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European football supporter attitudes toward ambush marketing

European
football
supporter
attitudes

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore attitudes towards ambush marketing at the 2016 Union of European Football Associations European Championships, seeking to examine fan affect towards ambush marketing.

Design/methodology/approach – A 24-item survey questionnaire was constructed, exploring consumers' general cognition and affection of ambush marketing; following Dickson *et al.*'s (2015) design, industry-specific attitudes were canvassed, assessing supporters' views of beer and gambling industry ambush marketers.

Findings – Results indicate that fans appear to be marginally more forgiving of ambush practices from beer or gambling brands than across ambushing more generally, yet a prevailing antipathy towards ambush marketing from an ethical perspective was observed. Importantly, however, the study's findings suggest that industry-specific advertising regulations bear little impact on fan perspectives.

Practical implications – The study's results bear notable implications for marketing theory and practice: for ambushing brands, this suggests that they are rather less likely to have a disruptive effect on events and their official sponsors. For official sponsors, a level of threat from ambushers nevertheless remains as it would appear consumers do not have strong views about the practice of ambushing.

Originality/value – The study's methods build upon and extend previous studies into consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing, specifically focusing on the perceptions and affect of fans in lieu of more empirically generalisable consumer populations. Given the target audiences of sponsors and ambush marketers, this emphasis on fan attitudes represents an important direction in ambush affect research.

Keywords Sponsorship, Ambush marketing, Fan attitudes, Mega sporting events

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The presence of competing messaging around major events represents a significant concern for sponsors and rights holders. Ambush marketing has long been theorised to potentially undermine the value, and viability, of official sponsorship, by impeding consumers' ability to process sponsorship communications and cluttering the event marketing landscape (Johar *et al.*, 2006; Séguin and O'Reilly, 2008). In response, major events and commercial rights holders have implemented legal, legislative and management-based measures intended to curb ambush marketing and protect sponsors' investments and activations (Burton and Chadwick, 2009; James and Osborn, 2016; McKelvey and Grady, 2008; Scassa, 2011). This duality – the dangers posed by ambushing, and the protection against ambush campaigns – have subsequently defined much of the extant ambush marketing literature, framing ambush marketing as ambusher vs sponsor, and encouraging a prevailing view ambush activities within the context of legal frameworks and ethical business practices.

This research seeks to expand upon the existing body of research into ambush marketing's consumer effects, drawing directly on Dickson *et al.*'s (2015) industry-specific study of consumer attitudes to explore fan perceptions of ambush marketing at the 2016 Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) European Championships. Importantly, the 2016 tournament was hosted in France, a country which boasts strict alcohol advertising regulations, as well as restrictions on legalised gambling marketing. As two of the most



prevalent sponsorship categories in sport – and most common industries for ambush marketers – the European Championships provided an invaluable opportunity to extend Dickson *et al.*'s (2015) industry-focused research, and to examine further the perceptions of fans towards ambush marketing and industry-specific advertising.

In so doing, this study builds upon the extant ambush marketing research by examining the attitudes and opinions of football supporters in a highly involved setting: specifically, attending matches in one of UEFA's official Euro 2016 public viewing areas (PVAs). By investigating the attitudes of engaged football supporters within the context of industrial sectors, this research thus contributes to the growing scholarly literature on ambush marketing's psychological effects and implications, and provides new insight into fan attitudes towards ambush marketing and the strategic implications for non-sponsors activating around major sporting events.

2. Theoretical framework

The framing of ambush marketing in an ethical context has inspired a wealth of research into consumer cognition of ambush marketer and sponsor messaging. Dating back to Sandler and Shani's (1989) initial examination of ambush marketing following the 1988 Calgary Winter Olympic Games, the practice has commonly been framed by commercial rights holders and scholars as a deleterious or parasitic form of marketing. This view of ambushing reflected the practical realities of ambushing in its earliest incarnations, and positioned ambushing within the context of the commercial rights holders' perspective. Early definitions proposed by Sandler and Shani (1989) and McKelvey (1994) emphasised the alleged intent on the part of ambushers to confuse consumers as to the identity of an event's official sponsors, or to weaken the marketing efforts of event partners. As a result, a wealth of research within the ambush marketing area has been devoted to examining the consumer-based effects of ambush marketing and potential dangers posed for sponsors. Most recently, however, research into the origins of ambushing's ethical framing have confirmed the role played by rights holders such as the International Olympic Committee in positioning ambushing as a morally objectionable practice to both the media (Burton *et al.*, 2018) and public (Burton and Bradish, 2018).

This ethical positioning of ambushing has thus informed much of the extant ambush marketing research (Burton and Bradish, 2018). Scholars have in turn sought to discern the deleterious effects of ambushers on sponsorship returns, and to demonstrate an intent on the part of non-sponsors to confuse consumers (Humphreys *et al.*, 2010; Lyberger and McCarthy, 2001; Portlock and Rose, 2009; Shani and Sandler, 1998). Sandler and Shani (1993), for instance, explored consumers' ethical response to ambush marketing employing a mail survey around the 1992 Barcelona Summer Olympic Games. The authors found that consumer recall post-event was higher for non-sponsors that ambushed than for those who did not, whilst sponsors without a direct competitor active in the event marketing environment achieved higher recall response rates than those subject to rivals' ambush efforts (Sandler and Shani, 1993). Similarly, Michaelis *et al.* (2008) found that the presence of ambush marketing may have deleterious effects on sponsorship returns, as sponsor identification decreased in the presence of ambush competition. Establishing such detrimental effects on sponsorship messaging retention in consumers has become central to the fight against ambush marketers: both in lobbying for legislative protections, and in leveraging consumers' ethical views of sponsorship and ambushing, determining the severity of ambush marketing's impact has been paramount.

Unfortunately, conflicting results throughout the literature have undermined allegations of ambush marketing's derisory effects on sponsorship and cast doubt over ambushing's deleterious effects. Evidence suggests that consumers are typically unaware of sponsorship classifications and identifications, and do not possess the necessary information or interest

to effectively differentiate between sponsors and non-sponsors (Lyberger and McCarthy, 2001; McDaniel and Kinney, 1998; Séguin *et al.*, 2005). Rather, a prevailing antipathy on the part of consumers appears evident, and contrasting findings have cast uncertainty over the actual cognitive impacts of ambushing on sports fans (Lyberger and McCarthy, 2001; Portlock and Rose, 2009; Shani and Sandler, 1998). Respondents have been found to be more likely to identify previously known brands as ambushers when asked (Wolfsteiner *et al.*, 2015), often misinterpreting the impact of existing brand awareness, and attributing its effects as actual event recall (Brown and Rothschild, 1993; Crompton, 2004). Indeed, Hoek and Gendall (2003) argued that consumers may wrongly identify or mis-identify sponsors or ambush marketers due to greater familiarity with the brand, or due to similarity between market competitors in the same industry. Moreover, a consumers' recency of exposure to an advertisement serves as a greater indicator of memory recall than repetition or honest awareness of sponsor identity (McDaniel and Kinney, 1998).

Ultimately, although the cognitive effects of ambush marketing on sponsorship memory represent an important initial subsection of ambush marketing research, consumer-based studies have provided little conclusive evidence of ambushing's effect on consumer memory or recall of sponsors (Crompton, 2004; Lee *et al.*, 1997; Séguin *et al.*, 2005). Most recently, research suggests that prior knowledge of, and familiarity with, a brand – either sponsor or ambusher – increases a consumer's awareness and likelihood of identification of that brand (Wolfsteiner *et al.*, 2015). Respondents have been found to be more likely to identify previously known brands as ambushers when asked, often misinterpreting the impact of existing brand awareness, and attributing its effects as actual event recall (Brown and Rothschild, 1993; Crompton, 2004; Singh *et al.*, 1988). Likewise, respondents have shown to be biased by an existing knowledge of a sponsoring or ambushing brand, and associations made between that brand and a sports property, without the brand actively seeking such an association through marketing efforts (Meenaghan, 2001a, b; Quester, 1997).

2.1 Affect and attitude in ambush marketing theory

Nevertheless, whilst the cognitive effects of ambush marketing have thus far proven difficult to establish, the disinterest in sponsorship and ambush marketing voiced by consumers has inspired further research into consumers' affective response to ambush marketing. As with cognitive studies, contrasting findings have, however, overshadowed the study of ambushing's attitudinal effects; contradicting arguments simultaneously suggest that consumers offer little moral opposition to ambushing (Moorman and Greenwell, 2005; Portlock and Rose, 2009; Shani and Sandler, 1998), and that consumers' opinions of ambushing brands weaken as a result of their activities (Mazodier, 2008; Mazodier and Quester, 2010).

Despite this uncertainty, though, affect towards ambush marketing remains an important area of study in ambush marketing scholarship and practice. Counter-ambush measures such as "name and shame" public relations, and to an extent event-specific ambush marketing legislation, rely on consumers' emotive response to ambushing and sponsorship, and necessitate a better understanding of ambush marketing's perceived ethics. Whilst the merits of counter-ambush communications (Burton and Chadwick, 2009; Koenigstorfer and Urich, 2017; McKelvey and Grady, 2008) and bespoke event-specific legislation have been debated at length within the ambush marketing literature (Ellis *et al.*, 2011; McKelvey *et al.*, 2012; Scassa, 2011), counter-ambush public relations represent a common tactic employed by major events intended to guide public sentiment, and ambush legislation is today a mandatory component of the Olympic host bid process, and is thus indoctrinated in sponsorship protection strategies at the highest levels of sport.

Exposing ambush activities, and effectively condemning ambushing brands, has furthermore yielded positive results for rights holders and sponsors in experimental settings

(Mazodier, 2008; Mazodier and Quester, 2010). Cornwell *et al.* (2012), for example, examined the potential contributions of strengthening sponsor messaging, noting the positive memory effects such an approach may yield in improving consumer memory (Cornwell *et al.*, 2012). Such findings indicate that public pronouncements and ethical positioning such as “name and shame” public relations may be more effective than previously believed.

However, whilst consumer opinions may be influenced by ethical appeals by events or sponsors, evidence suggests that consumers’ ethical views of marketing are guided primarily by situational factors and contexts (Leonidou *et al.*, 2010). Dickson *et al.* (2015) theorised that consumers may hold some industries (e.g. banks) to a higher moral or ethical standard than others (e.g. breweries or alcohol makers), whilst different advertising standards and regulations may be more forgiving or prohibitive or ambush activities. The authors thus investigated consumers’ response to ambush marketing across different industrial sectors to better understand the effects of an ambusher or sponsors’ industry or market sector on consumer affect or trust. Unfortunately for rights holders, the authors found that although the majority of those surveyed viewed ambush marketing as unethical, they did not oppose the practice due to the low perceived annoyance caused.

2.2 From consumer perspectives to fan perspectives

Importantly, throughout the attitudinal research, one major limitation is present. To date, much of the attitudinal ambush marketing research has focused on non-participant general audience consumers, and has sought to secure representative samples of the broader population within specific geographic or event-based contexts (e.g. Moorman and Greenwell, 2005; Sandler and Shani, 1993; Séguin *et al.*, 2005). However, the involvement of an individual with an event or sponsor is an integral contextual consideration. One’s level of interest or involvement with an event has been found to be a stronger indicator of their affective or attitudinal response to ambushing (Humphreys *et al.*, 2010; MacIntosh *et al.*, 2012; McKelvey *et al.*, 2012). Indeed, direct event participants have been most forceful in their opposition to ambush marketers in line with greater psychological and physiological involvement with the sponsored property (McKelvey *et al.*, 2012).

Current definitions of ambushing, however, have stressed the parallel in objectives and target audiences between ambushers and sponsors (e.g. Chadwick and Burton, 2011), whilst the depth and breadth of sponsor objectives and audiences have been examined at length throughout the extant sponsorship literature. Cornwell (2014), for example, differentiates sponsor audiences across a number of groups, including financial institutions and governing bodies, local communities, consumers most generally and event or property fans more specifically.

Indirect event involvement – conceptualised here as those in attendance at fan zones or official event sites without attending live matches in-stadia – represents an area as yet unexplored in ambush marketing research. As mega-sporting events such as the Olympic Games or FIFA World Cup garner ambush marketing interest due to their global reach and expansive viewing audience (McKelvey *et al.*, 2012), a growing trend in event sponsorship and mega-event hosting has been the development of official “fan zones” or PVAs intended to offer heightened fan experiences and greater involvement with events. Such spaces equally offer brandscaping opportunities for sponsors and non-sponsors alike to target highly involved and engaged fans (McGillivray and Frew, 2015; Pearson, 2012). Unfortunately, the literature regarding official fan zones is comparatively sparse; previous studies into sponsorship memory retention and ambush marketing effects have assessed the awarenesses and opinions of direct event attendees as well as the general consumer population. There exists a dearth of research into the views and behaviours of supporters in such engaged, highly involved, yet indirect participatory settings outside of official host stadia.

Ultimately, there remains considerable need for further investigation into ambush marketing's effects at both the cognitive and affective level for fans. Whilst the psychological effects of sponsorship and ambushing have been researched extensively, results have been mixed, offering little clarity. Moreover, current counter-ambush marketing tactics rely on consumer sentiment and ethical perspectives; the enactment and enforcement of ambush-specific legislation by event host countries, and the consistent use of counter-ambush communications in denouncing ambush campaigns, reaffirm the need for greater appreciation and understanding of fans' attitudes and affect towards ambushing.

As such, this study has sought to build upon Dickson *et al.*'s (2015) examination of attitudinal responses based on industry category or organisational type, within the context of heightened fan involvement. Three central research questions, drawing on Dickson *et al.*'s (2015), guided the research:

RQ1. To what extent does non-industry-specific ambush marketing influence fan perceptions?

RQ2. How do fans view beer-industry-specific ambush marketing?

RQ3. How do fans view gambling-industry-specific ambush marketing?

In addressing these three concerns, the present research provides new insight into the attitudes and perspectives of fans, a logical and important direction for ambush marketing affect research.

3. Methods

The study's methods were designed to investigate the attitudes and perceptions of fans of the ambush marketing of a major sporting event, providing a continued and extended view into the affective responses of fans. The methods built upon and extended previous studies into consumer attitudes at major events, including notably the 1996 Atlanta Summer Olympic Games (Shani and Sandler, 1998), the 2006 FIFA World Cup (Portlock and Rose, 2009) and the 2011 IRB Rugby World Cup (Dickson *et al.*, 2015). Specifically, the present research replicated Dickson *et al.*'s (2015) study, adapting the survey instrument used for the 2016 UEFA European Championships. Importantly, the sample canvassed for the study sought to reflect the growing presence and marketing value of official PVAs, expanding upon the extant consumer and attendee audience research. By exploring supporter views within the arena of official fan zones, the study sought to assess the opinions and attitudes of an engaged and active sample in an effort to better reflect the commercial realities of major event sponsorship and sport marketing.

3.1 Context – 2016 UEFA European championships

The 2016 UEFA European Championships were hosted across ten cities throughout host-country France. Qualifying and knockout stage games were hosted between 10 June and 10 July, 2016, featuring 24 national teams from throughout Europe. An estimated 613,000 tourists visited France for the Championships, contributing in excess of EURO 1.2b to the French economy (Sportcal, 2017).

Each host city for the 2016 European Championships housed an official fan zone which broadcast matches live into purpose-built constructed PVAs. Becker and Widholm (2014) noted that PVAs provide sponsors with expanded “performative” and “mass participatory” consumption opportunities. This emphasis placed on experiential consumption by sponsors in and around PVAs affords brands a means of creating interactive activations (McGillivray and Frew, 2015). These zones have therefore become integral elements of mega-events'

sponsorship inventory, and prime locations for sponsors to activate their partnerships and engage with supporters in an active participant setting (Becker and Widholm, 2014; Lauss and Szigetvari, 2010).

3.2 Industry selection

Playing a central role in the design and delivery of the fan zones were ten global and six national sponsors of the European Championships. Given the size and scope of the 2016 UEFA European Championships, the tournament compares favourably with the FIFA World Cup, the IRB Rugby World Cup, the Super Bowl and the Olympic Games as a major sporting event. However, contrary to recent host cities and countries for the Olympics, the FIFA World Cup or the IRB Rugby World Cup, the 2016 European Championships were not protected by bespoke ambush marketing legislation. As such, the European Championships provided an opportunity to explore fan perceptions beyond the reach of ambush legislation.

In extending Dickson *et al.*'s (2015) study, two industries highly regulated in host-country France were selected for inclusion the survey instrument. Most countries boast national advertising standards commissions tasked with self-regulating marketing and advertising activities in-order-to prevent unethical or deceptive marketing, as well as to monitor and control advertising and sponsorship standards for selected industries such as alcohol, tobacco and gambling (Parsons and Schumacher, 2012). The UK's Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), for example, oversee ethical marketing practices in Britain, ensuring that potential instances of false advertising or malicious marketing are prevented or decommissioned.

Reflective of contemporary marketing and sponsorship practices in European football, as well as specific regulatory frameworks governing both industries in host country France and the template provided by Dickson *et al.* (2015), beer and gambling were selected as target industries for the study. Of note, in contrast to Dickson *et al.*'s research, "alcohol" was used in the final survey instrument in lieu of the more specific "beer". Although Danish brewers Carlsberg served as an official sponsor of the event, France's federal legislation governing alcohol sponsorship, the Loi Evin, prohibits all alcohol sponsorship of sport and television advertising within France, including beer, wine and spirits (Casswell, 2012). Similarly, France's 1863 Act on Lotteries and recent changes to betting and bookmaking advertising and sponsorship laws in France have made gambling amongst the most heavily regulated and controversial advertising industries in Europe (Lamont *et al.*, 2011). The European Commission have sought to establish a continental approach to gaming advertising standards and regulations, including the completion of a 2011 Green Paper seeking to homogenise member nation's legislative approaches to gambling advertising (Lopez-Gonzalez and Griffiths, 2016).

Within individual jurisdictions, gambling-brand advertising and sponsorship in France is regulated by French lotteries authority Française des Jeux (a national partner of the 2016 UEFA European Championships), which prohibits illegal betting and unsanctioned international gambling operator marketing within France (Lamont *et al.*, 2011). The UK has similarly enacted legislation seeking to control gambling advertising, having adopted the Gambling Act 2005 and the Gambling (Licensing and Advertising) Act 2014 as means of better regulating both the legal and illegal (including international) gaming industries. Provisions within the legislations included the establishment of a national gaming commission and better regulated gaming advertising standards (Maclean and Bonington, 2008).

These regulations have been met with considerable controversy, however, due to the perceived normalisation of gambling marketing in the UK facilitated by the acts (Parke *et al.*, 2014). The Gambling Act 2005 included special dispensation which allows bookmakers to advertise during live sporting events before the 9 p.m. watershed (Carran, 2013), an exclusion granted specifically and exclusively to sport sponsorship and advertising. The resultant

backlash to sport's exemption, alongside the proliferation of legal and illegal gaming sponsorship in the UK in recent years, has inspired significant debate regarding gaming industry advertising and regulation, as well as heightened advertising standards implicating the Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice (BCAP) and the ASA (Maclean and Bonington, 2008). Indeed, most recently in response to the mounting criticisms facing sporting governing bodies regarding the propriety of partnering with gaming companies and concerns regarding gambling advertising impacting on minors and younger viewers during live matches, the English Football Association in 2017 elected to terminate all sponsorship agreements with all betting organisations (Kelner, 2017).

Such regulations highlight the ethical standards expected of the advertising industry most generally, and of particular industries more specifically, and thus offer the study of ambush marketing ethics and affect important case industries to explore. The selection of beer and gambling equally reflects the prominence of both industry categories in sponsorship, and ambush marketing, at recent events. Highly visible ambush campaigns by the likes of Bavaria around the 2006 and 2010 FIFA World Cup Finals and Heineken around the 2010 FIFA World Cup Finals and 2008 and 2012 UEFA European Championships, as well as Paddy Powers' ambush activities at the 2012 London Summer Olympic Games, the 2012 UEFA European Championships and the 2014 FIFA World Cup, have highlighted the prominence of both categories as candidates for ambush marketing.

3.3 Participants and procedure

Data collection was conducted in June 2016 over a period of two weeks during the group stages of the Championships so as to take advantage of large numbers of fans attending the championship at this point. The methods employed here represent a logical and necessary extension of previous ambush marketing research, acknowledging the increasing role official fan zones play in the marketing, delivery and participatory consumption of major events. Previous studies of ambushing (e.g. Sandler and Shani, 1993; Shani and Sandler, 1998) employed mail or online survey methods to canvas a representative sample of specific geographic populations; by contrast, Lyberger and McCarthy (2001) and Séguin *et al.* (2005), amongst others have conducted mall intercepts to survey broad demographic samples and to assess differences in ambush response across a range of demographic and consumer audience markets. In light of the emphasis within sponsorship to reach a multitude of audiences, including fans and spectators on-site, the present study sought to collect a sample representative of a cross-section of football supporters in attendance at UEFA official PVAs.

The study's participants ($n = 221$) were selected randomly amongst those in attendance at the official UEFA Parisian fan zone, prior to, during, and immediately following matches, upon securing written and verbal informed consent. Data collection was conducted over the course of four match days during the group stages of the tournament, featuring groups A, B, and E. The groups selected were chosen based on linguistics and access, in an effort to canvas as wide a sample as possible; therefore the inclusion of British home nations England and Wales, as well as the Republic of Ireland, ensured a viable population of English speakers. Group A featured host nation France, and was thus selected in order to appropriately canvas and represent the views of domestic football supporters (see Table I for a complete demographic breakdown of respondents).

3.4 Instrumentation

Data collection was administered on a face-to-face basis during the time period in question. A survey questionnaire was designed, comprising six sections. In total, 24 items were formatted as a five-point Likert scale ((1) strongly disagree – (5) strongly agree), intended to evaluate and measure respondents' perceptions of – and attitudes towards – ambush

	Respondents	
	<i>n</i>	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	176	79.6
Female	45	20.4
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Single	120	54.3
Married	32	14.5
Living with Partner	59	26.7
Separated/divorced	10	4.5
<i>Age</i>		
18–24	63	28.5
25–34	97	43.9
35–44	47	21.3
45–54	8	3.6
55–64	6	2.7

Table I.
Demographics of the
Sample

Note: *n* = 221

marketing. The 24 items were divided across three sections, intended to explore each of the three research questions posed: in total, eight survey items adapted from Portlock and Rose (2009) and Dickson *et al.* (2015) were constructed to capture a range of perspectives and opinions for each of the three sections (see Appendix for a full list of survey items). Furthermore, additional demographic information including age, gender, nationality, marital status and household composition was also collected.

Finally, participants were asked about their awareness of ambush marketing in each industrial sector, and were asked to identify official event sponsors (both global and national partners) from two separate lists. The list of global sponsors contained the names of 19 companies, including UEFA's ten official sponsors; the list of national partners contained the names of 10 companies, including the event's six official national partners. In the two lists, several company names were included as dummy sponsors (i.e. the companies had no formal or authorised involvement in the event). These additions to the survey items sought to evaluate and establish fans' awareness and knowledge of ambush marketing and sponsorship, employing a prompted recognition method. Following Romaniuk's (2006) examination of unprompted recall and prompted recognition methods, it was determined that a prompted approach provided greater accuracy in evaluating respondents' brand awarenesses; moreover, given the high-involvement surroundings of the fan zones where data were collected, a high-stimulus approach offered greater instrument control in avoiding potential biases of recency or prominence.

3.5 Data analysis

The survey data collected were analysed using mean difference testing, mirroring Dickson *et al.*'s (2015) methods in order to facilitate comparison. Mean (*M*) and percentage (%) analysis was used to capture the perceptions of fans on a sliding scale, and to evaluate the degree to which respondents agreed with statements regarding their opinions and attitudes towards ambushing. Additionally, *t*-tests were conducted in order to examine potential demographic differences across regional or gender-based indicators, whilst ANOVA testing was employed to explore the mean differences across age groups. Finally, cross-tabulations across a number of demographic variables were conducted, in order to identify specific variable relationships within the data and to better explore potential differences in fan impressions across industry sectors.

4. Results

The study's results are divided across three areas of interest: non-industry-specific ambush marketing affective responses – accounting for the general impressions and perceptions of respondents (research question one); industry-specific analyses of respondents' views of ambushing, examining supporter impressions of ambushing and sponsorship in two industrial categories (beer and gambling, research questions two and three); and fan awareness of UEFA 2016 European Championships sponsors. For each, the survey data collected were further analysed based upon age, gender, in following on the template set by Dickson *et al.* (2015).

The demographic information collected from participants reflects the attendance of football supporters in official public viewing fan zones for the European Championships (see Table I). This represents a notable shift from previous ambush marketing attitudinal research, which has historically emphasised empirical population representation. The sample collected represented a pan-European perspective of ambush marketing, with 19 European countries represented. Largest amongst these were the British nations, which accounted for 118 of the 221 surveys collected (53.4 per cent). Of the completed survey questionnaires collected ($n = 221$), 79.6 per cent of respondents identified as male ($n = 176$), whilst only 20.4 per cent ($n = 45$) were female. This represents an important deviation from previous empirical studies of ambush affect; this disparity in gender balance reflects supporter attendance at the 2016 fan zones rather than an empirically generalisable sample. The absence of a larger female audience suggests an important area of future research in need of greater consideration.

Likewise, in analysing the survey results across age demographics, six groups were created, corresponding with Dickson *et al.*'s (2015) survey instrument. Ages were collected in categories: 18–24; 25–34; 35–44; 45–54; and 55–64. The majority of respondents indicated that they were between 18 and 44 years of age (93.6 per cent), perhaps indicating that younger men are most likely to attend PVAs for the European Championships.

4.1 General fan impressions of ambush marketing at EURO 2016

The perceptions of participants towards ambush marketing varied considerably in terms of respondents' statements of agreement on a five-point Likert scale. Respondents largely agreed that non-sports affiliated companies should not lead fans to believe they are official sponsors in the absence of an official sponsorship agreement ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.08$). This view was reinforced by a general agreement amongst respondents that ambush marketing is unethical ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.03$). Respondents indicated little annoyance towards ambushing brands, however ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 1.15$), suggesting a predominantly neutral impression of ambush marketing held by supporters attending the 2016 UEFA European Championships.

Upon closer investigation, however, the data suggested a somewhat dichotomous attitude towards the permissibility and appropriateness of marketing activities of non-sponsors during the championship. Responses largely tended towards extremes (strongly disagree/disagree = 36.2 per cent; strongly agree/agree = 44.8 per cent). However, the attitudes of respondents regarding their perception of mislead marketing activates on fans (strongly disagree/disagree = 22.7 per cent; strongly agree/agree = 60.7 per cent), and the belief that ambush marketing methods are unethical (strongly disagree/disagree = 29.4 per cent; strongly agree/agree = 50.7 per cent), nevertheless suggest a pejorative view of ambushing held by many participants. More importantly, the data collected shows a slight fall in the attitude of fans when compared against the data from previous studies, notably against Dickson *et al.* (2015).

Two items revealed statistically significant *t*-test results when adjusting for gender across the eight non-industry-specific survey items examined (accounting for Levene's test

for equality of variances). These items, A1 ($t(219) = 1.22, p = 0.029$) and A8 ($t(219) = 1.51, p = 0.003$), are of note as they contrast supporters' views of ambush marketing, with their awareness of the practice. Item A1 asked respondents their perspective on whether non-sponsoring companies should lead fans to believe they are sponsors of the UEFA European Championships, whilst A8 asked participants if they are aware of any companies leading fans to believe that they are official sponsors. Interestingly, results indicated that women felt more strongly that companies should not mislead consumers, yet equally that women indicated a lower awareness of ambushing as compared to male respondents.

Likewise, ANOVA results yielded only one non-industry-specific item (A3) which resulted in statistically significant variance across ages. Upon adjusting for Cohen's (1992) effect size, however, the relative difference between ages calculated was small.

4.2 Industry-specific perceptions of ambush marketing

In examining fans responses on an industry-specific level, mean scores for both beer and gambling ambush marketing activities revealed minor yet discernible differences in respondents' views of ambushing on an ethical or moral level. Notably, fans appear to be more forgiving of ambush marketers attempting to mislead consumers in both beer and gambling than in a non-specific industrial context (A1 $M = 3.57/SD = 1.08$, B1 $M = 3.39/SD = 1.1$, C1 $M = 3.36/SD = 1.1$). More significantly, respondents indicated that beer-brand ambushing is much less annoying than either non-industry-specific or gambling-related ambushing (C4 $M = 2.93, SD = 1.15$); respondents did, however, appear to agree that beer-related ambushing is less humorous than gambling or non-industry-specific ambushing. Nevertheless, results across both industry-specific sections largely mirrored findings of non-industry ambushing perspective (see Table II).

In analysing both gambling and beer industry responses across demographic variables, few significant differences of note emerge. Importantly, though, t -test results indicated that three remaining items evidenced variance at a statistically significant level when contrasted based on gender (upon calculation of Levene's equality of variances) (Table III).

Once again, women surveyed indicated a stronger response in opposition to ambushing practices, both in terms of ethical perspectives and annoyance towards gambling-industry ambushing, and the perceived legality of beer-brand ambushing (C5). Across age groups,

Table II.

Mean test results

Item ($n = 221$)	General ambushing	Gambling-industry ambushing	Beer-industry ambushing
1	3.57 (1.08)	3.39 (1.1)	3.36 (1.1)
2	3.32 (1.08)	3.28 (1.12)	3.19 (1.12)
3	3.44 (1.02)	3.42 (1.16)	3.71 (1.66)
4	3.14 (1.16)	3.19 (1.17)	2.93 (1.15)
5	3.28 (1.11)	3.2 (1.12)	3.18 (2.3)
6	3.17 (1.12)	3.19 (1.11)	3.03 (1.08)
7	3.39 (1.11)	3.38 (1.07)	3.36 (1.12)
8	3.42 (1.05)	3.41 (1.09)	3.33 (1.08)

Table III.

Gambling industry
 t -test results

B3) The practice of gambling companies associating themselves with the UEFA European Championships without being an official sponsor is unethical	$t(219) = 2.49, p = 0.011$
B4) I am annoyed by gambling companies trying to associate themselves with the UEFA European Championships without being official sponsors	$t(219) = 1.46, p = 0.05$
C5) The practice of alcohol companies associating with the UEFA European Championships without being an official sponsor is illegal	$t(219) = 2.29, p = 0.025$

the same six groupings utilised in analysing non-industry-specific ambushing yielded three items at statistically significant ANOVA findings (*B1*, *B2*, *C6*). Upon adjusting for Cohen's (1992) effect size calculation, however, the relative variance observed again was small.

4.3 Assessing demographic industry views

As a means of further analysis, cross-tabulations were calculated across respondents' age and gender, in order to further quantify and assess potential variance in football supporters' views of ambushing. As with the previous analyses, participants evidenced a predominantly neutral view of ambushing across different demographic segments and between industries. However, a number of potentially interesting findings emerged, meriting further investigation.

In particular, a number of variables yielded noteworthy differences between the two most prominent age groups surveyed, 18–24 and 25–34 years old. Respondents in the older group, for example, much more resoundingly voiced positive agreement with the belief that ambushers should not mislead consumers to believe that they are sponsors (*A1*) for general ambushing than for either target industry studied. In total, 67 per cent (65/97) of those surveyed between 25 and 34 agreed or strongly agreed for ambushing across all industries, yet that number decreased to 54.5 per cent for gambling brands, and further still to 45 per cent for alcohol brands. The same age bracket equally indicated greater annoyance towards gambling ambushing than general ambushing (52.5 to 45 per cent), yet found alcohol ambushing considerably less tiresome (36 per cent). Perhaps most of note, however, respondents refuted the notion that either industry poses greater ethical concerns than ambushing more generally: whereas 19.6 per cent of respondents aged 25–34 disagreed or strongly disagreed that ambush marketing is unethical (*A3*), 26.8 per cent responded negatively in the case of alcohol (*C3*) and 27.8 per cent for gambling (*B3*).

Across those aged 18–24 ($n = 63$), fewer remarkable differences emerged across industries, as respondents maintained a largely consistent and neutral view of ambushing throughout the three sections. The greatest disparity revealed came of the perceived humourousness of ambushing advertisements, as the younger audience found alcohol ambush messaging less humorous than gambling (31.7 to 42.9 per cent). Likewise the younger age bracket appeared most confident in their awareness of ambushing across both industry segments than in general, as 41.2 per cent (gambling) and 44.4 per cent (alcohol) disagreed or strongly disagreed with question 8 of each section, yet only 30 per cent voiced similar surety for ambushing more generally. The small sample sizes encapsulated in each of these age groups must be acknowledged in balancing the significance of such discrepancies, however, such disparities do suggest that further study into ambushing impressions across age groups may merit further study.

Similarly, the gender imbalance of those sampled must be noted in examining the differences presented in responses between men and women, however, a number of observations can be made which may inform further study. First and foremost, a number of differences emerged in men's views of ambushing between more general impressions and those of specific industries. 59.1 per cent of men agreed or strongly agreed that ambushers should not mislead consumers, for example, yet that number decreased to 51.7 per cent for alcohol companies, and further still to 47.1 per cent for gambling brands. Similar decreases were seen in assessing ambushing's legality, falling from 48.9 per cent for ambushing overall to 43.7 per cent for gambling, and 39.7 per cent for alcohol. Likewise, while nearly half of men surveyed found general ambushing and gambling ambushing humorous (46.6 and 45.5 per cent, respectively), only 36.9 per cent similarly agreed in the case of alcohol brands. By contrast, women's views of ambushing appeared to be largely consistent, offering little incongruity between ambushing more generally, gambling brands and alcohol or beer companies.

4.4 Sponsorship recognition

The final area of analysis conducted was exploring respondents' awareness and knowledge of UEFA 2016 European Championships global and national sponsors. Perhaps most notable in the findings is evidence to suggest that PVAs represent valuable brand awareness and sponsorship activation opportunities for corporate partners. Of the corporations included in the survey, the seven most commonly selected "national sponsor" options were official sponsors of the event. Of those seven, Coca-Cola, McDonalds and Carlsberg – three brands activating on site and heavily involved in the delivery of UEFA's official fan zones – all were correctly identified by more than half of respondents (Figures 1 and 2).

This heightened level of awareness of sponsors on the part of respondents is significant: whereas consumers' lack of awareness of sponsorship has been cited as a possible cause for the antipathy observed amongst consumers towards ambushing in previous studies, the fans surveyed evidenced a strong awareness and appreciation of UEFA's global sponsors. By contrast, however, respondents' awareness of UEFA's national "partners" was somewhat tempered; whilst national partner La Poste

Figure 1.
Consumer Recall of
2016 UEFA European
championships
global partners

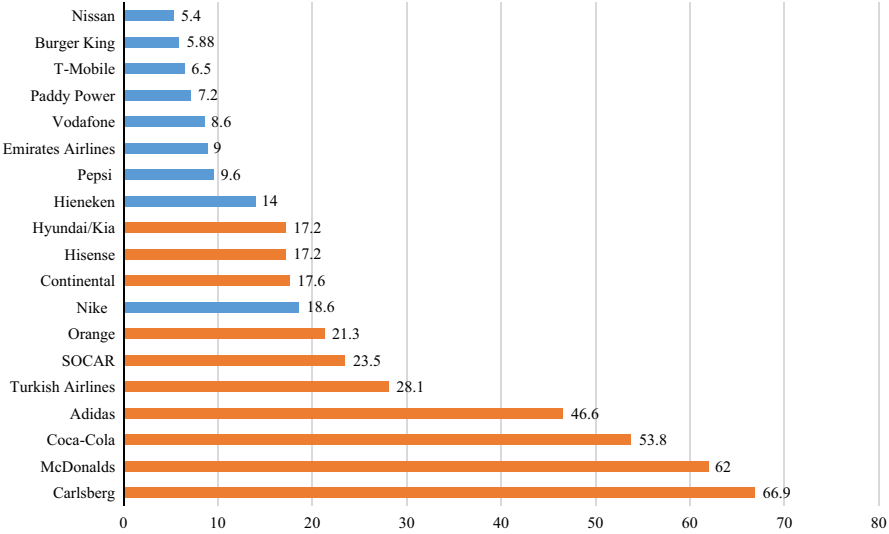
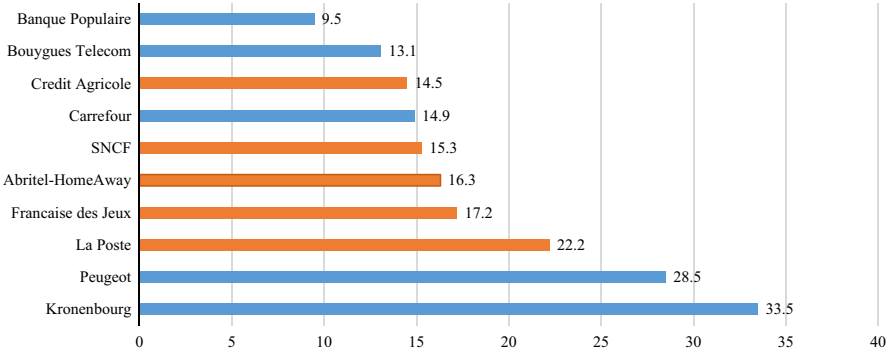


Figure 2.
Consumer Recall of
2016 UEFA European
championships
national partners



was correctly identified by more than 20 per cent of participants, non-sponsors Kronenbourg were most frequently selected by participants, despite a lack of involvement with the event or the official fan zones.

5. Discussion

In exploring fans' attitudinal response within the context of European football supporters at the 2016 UEFA European Championships, the findings presented here contribute to the theoretical discussion of ambush marketing affect and ethics, and offer insight for scholars and practitioners. First, our results reiterate previous findings and indicate a relative disaffection towards ambush marketing; contrasting previous studies, however, it would appear as though European football supporters are moderately less opposed to ambushing than prior research would have predicted. Whereas Portlock and Rose (2009) and Dickson *et al.* (2015) found respondents to be 66 and 69 per cent (respectively) opposed to the practice of ambush marketers misleading consumers, results here show that 60.7 per cent of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with such an assertion.

Likewise, our findings showed that 52.7 per cent of respondents believed the practice to be unethical, whereas 56 per cent of British participants (Portlock and Rose, 2009) and 64 per cent of New Zealanders (Dickson *et al.*, 2015) voiced ethical concerns. Perhaps most interesting, however, 44.8 per cent of respondents indicated that they either agree or strongly agree that ambush marketing is annoying. This degree of annoyance may infer that ambush marketing's appeal or perceived strategic advantage as a rebellious or creative marketing tactic may be waning. Indeed, our findings evidence a progression in fans' annoyance with ambush marketing across recent studies, as Portlock and Rose (2009) found only 13 per cent of respondents felt a degree of irritation towards ambushing, whilst Dickson *et al.*'s (2015) findings rose to 33 per cent.

Across industry-specific contexts, few significant differences emerged within the data. Whilst the majority of survey participants perceive ambushing as an unethical and immoral practice, the results suggest that such perspectives are muted. Nevertheless, the inclusion of the gambling industry in this study has offered an alternative industry to gauge the perception of fans and expand upon Portlock and Rose's (2009) and Dickson *et al.*'s (2015) findings. However, no evidence suggests that respondents hold either industry examined to a higher ethical standard, despite host-country France's strict alcohol sponsorship and advertising legislation. Likewise, although demographic analyses largely proved inconclusive, a number of metrics included did indicate that women take a firmer stance against ambush marketing, an important finding meriting further examination.

Ultimately, the results revealed here reiterate the complexity ambush marketing presents for marketers, researchers and supporters: fans appear to offer only minor moral objection to ambushing in general, and views seemingly vary only marginally across more regulated advertising industries as noted by Dickson *et al.* (2015). Whilst consumers have been noted to view ambushing more negatively in experimental settings upon being alerted to the practice through counter-ambush communications (cf. Mazodier, 2008; Mazodier and Quester, 2010), supporter views of ambushing throughout the extant literature appear to most strongly correlate to the individual's interest in, and involvement with, an event (Humphreys *et al.*, 2010; MacIntosh *et al.*, 2012; McKelvey *et al.*, 2012).

5.1 Implications

Importantly, then, the situational context within which the data were collected marks a significant contribution to the ambush marketing literature. Consumers' relative lack of familiarity with sponsors and sponsorship categories has previously been suggested to be a potential cause for consumers' confusion regarding official sponsor designations, and the apparent antipathy shown towards ambushing attitudinally (Lyberger and McCarthy, 2001;

McDaniel and Kinney, 1998; Séguin *et al.*, 2005). However, the respondents surveyed here demonstrated a solid awareness of UEFA corporate partners, and international sponsors most notably.

This bears potentially significant implications for future practice and research. Fans' awareness and recognition of global sponsors has previously been found to influence their implicit and explicit attitudes towards ambushing (Koenigstorfer and Groeppel-Klein, 2012); consumers formed more positive implicit attitudes (those affective responses outside of consumers' conscious awareness of, and connection to, a marketing message) where an imbalance in brand knowledge favoured the sponsor. As such, the setting where data collection was undertaken – official fan zones – present a significant communications advantage for sponsors. The creation of fan zones by rights holders such as UEFA have become important additional inventory for official sponsors to leverage, and represent major activation opportunities for engagement with supporters before, during, and after events, similar to inside the stadium. PVAs are heavily branded sponsorscapes which afford event partners extensive activation opportunities for those in attendance, thus providing sponsors with a chance to improve fan attitudes and thus create a knowledge imbalance between themselves and prospective ambush marketers.

Furthermore, the study's specific focus on fans, in contrast with more empirically generalisable samples as is commonplace in consumer affect ambush research, is an important development in ambush affect studies. Fans as a sponsorship audience are an important subcategory for sponsors to consider and target, therefore providing a valuable lens through which to further examine ambush attitudes. Given the myriad objectives and media available to sponsors today, and the range of ambush marketing strategies and types employed by non-sponsoring brands (Burton and Chadwick, 2018), continued research into more specific applications and perspectives of ambushing is required.

Finally, the study's results offer perspective for ambush marketing stakeholders in how to approach potential ambush marketing campaigns, including for ambush marketers, sponsors and commercial rights holders. First, for would-be ambushing brands considering engaging in ambush activities, an awareness of fan sentiment and the potential for negative brand effects is imperative. Although the results here evidence a largely neutral stance towards ambushing amongst football supporters, respondents nevertheless typically viewed ambushing in a moderately negative light. Indeed, perhaps most disconcertingly for ambushers, participants indicated heightened levels of annoyance towards ambush marketing, as compared to more recent ambush attitude research (Dickson *et al.*, 2015; Portlock and Rose, 2009). Brands engaging in ambushing should therefore be wary of exceeding fans' tolerance for ambush campaigns, and to engage in ambush activities without risking negative fan reaction. Respondents appeared to be more responsive to humorous ambush campaigns, perhaps an indication of how ambush marketing campaigns should be framed in order to appeal best to football supporters.

For sponsors and rights holders, the results revealed here equally provide perspective as to how best to protect against or prevent ambush marketing. Event hosts and organisers should be aware of the different emphasis placed on the moral-ethical positioning of brands in specific industries, and should tailor counter-ambush responses accordingly. The study's findings once again reaffirm that sponsorship stakeholders must not expect and rely upon consumers or supporters to uphold an ethical view of ambushing marketing or sponsorship – regardless of industry. Fan impressions of ambushing appear greatly nuanced and context-dependent (Leonidou *et al.*, 2010), and thus rights holder interventionist activities – and public support for such initiatives – must be cognisant of consumers' potential indifference towards ambushing, and thus sponsors' protection.

For example, although commonly decried as an ineffective and counter-intuitive rights protection practice (Burton and Chadwick, 2009), recent evidence suggests that name and

shame public relations may in fact be a valuable component of sponsorship protection, due to fans' ethical response to specific sponsorship categories or ambush types (Carrillat *et al.*, 2014; McKelvey and Grady, 2008). In certain, specific situations, alcohol and gambling sponsorships could benefit from bespoke public relations protective measures intended to reinforce consumers' ethical impressions and standards. However, such approaches must be measured and strategic on the part of sponsors and rights holders; Humphreys *et al.* (2010) noted that "counter-ambush communications may have the unintended effect of creating or strengthening a link between the ambusher and the event" (Humphreys *et al.*, 2010, p. 107). Rights holders and sponsors must therefore be certain of consumers' ethical views of the sponsorship in question and offending ambush, and take precautions in order to avoid strengthening the ambushing brand's link to the event at the expense of the sponsor. Overly stringent or draconian interventionist activities may negatively affect consumer attitude towards an event and its sponsors, necessitating that event sponsorship stakeholders must consider fan perspectives of ambushing carefully in taking a public approach to counter ambushing.

5.2 Limitations and future research

In conducting this research, a number of limitations must be acknowledged. First, despite collecting data from a pan-European audience in attendance at official UEFA fan zones, the survey instrument employed was written and delivered in English, thus potentially biasing results towards an English-speaking audience. This is likely reflected in the proportion of participants from the UK. In future, a multi-lingual instrument may offer valuable insight into the perceptions and attitudes of a broader cross-section of the European population. Moreover, as noted the demographic breakdown of the study presented a cross-sectional view of those in attendance at the official fan zones surveyed, and not an empirically representative sample. Given the differences found between male and female respondents' views of ambushing, further research into female supporters' impressions of ambush marketing is required.

Second, although respondents' awareness and knowledge of official 2016 UEFA European Championships sponsors was assessed, and participants evidenced a solid knowledge of sponsor identities, participants' knowledge of ambush marketing was not examined in depth. As such, a lack of understanding of ambushing on the part of participants may belie the results presented here. Moreover, ambush marketing manifests in a multitude of strategies, media, and objectives (Burton and Chadwick, 2018; Chadwick and Burton, 2011); as such, it must be acknowledged that fans may hold altogether opposing views to different forms of ambushing, depending on the nature of the ambush or the degree of intrusion employed.

Third and finally, the present study's authors echo Dickson *et al.*'s (2015) call for greater qualitative examination of ambush marketing attitudes. By extending consumer affect and ambushing research to include improved focus on fan perspectives, this research has provided new insight into the opinions and awarenesses of European football supporters in a highly involved, previously unexplored setting. However, greater depth in assessing consumers' knowledge of, and opinion towards, ambushing represents a logical and important next step for ambush marketing consumer research, in order to better qualify and comprehend fans' views. As such, continued development in ambush marketing affect research is required, particularly in qualitatively assessing and exploring fan insights, attitudes and awarenesses in greater detail and depth.

5.3 Concluding remarks

In extending the study of consumer attitudes towards ambush marketing to European football supporters within a highly involved marketing environment, this research provides

new insight into the effects and implications of ambush marketing for sport marketing and sponsorship stakeholders. Whereas recent research into the attitudinal effects of ambush marketing have primarily concerned non-participant and broad consumer samples, by examining highly involved supporter attitudes around the 2016 UEFA European Championships the findings presented here offer a unique context, previously unexplored in ambush marketing research.

The continued study of consumer affect and attitudes towards ambush marketing is imperative for ambush scholarship; understanding ambush marketing's effects on consumer memory and sentiment are necessary considerations in establishing the need, and place, for counter-ambush communications and tactics. The expansion of ambush legislations in Olympic host countries to include "rights of association", prohibiting sport-related marketing during the Games period and affording rights holders near-monopolistic power over the sports industry during major events (James and Osborn, 2016; Louw, 2012; McKelvey and Longley, 2015), is a product of ambush marketing's ethical positioning by major events and an appeal to host governments to protect sponsors and consumers from "deceptive" or "parasitic" marketers. Likewise, the public relations and counter-ambush communications engaged in by sponsors and events to denigrate and demonise alleged ambush marketers rely on consumers upholding an as yet unproven ethical perspective of ambush marketing.

The present study's findings thus offer valuable insight into the perspectives and attitudes of football supporters, contributing to the extant ambush ethics literature and further building towards a more comprehensive view of ambush affect. Importantly, the study's findings reaffirm the prevailing neutrality of consumers' perceptions of ambushing; European football supporters generally appear unmoved by ambush marketing as an unethical practice, offering only marginal opposition across both industry-specific and non-industry-specific analyses. Demographically, few differences emerged, however, across a number of variables female participants indicated a lower tolerance or acceptance of ambush marketing practices, notable for prospective ambush marketers targeting a female demographic audience. This represents an important opportunity for future research. Most notably, though, respondents noted a pronounced annoyance with ambush marketing practices. This contrasts previous research (Dickson *et al.*, 2015; Portlock and Rose, 2009) suggests that the ambush marketing bubble may soon crash as consumers lose interest in ambush marketing campaigns and event marketing clutter.

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Appendix. Survey items

PART A

A1. Non-sponsoring companies should not lead consumers to believe they are official sponsors of the UEFA European Championship.

A2. I find it confusing when non-sponsoring companies lead consumers to believe they are official sponsors of the UEFA European Championship.

A3. The practice of companies associating with the UEFA European Championship without them being an official sponsor is unethical.

A4. I am annoyed by companies trying to associate themselves with the UEFA European Championship without them being official sponsors.

A5. The practice of companies associating with the UEFA European Championship without being an official sponsor is illegal.

A6. When non-sponsoring companies associate themselves with the UEFA European Championship I find it humorous.

A7. The practice of companies associating with the UEFA European Championship without them being an official sponsor does not affect me.

A8. I am unaware of any non-sponsoring companies leading consumers to believe they are official sponsors of the UEFA European Championship.

PART B

B1. Gambling companies should not lead consumers to believe they are official sponsors of the UEFA European Championship.

B2. I find it confusing when gambling companies lead consumers to believe they are official sponsors of the UEFA European Championship.

B3. The practice of gambling companies associating themselves with the UEFA European Championship without being an official sponsor is unethical.

B4. I am annoyed by gambling companies trying to associate themselves with the UEFA European Championship without being official sponsors.

B5. The practice of gambling companies associating with the UEFA European Championship without being an official sponsor is illegal.

B6. When non-sponsoring gambling companies associate themselves with the UEFA European Championship I find it humorous.

B7. The practice of gambling companies associating with the UEFA European Championship without them being an official sponsor does not affect me.

B8. I am unaware of any non-sponsoring gambling companies leading consumers to believe they are official sponsors of the UEFA European Championship.

PART C

C1. Alcohol companies should not lead consumers to believe they are official sponsors of the UEFA European Championship.

C2. I find it confusing when alcohol companies lead consumers to believe they are official sponsors of the UEFA European Championship.

C3. The practice of alcohol companies associating themselves with the UEFA European Championship without being an official sponsor is unethical.

C4. I am annoyed by alcohol companies trying to associate themselves with the UEFA European Championship without being official sponsors.

C5. The practice of alcohol companies associating with the UEFA European Championship without being an official sponsor is illegal.

C6. When non-sponsoring alcohol companies associate themselves with the UEFA European Championship I find it humorous.

C7. The practice of alcohol companies associating with the UEFA European Championship without them being an official sponsor does not affect me.

C8. I am unaware of any non-sponsoring alcohol companies leading consumers to believe they are official sponsors of the UEFA European Championship.

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