reporting relating to the event. This limitation was considered to have a minor impact as many articles and reports in print are also duplicated online.

A second limitation was that a Google search does not include any word strength rating. This resulted in articles specifically relating to ambush marketing of the London Olympics being assigned the same weight as articles that were not specifically relating to ambush marketing and London Olympics. Despite this limitation, the alternative of only including articles and postings solely relating to ambush marketing and the London Olympics would have required an additional subjective interpretation regarding the weighting of the article as well as determining a relevancy threshold. Due to the amount of data collected, it was considered that the most appropriate method was not to introduce weighting criteria.

A further limitation may have been that text was only extracted from articles displayed by a Google search. This potentially produced biased results dependent on the Google algorithm. This limitation was addressed in that the researchers checked the results displayed from using alternative search engines to Google such as Yahoo and Bing and it was noted that similar results were displayed, indicating the different search engines use similar search algorithms.

A final limitation arose with respect to the interpretation by the researchers of the Leximancer maps. Due to the nature of the visual display of the maps, there is the potential of subjectivity bias in interpretation. However, this limitation was mitigated as the researchers discussed and compared their interpretation to produce an agreed consensus and Leximancer has been found to be reliable (Rooney 2005:410), and valid (Smith & Humphreys 2006:277).

## 8. CONCLUSION

Considering all three periods of data, it appears that the dominant conversations before and during the Games centred on the tight protection of exclusivity rights provided to sponsors to protect their substantial investments in the London Olympics. This strict regulatory environment appears to have had the desired effect of limiting the extent of ambush to a small number of cases. Despite the rise of social media since the Beijing Olympic Games, this media channel was effectively restrained by the strict rules, regulations and agreements in place. Nike, Dr Dre as well as Paddy Power and Louis Vuitton, to a lesser extent, however managed to pull off successful ambushes.

Ambushes occurred before (Nike's 'Find your greatness' campaign), during (Nike's Volt shoes and Dr Dre's headphones) and after (Luis Vuitton) but all involved the use of athletes.

Ambush marketing thus appears to have morphed or evolved again as Burton and Chadwick (2009:310) indicated it had done previously. Discussion did not reflect negative sentiment towards the ambushers as found by Farrelly *et al.* (2005:246) and Mazodier *et al.* (2012:209). In fact, in the majority of cases discussion was about the resourcefulness and cleverness of the ambushers.

This seems to indicate more of a pro-ambusher stance as found by Pitt *et al.* (2010:288). This may be due to the fact that the current research data was drawn from commentaries for example by reporters or by people with more of an interest in sponsorship and ambush marketing, than the general 'man-in-the-street' found in many of the other consumer-based studies.

Sponsorship is more costly, there is more IOC involvement, more legislation and policing to combat ambush marketing, yet the opportunity for ambush marketing is more attractive. If ambush marketing is successful, not only do the media pick up on the event, but there is a connection with official sponsors of the event. However, rather than a full frontal assault such as advertising of the Li Ning method, on the global sporting event, the nature of ambush marketing have morphed to include subtler techniques.

The prize for effective ambush strategy on a global sporting event is the equivalent of winning gold. The revenue of Dr Dre Beats in the year prior to the Olympics (2011) was \$298 million. In 2012 revenue had increased to \$519 million (Garrahan 2013:Internet) and by 2013

had reached \$1.5 5 billion (Sisario 2014:Internet). This success could either be due to an association of the product with an official sponsor of the event, or alternatively, recognition that it is an ambush brand, regardless of official association.

The challenge for the governments and official sponsors is to understand the changing nature of ambush marketing, whilst the challenge for ambushers is to be more anticipatory, creative and forward thinking to be one step ahead of the competition.

A suggested area for future research could be to analyse whether a protected sponsorship investment is actually best for the brand, using discrete time periods to see if and how public sentiment of the brand changes. Given the highly legislated nature of the London Olympics, future research could be conducted to determine how effective this is in containing an ambush.

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