



Sport Communication Report: Samsung Communication Campaign for Rio Olympic Games

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Abstract: This paper analyses the content and strategy of Samsung's sport communication campaign during the Rio Olympic Games. This paper reviews the relevant marketing and communication theories and then analyzes Samsung's product selection, opinion leaders, and communication strategies. We suggest that the sports products, marketers, and owners provide feedback, making the three advertisements more effective. The selection of athletes for the advertisements demonstrates the core value of the Olympic Games. When the opinion receivers decode the meaning expressed in the advertisements, both behavior and cognitive learning theory have applied to the analysis. The communication campaign's effective decoding enabled the consumers to make quick decisions.

Keywords: Sport Communication, Samsung Communication Campaign, Olympic Games

1. INTRODUCTION

In the Sports Marketing field, communication is an indispensable part of an event and related consumption. There has been a marked increase in enthusiasm to host or sponsor world-class sporting events, not least because of the economic rewards (Asteriou, Samitas & Kenourgios, 2013). Indeed, two-thirds of all sponsorship expenditure in North America is attributable to sporting events, equating to approximately \$16.51 billion (IEG, 2009). The Rio 2016 Summer Olympic Games exemplifies this: around 30 billion viewers (per hour) tuned in to watch the event globally, and revenue made by the Olympic Movement from sponsorship was more than \$848 million (IOC, 2017, p. 21 & p. 15). The money raised from sponsorship was spent on advertising campaigns broadcast on social media platforms to promote the sponsors' sports-related products and the sports event (Cook, 2001; Horne, 2006).

The communication process of an advertising campaign (Figure 1, Schwarz, Hunter & LaFleur, 2013, p. 233) originates from an idea that connects a given product to the event. The source is encoded, giving the idea a unique identity, and can be delivered over multiple platforms, such as verbal, visual, and print, using

narration or episodic and semantic means. At this juncture, the third party becomes involved, the so-called 'reference group' (Whan, 1977), which present, describe, and persuade the sport consumer of the commodity. Once the source has been encoded, the channel helps deliver the message to the receiver, incorporating a wealth of media to do so (Internet, newspaper, poster, radio, television, etc.). The receivers are exposed to what triggers their senses, capturing their attention and reminding them of their past experiences. During this time, the receiver understands the signifier's denotation and Connotation (Cobley, 1996). Furthermore, the role of the memory (Solomon, 2013) enables the receiver to decode the advertising campaign and provide feedback to the source again.

This paper will attempt to critically analyze the content and strategy of Samsung's sport communication campaign during the Rio Olympic Games, based on sport and communication theory. The products promoted in the three chosen advertisements are Samsung cord-free earbuds and the Samsung Galaxy S7 Edge smartphone.

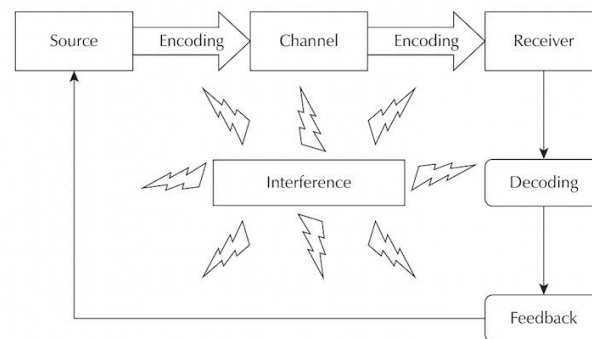


Figure 1 The communication process

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Communication theories and strategies

Sports marketers seek to unearth methods of influencing consumers to make decisions after the communication in the hope that their demographic will be affected by their attitudes, choices, recommendations, and behaviors (Rogers, 2003). In particular, marketers value information sourced from opinion leaders who are seen as possessing credibility (Schwarz et al, 2013). Lyons and Hendeson (2005) indicate that opinion leaders' traits, including self-confidence, competitiveness, and intelligence, can considerably influence consumer behavior. Similarly, Carpenter (2012) found that self-promotion, or narcissism, was also influenced by opinion leaders. Additionally, other researchers have highlighted personal characteristics such as being experimental, open, curious, and innovative (McElroy et al., 2007). Initial studies of opinion leadership concentrated on how such leaders can affect opinion followers in several areas (Solomon, 2013). However, later literature questioned this assumption and argued that, for the large part, the influence of most opinion leaders is confined to one domain, and they are typically not experts in all fields (Merton, 1957). Likewise, King & Summers (1970) indicate that it is uncommon to find generalized opinion leaders with more than one defined authority area. In more recent literature, communication technologies have improved, the internet has become a powerful means to deliver advertisement campaigns, and it has also become a new stage for opinion leaders who are active on many social media platforms (Song,

Cho & Kim, 2017). This type of opinion leader is called the online opinion leader and is now, in many respects, more valued than traditional opinion leaders (Solomon, 2013).

Opinion leaders are viewed as vital to the communication process. There are two communication flow models that aid in distinguishing the role of opinion leadership in this process – the Two-step Flow Communication Model (Figure 2, Schwarz, 2013) and the Multi-Step Communication Model (Figure 3, Schwarz, 2013). Schwarz (2013) elucidates that the two-step model is a direct communication process whereby the source, the sport product, utilizes the sports marketer, the opinion leader, who influences and persuades the sport consumer (the opinion receiver) of the value of a product. In comparison, the multi-step model illustrates a more varied role of opinion leadership, where it can be the source itself or the sports marketer. In this model, all three interrelate and can affect each other's decisions.

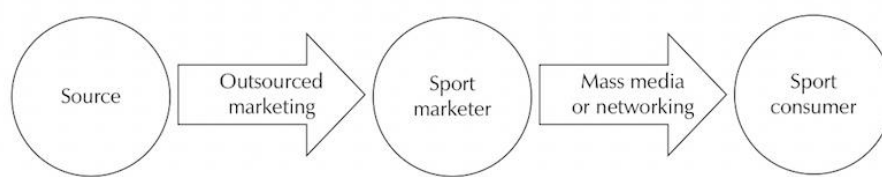


Figure 2 Two-step Flow Communication Model

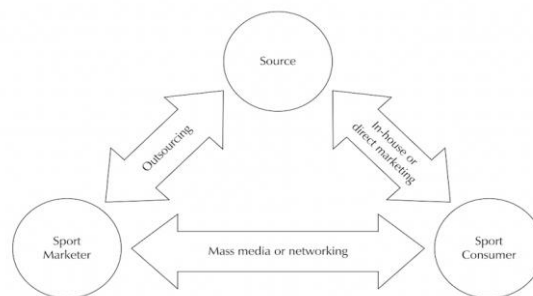


Figure 3 Multi-step Flow Communication Model

1.2 Denotation and Connotation

The sports marketer tends to present memorable advertisements and is more open to an in-depth understanding of the person, community, and society (Puntoni, Schroeder & Ritson, 2010). According to Lee (2017), a sign's meaning can be explicitly and implicitly explained. Eco (1977) and Lee (2017) both proffer similar definitions of denotation and Connotation: denotation is the meaning provided by a dictionary or the definitional meaning, whereas Connotation relates more to the allusive dimension, including the cultural, personal, and ideological implications.

In psychology, an advertisement's meaning can be lexical and psychological (Friedmann & Zimmer, 1988). The psychological meaning largely depends on the spectators' subjective perception. The messages or sources can be determined by their characteristics and can be understood as the inherent potential of polemical meanings (Puntoni et al., 2010). They argue that denotative meanings are much stronger and more

stable than connotative meanings. They explain that a large number of audiences whose general knowledge of in-depth content differs from each other; at the same time, some might not understand the connotative meaning at all. Thus, the success of an advertising campaign largely relies on denotative meanings. However, after watching a commercial advertisement, consumers tend to commit to memory connotative meanings. This result may lead to interpretations that were unintended by the advertisers. As Puntoni et al. (2010) explain, polysemy can lead to the loss of control over the meaning of brands. Therefore, a meticulous analysis of an advertisement should be conducted before and after a mass communication campaign. The length of time and the advertisement's target demographic affects the communication's effectiveness.

2.3 Cognitive learning theory and the role of memory

Sports marketers use cognitive learning theories to produce brand loyalty from the consumer when designing their advertisement campaigns. Observational learning is one such cognitive theory that emphasizes internal mental processes. According to Solomon (2013), observational learning occurs when the audience observes other people's actions and appropriates the received reinforcements in their performance, which suggests that learning is a vicarious experience rather than a direct one.

Another focus of observation learning is the involvement concept. For example, Schwarz et al. (2013) indicate that the sports consumer and product are involved in a sports advertising campaign. Sports marketers believe that those who have already connected with the sport product are persuaded. One method of stimulating this process is setting, which refers to refreshing a campaign with new sports facilities or celebrity endorsements (Schwarz et al., 2013).

Bandura (1977) believes that retention, the memory of something that has been experienced or learned, is the most crucial factor of the learning process. Thus, it follows that the sports marketer must be captured in the memories of consumers, including both memories of the campaign itself and personal memories (internal and external memory), to produce an effective campaign.



Figure 4 Observational Learning Process

Craik & Lockhart (1972) think that individuals can convert simple sensory memories to more sophisticated semantic ones, which means they can use the current senses to relate to previous experiences or beliefs. Episodic memories relate to events relevant to the audience; semantic memories are symbolic associations, stimuli, and references; and narrative memories are also called stories (Solomon, 2013). In decoding and encoding memories, the memory system can divide into sensory, short-term, and long-term memories. However, due to the long time taken to collect data from a sample in sports communication, there are few studies of long-term memory.

3. THE SELECTION

The earbuds and smartphone advertisements were selected because they are products of Samsung Electronics Company, which began its legacy of sponsoring the Olympics in 1998 and has continued to the present day

to sponsor the event. Jacques Rogge, the president of the IOC (cited in Kang & Stotlar, 2011), said that the Olympic Games couldn't have achieved the reputation it enjoys today without the sponsorship of technology, services, and telecommunication companies. According to Jacques Rogge, to some extent, products that may not be directly associated with the sport also play a vital role in the Olympic Games.

One deep-laid marketing strategy that Samsung uses is based on communication theories, specifically behavioral learning theories. One specific school of thought within psychology regarding behavioral theory is behaviorism, which posits that behavior learning is ordinarily the consequence of response to outside events (Solomon, 2013). One of the significant tenements of this theory is classical conditioning, proposed by Ivan Pavlov. Davey (1987) explains classical conditioning. He suggested that an unconditioned response (e.g., salivation) is a natural stimulus. He explains that a natural stimulus is an unconditioned stimulus (e.g., food), and a natural stimulus reacts to another. Still, the preselected-the stimulus (the conditioned stimulus) previously elicited shows no response. This type of behavioral conditioning can be observed in Samsung's Olympic marketing campaign: the motivational content of the advertising campaign, the promotion of success and peace, is the unconditioned stimulus; the sensing of the Olympic spirit is the unconditioned response; the advertisements are the conditioned stimulus; the conditioned response is the connection by audiences of the Samsung product with the Olympic spirit. Therefore, the analysis of the content and strategy of Samsung's communication activities in this paper also highlights that advertisers apply semiotic theory and communication methods to their product advertising.

The first section of the analysis concerns the selection of opinion leaders, particularly celebrities. Solomon (2013) says these are influential people in a specific community who can significantly influence community members' attitudes. Because of the symbolic meaning of sports stars, sports marketers often invite them to act as their brand ambassadors (Lee, 2017).

Chongwei Lee, the Malaysian Chinese professional singles badminton player, appeared in the first Samsung online and TV promotional campaign analyzed here. He has achieved silvers in Olympic events and is seen as a champion in other worldwide badminton events. Appointed as UNICEF Malaysia's national Ambassador in the year of 2009, he is not only a successful Olympic athlete but also a dedicated philanthropist. At the end of the advertisement, a moment is captured when Chongwei receives a message from his wife which reads, "*Do your best! We BELIEVE in you!*". His wife, Miaozhu Huang, is a former renowned Malaysian badminton player, although less well-known than Chongwei Lee. In this case, Huang can be categorized as a subcultural celebrity. As underlined earlier, online opinion leaders are often seen as more desirable than conventional ones (Song, 2017). As 1.1 million people follow Lee's official Facebook, he may be regarded as an online opinion leader who can persuade a larger audience of Samsung's products.

The second advertisement featured Margret Rumat Rumar Hassan, a sprinter from South Sudan. Although she had not yet secured an Olympic medal, Samsung valued her social identity. In the 2014 Youth Olympics, she attended as an Independent Olympic Athlete. Then, a year later, South Sudan was recognized as a member of the International Olympic Committee, and at the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, where Hassan represented her country- was a significant event for the Republic of South Sudan. Hassan was a great strategic choice for Samsung for building brand value. The advertisement depicts Hassan being cheered and supported by her country's people of all ages. Moreover, the other athletes briefly featured in the advertisement were also of African descent and a majority of Olympic workers. This is vital because some audiences may feel sensitive to racial differences (Solomon, 2013). Thus opinion receivers in different minority groups are more likely to view a celebrity from their group as more trustworthy and will be easier to persuade regarding Samsung's product (Deshpande & Stayman, 1994).

The third advertisement, The Anthem, appeals to opinion leaders of different ages and ethnic groups. The ad begins and ends with close-ups of a young girl from Botswana displayed on a Samsung phone and includes a young boy from Canada, a French teenager, African-American teachers and young students, a middle-aged Brazilian man, a young Malaysian woman, Malawi monks, UK primary school students, New Zealand teenagers playing the sport, an older woman from Germany, an older man from Australia, and six global athletes (Tom Daley, Alysia Montano, Arnaud Assoumani, Margret Hassan, Shelley Watts, and Gabriel Medina). This advertisement aims to appeal to the large youth market and also emphasizes the different age groups of Samsung smartphone users and their use of Samsung smartphones throughout their lives and in other areas of their lives, such as on holiday, at work, in school, and playing sports.

4. THE ENCODING AND DECODING OF THE ADVERTISEMENT CAMPAIGN CONTENT

This section presents a closer analysis of the signs used by Samsung in its advertisement campaign. In the first case, Lee is captured participating in vigorous badminton games. His words, the sign of the language, portray him as a successful athlete and a successful husband with a supporting wife. In his first sentence, he says, *"It takes a lot to be on top."* A lot here is a polysemy in the English language and, in Lee's case, may represent his hard work as a national athlete. It may also point towards his being suspected of doping by the Badminton World Federation, which he had a hard time with during this period. In the second sentence, Lee speaks, he says *"It takes everything to stay up there."* This sentence may refer to the position of a sports champion or the success of being a man, a husband, or a public figure. In another ruling, Lee says, *"The last man standing, but I won't be standing alone"*. This statement highlights the sponsored product – the Samsung Galaxy Edge smartphone. The word *alone* may gesture towards the Samsung smartphone shown earlier or his wife's message. More importantly, Lee's fans watching this advertisement might feel that Lee is speaking to them and thanking them for their support. In addition, the Samsung slogan *Pledge Your Support* may also indicate a pledge by Lee to the public that he will never use doping and never let his fans down.

In the second advertisement, the cord-free earbuds are a vital sign. The denotation of an earphone is simply a portable device used to listen to music. However, when Hassan activates the Samsung smartphone, she is connected to the sounds of the cheers of her fans-which suggests to the audience that Samsung earbuds let you hear what you want to hear, including the patriotic sounds of her cheering fans, which embeds the earbuds with a patriotic meaning. However, according to Weinstein (1987), patriotic appeals are less effective in mass communications. Additionally, the fans who chanted Hassan's name were filmed doing so in South Sudan, creating a powerful appeal to the people of South Sudan, who will feel a stronger attraction to Samsung's products and the Olympic Games.

The slogan #DoWhatYouCant is used in the last advertisement, expressing different meanings. The denotation is clear: Samsung created a new Olympic song supplementing the official Olympic song, The Anthem. Whereas the Connotation behind the slogan varies. As mentioned, the advertisement featured six global athletes, each with their unique story of doing what they cannot. For example, in Hassan's mind, #DoWhatYouCant may mean the progress in sports made by South Sudan. Others include the obstacles conquered by Tom Daley and Arnaud Assoumani's dream to become a jumping athlete.

Attention is the first step in the observational learning process and refers to the consumer's focus on a model's behavior (Solomon, 2013). Similarly, Bandura (1977) indicates that consumers' attention should be directed to the model. In the first advertisement, there are several intervals where slow-motion is used to show Lee playing on the court, which guides the viewers' attention to Lee. In the first instance, he sighs, his knee is bent and covered by his left hand, and the other hand is holding the racket he is using to support his body. However, after using the Samsung Galaxy Edge smartphone, he appears more motivated and steps back onto the court to play badminton.

Memory retention is acquiring and storing information over time to be available when needed (Solomon, 2013, p. 118). Lee's sign, the skill of playing badminton, and his wife's message may encourage opinion receivers to recall certain instances from their memory. For example, the last time they wanted to give up on a complicated thing, a situation when they were watching a sports game, or circumstances when they were encouraged by others. These are all examples of episodic memories that are personally relevant and enable them to be retained more easily (Endel, 1989). In the video of Hassan, the audience is exposed to repeated information. Such repetition can stimulate the audience's memory (Stuart et al., 1987). It creates not only an awareness of the athlete Hassan but also of the country of South Sudan. More importantly, when the audience sees Hassan during the Rio Olympic Games, they will recall the advertisement for Samsung earbuds.

The other exciting aspect of the earbuds advertisement is that the name Margret Rumat Rumar Hassan is an easy stimulus for short-term memory- the magic of chunking. In Hassan's full name, there are eight syllables. Baddeley & Walter (1994) argue that the magic seven no longer works, meaning that a chunk of seven syllables is not efficient for memory retrieval. Thus, the longer name repeated with a certain rhythm makes it much easier for people to recall.

The last video uses 14 national anthems sung by people in various countries to stimulate people's long-term memory. This planned advertisement campaign was conducted during the Rio Olympic Games. When the game's audience sings the lyrics, these lyrics may then be transferred from the viewer's short-term memory into their long-term memory (Solomon, 2013). Moreover, at the end of this video, the slogan *#DoWhatYouCant* appears again. # is a symbol sign representing a hot topic on social media platforms. During the Rio Olympic period, when people saw the topic on Facebook, Twitter, etc., it was highly likely to remind them of the Samsung products they previously saw advertised.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper discusses the content and strategy of the Samsung Rio Olympic communication campaign. The sports communication process provides the conduit for establishing and maintaining a relationship between the consumer and sports marketing professional (Schwar et al., 2013). The multi-step flow provided evidence that all three advertisements have more than one opinion leadership. The sports products, marketers, and owners provided feedback, making the three advertisements more effective. The selection of athletes for the advertisements demonstrates the core value of the Olympic Games: *'Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy found in effort, the educational value of a good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles'* (IOC, 2017). When the opinion receivers decode the meaning expressed in the advertisements, both behavior and cognitive learning theory have applied to the analysis. The communication campaign's effective decoding enabled the consumers to make quick decisions (Solomon, 2013). In terms of sports communication, the Olympic Games are one of the most successful worldwide events, which benefits Samsung its social values and mission. Thus, sports communication is vital in building a utopian society we always pursue.

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