

# Roles of Emotional Responses on Olympic Sponsorships

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This study explores the roles of emotional responses on Olympic sponsors. Using pleasure and arousal as major mediating variables, the antecedents and consequences of emotional responses were investigated. The findings of this study showed that sensation seeking had significant direct effects on Olympic involvement and emotional responses, as well as that Olympic involvement was linked to pleasure and arousal. In regard to the consequences of consumer affect, pleasure influenced attitudes toward the sponsor and word-of-mouth intentions of the Olympic sponsor directly. However, the direct relationships between arousal and Olympic sponsors were not found. Finally, attitudes toward the sponsor influenced WOM (word-of-mouth) intentions. These results could provide academic and managerial implications regarding the roles of consumer emotions on mega event sponsorships. The originality of this study is exploring the role of emotional responses on sponsorships incorporating hierarchical relationships among the psychological, Olympic, and sponsor variables.

**KEY WORDS** Olympic sponsorship • Sensation seeking • Involvement • PAD • Attitudes • WOM

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Olympic Games have an important meaning in marketing communication. The Olympics have various values. The Games themselves are the target of consumption and can be used as marketing communication tools. Many global companies invest their marketing budgets in mega event games, and the Olympics are the representative event to which money is headed. Along with global partners, local companies also participate as Olympic sponsors. In addition to official sponsors, informal sponsors are actively promoted in the form of ambush marketing. Ambush marketing is marketing through messages that can be reminiscent of the Olympics by companies that are not official sponsors. For the official sponsor, it is necessary to achieve the maximum advertising effect in the 'sponsorship clutter' environment (Woodside, Summers, 2012). Thirteen Olympic partners and eleven local sponsors supported the PyeongChang 2018 Olympic Winter Games. For example, KT, a telecommunication provider in Korea, served as one of the local sponsors.

Various studies have been conducted on Olympic sponsorship. The most representative is the effect that exposure through sporting events affects the brand image of a company. Sponsorship contributes to creating or enhancing a brand image (Lee & Seok, 2009). Specifically, it refers to the effect of sports sponsorship activities on brand recognition and brand equity and brand loyalty (Baek & Koo, 2013). In particular, as for the exposure effect, the fit between sports and corporate images has a moderating effect (Kim & Kim, 2010). A general result is that the sponsorship effect is high when the image fit between sports and companies is high. In addition, the level of consumer involvement in each sport moderates the effect of sponsorship advertisements (Cha, Cho, Youn, & Lee, 2001). A lot of research has been done on ambush marketing other than formal sponsorship (Lee & Lee, 2003).

This study explores the effects of local Olympic sponsorships on consumer

behaviors. The effects of global sponsorships are well documented in the literature, but local sponsors have not been major research topics in sponsorship studies. This study aims to investigate the effect of local sponsorship on kt. More specifically, this study focuses on the roles of consumer affect that is essential element of sport experiences. Using emotional responses as a major mediating variable, the antecedents and consequences are investigated. Another variable is that consumers' psychological tendency could influence sponsorship effects. Involvement on sports or the Olympics is also included because it could impact sponsorship effects.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1) Affective experiences of sponsorship

As previous literature suggested, the Olympic Games provide huge marketing opportunities. The effects of Olympic sponsorship include tangible and intangible outcomes. There are various explanations for sponsorship effects, but the reason why sports sponsorships are effective is that sports can provide massive emotional experiences. These emotions are linked to the images of sponsors and make them more favorable. Emotion is an important agent when people use media content or on-the-spot content because emotion is the first step regarding the whole experiences of audiences (Lee, Park, & Jun, 2019). Emotion is a key element of marketing overall, but researchers are just now beginning to understand its important role (Hudson et al., 2015). It is a traditional belief that marketing researchers have mainly dealt with cognitive elements, but have now started to look more at the affective concepts in current marketing situations, as emotional responses influence consumer choices at the very last moment (Jun, 2019).

Emotion is important because it influences consumer evaluations and actual behaviors. According to the valence and intensity research on emotion in sport sponsorship, more positive emotions related to sports have stronger impacts on the sponsorship persuasion process (Bal, Quester & Plewa, 2010). In the study of branding effectiveness of event sponsors, emotion partially affects the attitude toward sponsor events, and this attitude positively affects brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand association or awareness (Mao & Zhang, 2013).

When measuring these elements, PAD (pleasure, arousal, and dominance) is frequently used because it can efficiently contain human emotion. While these three dimensions are widely used among researchers, it is also true that many researchers have argued about their interpretation. Russell and many researchers found that pleasure and arousal were indicators of emotion, and dominance was more cognitive (Russell, Ward & Pratt, 1981). Russell, Ward & Pratt (1981) conducted affective research on two axes of pleasure and arousal. Some researchers suggested that pleasure and arousal should be considered as affective and cognitive concepts, and dominance as a conative concept (Bakker, van der Voordt, Vink & Boon, 2014). Recent studies used pleasure and arousal as the main dimensions of human emotion, and the current study also uses the two axes of pleasure and arousal as main mediators.

### **(1) Sensation seeking**

Consumer characteristics could influence the acceptance of communication messages along with entertainment content. Some personality moderate effects of marketing messages. It is said that individual differences explain a lot of variance of consumer behaviors. Sensation seeking explains a certain tendency of consumer preferences. Hirshman (1980) suggested that sensation seeking is considered as consumer characteristics influencing consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions.

According to AMIE (Activation Model of Information Exposure), attention to a certain piece of information is related to personal need, and audiences try to sustain a moderate degree of stimuli or pursuit stronger stimuli (Donohew, Palmgreen, & Duncan, 1980). People who have a high tendency of sensation seeking hold comparatively higher levels of optimal stimulus, as well as want stimulating and novel experiences. On the contrary, people who have a low tendency of sensation seeking want simple and stable works (Bagdasarov et al., 2010).

Sensation seeking is used to predict risk behaviors and addiction in terms of individual difference variables (Arnett, 1994). Sensation seeking can also be used to explain audience behaviors and is linked to Internet dependency (Lin & Tsai, 2002). A high level of stimulus is effective for those who have a high level of sensation seeking (Lang, 2005). People with high sensation seeking prefer humor appeal, fear appeal, and quick bits of music (McNamara & Ballard, 1999). Also, the tendency of sensation seeking influences one's acceptance of advertising messages, which means that advertising appeals need to be adjusted to the level of sensation seeking of consumers (Donohew, Philip, & Elizabeth, 1998).

In sum, sensation seeking explains a certain addictive behavior and influences the level of message acceptance from different audiences. Sports involve emotional experiences, and given that sponsorship is one of the most effective marketing communication messages associated with sports, it can be hypothesized that people who seek sensational stimuli will experience more emotion on sponsorship activities. As a result, this study uses the dual emotional axes of pleasure and arousal from the PAD (pleasure, arousal, and dominance) model of human emotion.

H1: Sensation seeking will be associated with pleasure.

H2: Sensation seeking will be associated with arousal.

## (2) Olympic Involvement

When marketers consider event sponsorships, one of the most important decisions is to choose effective events. Many options can be considered, such as sports, art, and even cause marketing. Sports events dominate sponsorship industries, and mega events such as the Olympic Games and the World Cup Soccer Games are considered representative events for corporate sponsorship. As the Olympic Games are the most valuable sports competition in the world, they provide marketing opportunities to sponsor companies because peoples like the Olympic Games and enjoy spending their time watching.

Involvement refers to the degree of motivation needed to process information regarding a certain object (Celsi & Olson, 1988). Olympic involvement can be defined as motivational degree processing Olympic information. This motivational state is moderated by the degree of relationship with the object (Zaichkowsky, 1985). Involvement is used as an important variable in advertising studies because it influences advertising effects (Srull, 1983; Singh & Churchill, 1987). This particular effect stems from the high level of motivation needed to process advertising messages (Aaker & Lee, 2001). In the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty, Caccioppo & Schumann, 1983), people who have a high level of involvement process information with central routes, and memories last longer than those of low involvement; consequently, involvement plays the roles of both moderator and/or mediator. This study proposes the mediating roles of involvement in the research model.

Involvement could be related to individual differences, which is more obvious in sports games. The higher the tendency of pursuing sensation seeking and thrill/adventure seeking, the more involvement in sports game (chess in the study) there was; the higher the scores for disinhibition, the more satisfactory sports game experience there was (Joireman, Fick & Anderson, 2002). Sensation seeking studies illustrate that sensation seeking makes people more exciting and influences consumer emotional responses. In this regard, we propose the

roles of sensation seeking on Olympic involvement in the sports sponsorship setting.

H3: Sensation seeking will be associated with Olympic involvement.

More specifically, involvement with a sports event influences strength and valence in the information process of sponsored stimuli (Mitchell, 1981). Sports involvement drives active information processing and leads to increased attention with sport game content (Burnkrant & Sawyer, 1983). The information processing of sponsorship and events is affected by personal motivation, ability, and opportunity to access to events, and these elements also influence the stimuli of sports games (MacInnis & Jaworski, 1989). Pham's (1992) study about sponsorship stimulus found that involvement positively influenced arousal. Based on the literature, this study proposes the role of involvement on emotional responses on sponsorship activities.

H4: Olympic involvement will be associated with pleasure.

H5: Olympic involvement will be associated with arousal.

## **2) Word-of-mouth**

As connection among people becomes a key factor in the current marketing environment, sharing information is more important than traditional consumer behaviors. Most especially in the social media era, content produced by users is more emotional than news in traditional media; this content evokes users' emotions, which again serves as a driving force of WOM (Pace, Balboni & Gistri, 2017).

WOM is the main goal for marketers, and the antecedents of WOM need to be explored in order to understand consumers. WOM may be defined as

“informal, person to person communication between a perceived noncommercial communicator and a receiver regarding a brand, a product, an organization, or a service” (Harrison–Walker, 2001). Although WOM has been studied extensively as an outcome variable, the research on the antecedents of WOM seems to be somewhat lacking. In a few studies, satisfaction, loyalty, quality, commitment, trust, and perceived value were suggested as the antecedents of WOM (De Matos & Rossi, 2008).

Research related to emotion and WOM is studied in various fields, such as sports, festivals, and movies. In music festivals, emotional attachment has a direct and indirect effect on WOM (Hudson et al., 2015). Likewise, in the effect study of emotion on WOM in movie consumption, pleasure and arousal have been identified as the antecedents of WOM. Pleasure has a direct effect on the positive WOM, and both pleasure and arousal affect the satisfaction and the satisfaction has influenced the WOM (Mishra, Bakshi & Singh, 2016). Emotion is also an important variable in marketing communication studies, and researchers in this field have found that emotional responses evoked from brand webtoon influence WOM intentions (Lee, Park, & Jun, 2019).

Emotion is also important in the study of the relationship between sports team attachment and sponsorship. It is well known that sports sponsorship is effective among sports fans. Highly attached fans are likely to have a positive image of their team sponsors and have more purchasing intentions and referral intentions for the sponsor’s products (Tsiotsou & Alexandris, 2009).

This study proposes the role of emotional responses regarding sponsorship activities on WOM intentions. Olympic sponsorship provides the pleasure of games and deliver commercial messages. Olympic sponsorship is effective because the Games do not trigger the persuasion knowledge of consumers and provide happy experiences. In this regard, the emotional responses on sponsorship activities can be major factors influencing the WOM intentions of consumers.



H6: Pleasure will be associated with WOM intentions.

H7: Arousal will be associated with WOM intentions.

The effect of sponsorship marketing is threefold: brand attributes, benefits (perceptions related to brand products' value), and overall brand attitudes (Keller, 1993; Tsiotsou & Alexandris, 2009). Furthermore, the positive attitude toward sponsors is more developed, as the consumer evaluates the value of the sponsorship of a certain team positively (Meenaghan, 2001). Attitudes include three dimensions such as affect, beliefs, and behaviors, and the relationship between emotion and behavioral intention can be hypothesized. In this regard, attitudes toward the sponsor will mediate the influences of emotion on WOM intentions.

This study focuses on the relationship between emotion and behavioral intentions. There is research in sponsorship that has hints about emotion and attitude formation. In a study of Australia and France in the Grand Slam tennis tournaments, emotion contributed to attitude formation. However, this study suggests that each sports event leads to different emotions, and therefore further research is needed to see if emotional effects reproduce in the context of other top sports or events (Charles, Pascale & Carolin, 2010). The influences of affect in attitudes can be found in tremendous attitudinal research. There is also a view that the attitude toward the event affects the emotional variables of pleasure and arousal (Lee, Hur, & Sung, 2015), but generally, it is accepted that pleasure and arousal influence the attitude (Clore & Schnall, 2005). Accordingly, we propose emotional responses as antecedents of WOM.

H8: Pleasure of sponsorship activities will be associated with attitudes toward the sponsor company.

H9: Arousal of sponsorship activities will be associated with attitudes toward the sponsor company.

The relationship between attitudes and behavioral intentions are well documented in the attitude literature (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005). Likewise, this relationship is valid in sponsorship studies. The development of favorable attitudes toward sponsors has been proposed as a major factor in the sponsorship effect in the literature. Attitudes toward sponsors were the strongest predictor of purchase intentions (Biscaia, Correia, Rosado, Ross & Maroco, 2013). In this regard, this study suggests the direct relationship between attitudes toward the sponsor company and word-of-mouth intentions.

H10: Attitudes toward the sponsor company will be associated with WOM.

### 3. METHOD

This study selected KT as the target research company, and used a survey research method to validate the proposed research model. KT participated as local sponsors in the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Olympic Games.

#### 1) Samples

A total of 566 samples were collected from research panels provide by a professional research company. Among respondents, 283 were male (50%), and 283 were female(50%). The participants' mean age was 40.

#### 2) Measurements

Consumer emotional responses of official sponsorship marketing serve as the main mediating constructs of this study. Emotional responses are measured by pleasure and arousal from PAD (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Sensation seeking was measured by the Brief Sensation Seeking Scale suggested by Hoyle,

Stephenson, Palmgreen, Lorch, and Donohew (2001). Olympic involvement was measured by four scales (Ko, Kim, Kim, & Lee, 2010). Attitudes are measured with three adjectives commonly used in advertising and marketing literature: favorable, good, and positive. WOM was measured with three scales: likely, probable, and possible.

Table 1. Measurement scales

Variables	Scales		M	SD	CFA
Sensation seeking	I would like to explore strange places		3,20	.85	.511
	I get restless when I spend too much time at home		2,50	1,03	.441
	I like to do frightening things		2,29	.94	.700
	I like wild parties		2,36	.91	.678
	I would like to take off on a trip with no pre-planned routes or timetables		3,10	.95	.419
	I prefer friends who are excitingly unpredictable		2,67	.94	.641
	I would like to try parachute-jumping		2,39	1,06	.661
	I like new and exciting experiences, even if I have to break the rules		2,19	.99	.702
	Index		2,59	.96	$\alpha = .82$
Olympic involvement	PyeongChang 2018 Olympic Winter Games were an important event for me		3,24	.95	.890
	PyeongChang 2018 Olympic Winter Games provided pleasure to me		3,67	.88	.786
	PyeongChang 2018 Olympic Winter Games were an interesting event for me		3,57	.91	.827
	PyeongChang 2018 Olympic Winter Games were a valuable event for me		3,21	.92	.866
	Index		3,42	.91	$\alpha = .92$
Emotional responses on kt sponsorship	Pleasure	Happy	2,73	.83	.876
		Pleased	2,80	.88	
		Satisfied	2,78	.87	
		Relaxed	2,71	.82	
		Index	2,76	.78	$\alpha = .94$
	Arousal	Aroused	2,70	.83	.958
		Excited	2,58	.87	
		Frenzied	2,56	.90	
		Stimulated	2,59	.88	
		Index	2,61	.79	$\alpha = .93$

Variables	Scales	M	SD	CFA
KT attitudes	Favorable	3,23	.90	.890
	Good	3,25	.85	.918
	Positive	3,22	.88	.913
	Index	3,23	.88	$\alpha = .93$
WOM	likely to recommend KT products or services	3,00	1,00	.923
	Probable to recommend KT products or services	2,94	.99	.942
	Possible to recommend KT products or services	3,03	.95	.900
	Index	2,99	.88	$\alpha = .94$

## 4. RESULTS

### 1) Hypotheses testing

This study performed SEM analysis to validate the proposed model. Estimating goodness-of-fit for the hypothesized research model is the first step in model testing. In our study the  $X^2/\text{degrees of freedom}$  ratio was estimated as 4.14 (1191.050/288). The Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) was .885, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was .921, the Incremental Fit Index (IFI) was .921, TLI was .911, and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was .074, respectively. Based on these measures, we can conclude that the model is acceptable.

To improve the first model, modification indices were used to identify any theoretically meaningful paths/relationships omitted in the original model. We found the covariance between pleasure and arousal, and we made the constructs covariate connecting the error. The revised model was found to fit the data better than the original model, and the  $X^2/\text{degrees of freedom}$  ratio was 2.16 (619.722/287). GFI was .940, CFI was .971, IFI was .971, TLI was .967, and RMSEA was .045. The revised model was accepted as the final model.

The significance of regression weights was examined for all constructs, and their associated measures and some relationships were significant at  $p < .05$ .

In support of H<sub>1</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>, sensation seeking influenced pleasure (H<sub>2</sub>:  $\gamma = .159$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and arousal (H<sub>3</sub>:  $\gamma = .255$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Sensation seeking also had significant direct effects on Olympic involvement (H<sub>3</sub>:  $\gamma = .166$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The mediating roles of Olympic involvement were also found. Olympic involvement influenced pleasure (H<sub>4</sub>:  $\beta = .402$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and arousal (H<sub>5</sub>:  $\beta = .347$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The mediating effect of Olympic involvement between sensation seeking and pleasure was .067, and the mediating effect between sensation seeking and arousal was .058. For the consequences of PAD, pleasure influenced attitudes toward KT, the Olympic sponsor (H<sub>6</sub>:  $\beta = .519$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, arousal did not affect attitudes toward KT (H<sub>7</sub>:  $\beta = .048$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Pleasure had direct effects on word-of-mouth intentions (H<sub>8</sub>:  $\beta = .193$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Arousal did not affect word-of-mouth intentions (H<sub>9</sub>:  $\beta = .001$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Finally, attitudes toward the sponsor were found to influence word-of-mouth intentions (H<sub>10</sub>:  $\beta = .641$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The mediating effect of pleasure between sensation seeking and WOM was .031, and mediating effect between Olympic involvement and sponsor attitudes was .209. Eight out of ten hypotheses were supported in the research model.

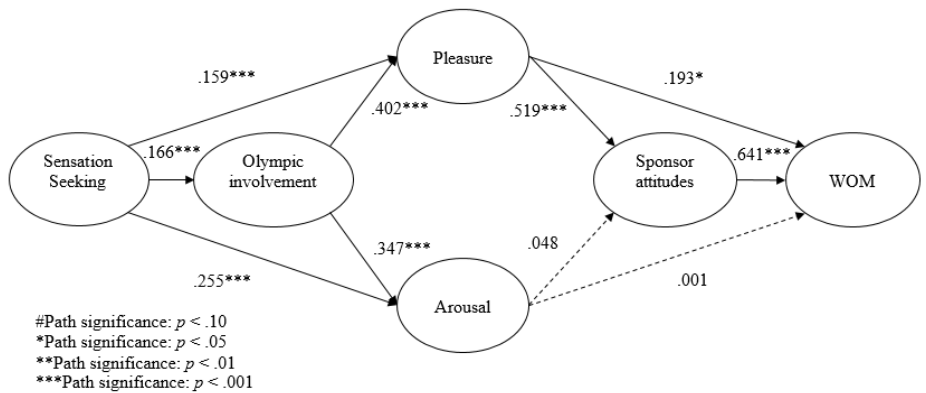


Figure 1. Final model

## 5. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

This study explored local sponsorship effects in the PyeongChang2018 Olympic Winter Games. The results showed that sensation seeking had direct effects on both pleasure (H1) and arousal (H2). Sensation seeking also influenced Olympic involvement (H3). We also found the mediating role of Olympic involvement between sensation seeking and emotional responses. Olympic involvement was linked to pleasure (H4) and arousal (H5). For the consequences of emotional responses, pleasure influenced attitudes toward the Olympic sponsor (H6) and word-of-mouth intentions (H8). However, arousal did not influence attitudes toward the Olympic sponsor (H7) and word-of-mouth intentions (H9). Attitudes toward the sponsor were found to be a mediator influencing WOM intentions (H10). In this regard, hypotheses eight and nine were not supported.

This study has several academic implications. The main finding is that emotional responses were proved to be pivotal mediating constructs in the research model. Pleasure and arousal mediated the relationships between sensation seeking and WOM intentions, and also mediated the relationships between Olympic involvement and attitudes toward the sponsor. This means that human emotion is an important step in the information processing of sports sponsorships. Emotional responses have been regarded as important variables influencing consumer evaluation and behaviors, and this study showed the way people process sponsorship information mediated by emotional responses.

The role of sensation seeking is interesting for many reasons. For example, sensation seeking usually explains addictive behaviors (Arnett, 1994). In this research, sensation seeking directly influenced consumer emotion and also showed indirect influences on emotion being mediated by involvement. This demonstrated that people who seek sensation tend to feel more affect when they encounter Olympic-related marketing communication messages, which in

turn showed that the dispositional tendency of consumers could influence information or message processing. It is well known that human characteristics moderate advertising or marketing effects, and this study suggested sensation seeking as a useful variable of consumer segmentation.

Emotional responses are powerful antecedents that lead to favorable consumer attitudes and WOM intentions. This study illustrated the importance of emotional experiences to be effective factors of marketing communication. Sports sponsorships are effective marketing tools, and require huge monetary investment. This study showed a clue as to why sports sponsorship is effective based on the roles of emotional responses. Furthermore, attitudes are found to be mediators between emotion and WOM intentions. This is in the same line of traditional attitude literature that affective responses are related to attitudes (Clore & Schnall, 2005), which are antecedents of behavioral intentions (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005).

One thing is that the role of arousal in emotional responses has not been supported. Pleasure was found to have a positive effect on the attitude toward the sponsor and intention of WOM, but arousal was not significant. This is because individual emotions have different meanings. Pleasure refers to the direction of emotion, whereas arousal refers to intensity. Therefore, it can be seen that positive emotions have a positive effect on the sponsor's attitude and WOM intention, but the strength of simple emotions does not affect the attitude and behavioral intention in the sports marketing environment. Although it is known that dominant is distinct from the other two dimensions in emotional response, this study shows that pleasure and arousal also differ in the individual roles of emotion.

These results have managerial implications. It is recommended that sponsors plan marketing communication campaigns that could provide affective experiences. The Olympics operate as effective marketing grounds, but many sponsors must compete to catch consumers' attention. In addition, a tremendous number of

ambush marketers try to use Olympic images for marketing purposes without official permission. In this competitive marketing environment, official sponsors should conceive strategic programs to win marketing competitions, and affective strategy could be a solution for that.

Sensation seeking might also be used as a target segmentation variable. We found that people who seek sensation tend to respond more favorably to sponsorship activities, which means that sports event sponsors could target those consumers for their marketing communication programs. In the same line of thought, people who are more involved in the Olympics can be another segmentation for marketing communication. When marketers try to choose the right events for sponsorship, they evaluate congruence with target consumers. This study reassured this old belief in sponsorship marketing. Another managerial implication is that sensation seeking mediates pleasure and affects attitude toward sponsors and WOM intention. Specifically, it shows that providing the Olympic-related pleasure to those seeking sensation can maximize the sponsorship effect. Official Olympic sponsors need to take this into account when planning marketing programs.

However, this study has limitations stemming from the research target. This study explored only the PyeongChang 2018 Olympic Winter Games, and future research exploring other major events is required. The Summer Olympic Games, the World Cup Soccer Games, or another mega sports event could be studied for the future sponsorship research. This study also used solely Korean consumers for the investigation of local sponsorship effects. Analysis of responses from international consumers outside the event's host country would be interesting.



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## 올림픽 스폰서십에 미치는 감정 반응의 역할

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본 연구는 올림픽 후원자에 대한 감정적 반응의 역할을 탐구한다. 즐거움과 각성을 주요 매개 변수로 사용하여 감정적 반응의 선행요인과 결과를 조사하였다. 본 연구의 결과는 감각추구가 올림픽 관여도와 감정적 반응에 직접적인 영향을 미쳤을 뿐만 아니라 올림픽 관여도가 즐거움 및 각성과 관련이 있음을 보여주었다. 소비자 감정의 결과와 관련하여 즐거움은 후원자에 대한 태도와 올림픽 후원자의 구전의도에 직접적인 영향을 미쳤다. 그러나 각성과 올림픽 스폰서 간의 직접적인 관계는 발견되지 않았다. 마지막으로 후원자에 대한 태도가 구전의도에 영향을 미치는 것으로 나타났다. 이러한 결과는 메가 이벤트 후원에 대한 소비자 감정의 역할에 관한 학문적 의미와 실무적인 시사점을 제공할 수 있다. 이 연구의 독창성은 심리적 변인, 올림픽, 후원자 변인 간의 계층적 관계를 통합하는 스폰서십에 대한 감정적 반응의 역할을 탐색하는 것이다.

**KEY WORDS** 올림픽 스폰서십 • 자극추구 성향 • 관여도 • 감정반응(PAD) • 태도 • 구전의도

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