

The Importance of Agenda-Setting Theory
Applied to the Samsung's Olympic Campaign in the U.S.

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Introduction

Would you write an essay for a chance to go to the Olympics? Chances are likely that an individual would put the time and energy into writing an essay if they were being rewarded with a free trip for them and their family to go to the Olympic Games; however let me ask you this, would you still consider writing this essay when the world, especially the U.S., felt on edge after the current terrorist attacks? Would you still want to travel someplace with an enormous crowd? Samsung, a large South Korean company that sells a variety of electronic devices, values the importance of staying connected, and has a mission to “inspire the world with innovative technologies, products, and designs that enrich people’s lives and contribute to social prosperity by creating a new future,” had to work around this society crisis and come up with a beneficial campaign that would essentially support their goals (Samsung, 2019). The campaign they would develop not only had to revolve around their beliefs, but also inspire individuals from across the globe to participate in following their dreams. Through effective planning, research, strategies, public relations tactics, and applying the agenda-setting theory, this foreign corporation accomplished goals of reaching the U.S. market, bringing communities together, and sharing the spirit of the Olympic games, even during a time when society was being torn apart from the effects of 9/11. In this paper, I will talk about Samsung’s campaign, their reasoning behind the tactics used, and further exploration of the significance behind subsequent research needed to refine the construction of the agenda-setting theory.

Case Summary

During the Salt Lake 2002 Olympic Winter Games, Samsung further built on its commitment to both communicate and connect people through sports by developing an essay contest that focused on how encouragement from sports mentors can greatly enhance success in the youth. This broad-based communication program was called The Samsung Spirit of Sport Contest, and it asked entrants to identify an individual in their life that both motivated them through challenges, and positively influenced their growth either on or off the field. The campaign used celebrity endorsements, multiple media platforms, and creativity, to further boost its name recognition to a target market that was simply outside of its country of origin. The campaign picked five winners, and flew them and their mentors out to the 2002 Olympic Winter Games, where they were honored at the Olympic Rendezvous @ Samsung (Samsung's athletic hospitality center and product showcase). In addition, all this was happening in the aftermath of 9/11, so Samsung had to find ways to promote their contest in the media that was booming with stories of politics, panic, and mourning.

Case Analysis

According to Gerhard Heiberg, chairman of the IOC Marketing Commission, "The Olympic Games has broader broadcast appeal worldwide than television coverage of any other sporting event, attracting a substantially greater audience across all demographic groups, including television viewers who generally have no interest in sport" (Kim & Jo, 2004, pg. 56). With the Olympic Games being the most significant and largest sporting event in the world, Samsung took the opportunity to be the official

worldwide telecommunications equipment partner for the Salt Lake 2002 Olympic Winter Games. With this partnership in mind, Samsung could potentially reach their ultimate goal of being a global leader in the wireless telecommunication's market, by continuing to expand their market share in key markets around the world, especially the United States. Additionally, Samsung could easily enhance its brand recognition through extensive media coverage that exhibits the company's pledge for global friendship. For the campaign, Samsung centered its focus on a few target audiences, including general consumers and numerous sports related committees, such as the Salt Lake Organizing Committee for the Olympic Winter Games (SLOC), the International Olympic Committee (IOC), and The United States Olympic Committee (USOC). As reported by Johoo Kim, director and chief of public relations team, "there were three main public relations objectives Samsung used for games, "position Samsung as a corporate citizen dedicated to connecting people and communities through sports, raise awareness of Samsung's role as a vital Olympic partner, and showcase Samsung as a dynamic brand in the U.S.A market" (Kim & Jo, 2004, pg. 50). In order to reach and send the correct message to these audiences, Samsung used multiple media platforms, including sports and business TV Stations, newspapers, radio, and media tours with two major Olympic athletes, Bonnie Blair, and Eric Bergoust. Both Blair and Bergoust agreed to be the official spokespersons for the campaign, serving as judges for the essays, traveling to different locations to share their mentor experiences, and writing their own personal essays on the Samsung's Olympic Website to inspire others to enter. It put Samsung's company as just another member of the community, which would help Samsung's respected name in the uncontrolled media.

Moreover, to promote even more entries and further enforce key messages of the campaign, Samsung utilized controlled media through existing online advertising, such as banner ads on sites like Warner Brothers and Teen People, and teamed up with Edelman Interactive Services (EIS) to place the contest in both internet search engines and contest websites. To “kick off” this campaign, Samsung organized a press release entitled, “Samsung’s 2002 Olympic Program to Keep Athletes, Fans Connected with Friends, Family,” with the subtitle being “Olympic Gold Medalists Bonnie Blair and Eric Bergoust Spreading the Word about the Importance of Sports Mentoring and Helping Judge Samsung’s Spirit of Sport Contest.” This press release was held on October 18, 2001 at the USOC Media Summit and was attended by more than 600 U.S. media (Kim & Jo, 2004). From this large attendance, Samsung could receive enough media coverage to further influence contest entries.

Strategies and Outcomes

Samsung, even before the 2002 campaign, was already one of the world’s largest producers for code division multiple access mobile phones, with operating offices and factories in 46 countries, 66,000 employees worldwide, recorded sales of \$34.6 billion, and a net income of \$4.8 billion (Kim & Jo, 2004, pg. 49). They essentially had the money, tools, and previous knowledge needed to both expand their campaign and build brand awareness in the United States. Additionally, the world at this time, was booming with new technologies and advancements in the cell phone. It was substantially, the beginning of the smartphone era, where almost everyone owned some kind of wireless cellular device. Even though Samsung was number one in producing mobile phones, they

were still only the fifth largest manufacturer of these phones, behind Nokia and Motorola, who lead in both market share and brand awareness. Therefore, Samsung needed to figure out ways to increase their brand recognition, maintain their overall message of connecting people, and somehow grow market share in the U.S, so they could accomplish their desire to be one of the most respected brands in the world. In order to do this, public relations practitioners had to get creative in their media strategies and figure out ways to inform the public. The timing when it came to promoting their campaign, however, was working against them because the news was centered around the aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks. They had to find ways to integrate their contest in the media so that it would minimize the top news stories, and capitalize the importance of sticking together in times of despair. They were challenged to come up with tactics that would capture two key messages, “Samsung cares about the importance of people staying connected, and Samsung brings families together and bridges people and communities through sports and Olympic games” (Kim & Joe, 2004, pg. 51). Additionally, the concept of using something sports related, like the Olympics, would be a key factor in this campaign because of how popular sports are in connecting people around the world. Sports, benefit communities, generate friendships, construct national unity, and have the power to lift people up in times of turmoil. Moreover, the notion that the campaign would generate relatable stories in regards to mentoring, was fundamental in proving to society that Samsung cares more about their consumer’s stories rather than the company’s, making it more personable.

To analyze their performance, Samsung conducted surveys in eight major U.S. cities after the Olympic Games, and concluded that the brand awareness increased by 8.9

percent. With that increased brand awareness, the survey also established that the opinion of prevalent Samsung consumers rose 2.8 percent from a similar survey that was handed out before the Games. Through the online public relations tactics, Samsung was able to generate 36,000,000 impressions from all over, and further netted over 50 media placements for the “Spirit of Sport” contest (Kim & Jo, 2004). With the national media coverage on the CBS Early Show and Oxygen, and nearly 20 broadcast segments during the satellite media tour in major markets, such as FOX, Samsung received favorable outcomes that placed their company into one highly admired. Furthermore, the media events for the winners received encouraging coverage on NBC affiliates, like KTJ Milwaukee, and one winner Anne Christianson, showcased the importance of the Spirit of the Sport contest by stating, “winning the essay contest brought her the most incredible experience that she ever had, attending the Winter Olympic Games.” Anne lived in New York and her father lived in California, and she mentioned, “being together at the Games was a great chance for them to share the most important values they haven’t talked about for a while and to enjoy the Olympic Games” (Kim & Jo, 2004, pg. 56). Nonetheless, since both the World and USA were committed to stories about the terrorist attacks, Samsung did receive fewer entries than expected and had to scale down the number of countries used in the contest due to some budgeting concerns.

Theory Overview

According to *International Communication Gazette*, “the Agenda-Setting Theory says that because of newspapers, television, and other news media, people are aware or not aware, pay attention to or neglect, play up or downgrade specific features of the

public scene. People tend to assign an importance to what they include that closely resembles the emphasis given to events, issues, and persons by mass media” (Shaw, 1979, pg. 1). In order to further examine this theory, an individual has to first understand the significance of mass communication, and how technology is used to influence broad audiences over a great distance. They must also understand all the diverse key aspects of mass media; media can reach excessive crowds instantaneously, arouse both hope and fear in the audience, attract universal fascination, portray societal power in categories, such as political and economic power, and can be assumed as a huge source of influence (Dinton & Zelle, 2004). The agenda-setting theory in basic terms, occur when the media informs the users about what really matters. The more a story pops up on the web, the more significant it seems to the viewer because of the objective that it is getting the most attention worldwide. This theory, however, has gradually changed over the past decade, being both redefined and enhanced into a theory that associates in defending specific points of view. In the year 1972, two communication scholars, McCombs and Shaw, were among the first to test this theory and support their ideas about media influence. Before their study even began, it was a widely known concept that the media produced content based on issues and interest of the audience. Often times the media reflected knowledge the public already knew, and other times it expanded into more detail on that knowledge to satisfy needs. With that being said, McCombs and Shaw, felt as if the entire concept of the portrayal was inaccurate, stating that the “public opinion is shaped, in part, by media coverage-particularly with regards to political news and campaigns” (Dinton & Zelle, 2004, pg. 196). The public interests hold an even higher significance in determining what should be further presented in news media coverage. This is where the

term “agenda” is set in place. The word agenda means that there are problems that either need to be done or addressed, and according to McComb and Shaw, “the news media present audiences with an agenda for what events the public should consider as important” (Dinton & Zelle, 2004, pg. 196). The news media, however, is limited when telling the audience which “news” is deemed important, exemplifying Cohen’s famous phrase “the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling readers what to think about” (Corbou & Hosu, 2017, pg. 8). Another finding in their study, was that individuals tend to want more guidance when it comes to making decisions on their own and genuinely rely on media to provide topics of importance. In the past couple years, the agenda-setting theory, has developed into numerous levels. One of the levels of the theory, framing and priming, are the most studied phenomena that relates to the effects of agenda setting. Priming, in regards to the agenda-setting theory, is a “notion that originates in cognitive psychology and derives from the associative model of memory. The priming effect is a mechanism based on a memory based model of information processing, which assumes that individuals make judgments about other people or issues based on information easily available and retrievable from memory” (Corbu & Hosu, 2017, pg. 9). On the other hand, framing is essentially the news media’s success in “framing” news events for viewers to comprehend. Often times, gatekeepers, editors who select, exclude, and emphasize stories, are the individuals who frame the story to be more creative for the audiences. Another level, or the Network Setting Agenda model (NAS), focuses on how the connections individuals make in their mind regarding the issues presented by the media, are essentially the media’s responsibility. The NAS model “not only tells people what

and how to think about issues, but also suggests what and how to associate,” providing insights into the functions of media when it comes to key words and expressions people use in their daily conversations (Corbu & Horsu, 2017, pg. 10).

Examples of Studies That Tested The Agenda-Setting Theory

One case that used the agenda-setting theory is the campaign initiated by Greenpeace that targeted Nestlé and its suppliance of palm oil, a key ingredient for Nestlé food makers. Greenpeace is an organization that makes society aware of both global environmental problems and the solutions to fix these problems for a promising green future. In 2010, Greenpeace investigated into reports of palm oil users so they could eventually take action and confront the underlying problems of suppliers tagged as rainforest destroyers. Amongst the findings, was the company Nestlé, which buys their palm oil from suppliers who are killing orangutans due to plantation expansion into rainforest areas. Greenpeace unleashed media assaults targeting Nestlé, by posting numerous videos exposing Nestlé’s role in forest destruction, especially in Indonesia. These videos portrayed an alternative Kit Kat advertisement where an office worker opens up a Kit Kat candy bar for lunch and finds a blood-spouting orangutan finger, which was a dramatized disclosure that orangutans are being exterminated to clear out forests for palm oil suppliers. The video was posted to YouTube, but immediately taken down due to both copyright infringement and the protest by Nestlé. Even after the video was taken down, however, the media blew up with people posting their reactions on multiple media platforms such as Facebook and blogs. All the posts were centered around the disgust of Nestlé and its involvement in wrecking the environment. Eventually, there

were way too many channels to shut down the post, making this video a striking success for Greenpeace. Individuals were posting negative criticism and comments on Nestlé's fan page, making it hard to miss if one searches the web. Greenpeace incorporated the agenda-setting theory by telling the users what mattered and giving their story attention and priority over Nestlé. They in other terms, "framed" the news of interest to the communities they serve and made a powerful influence on the strategic agendas.

Greenpeace used media and the opinions of others to gain desired outcomes of their issue to create a certain effect, even if it caused risks on their own organization's recognition.

Another case study example that applied the agenda-setting theory is the Chilean investigation in 2002, where the television newsmagazine "Contacto" posted a story about the major international network of child pornography called Paidos. It was later found out that one of the program leaders of Paidos, a man named Zacarah, worked as a bus driver for the community La Florida, a suburb of Santiago. The published article eventually lead to the arrest of Zaracha and other child molesters. Additionally, after Canal 13 aired the story, parent teacher associations pledged to urge the local authorities to run background checks before hiring school drivers. On the other hand, the Congress concentrated on the child pornography legislation and other sex crimes, eventually leading to the 2004 law against child pornography. The Chilean news was centered around this topic, and the public opinion was used to reading and watching these stories about cases of pedophilia, therefore, "Contacto," successfully managed to gain attention about the public issues of child pornography from authorities, such as congress and law enforcement agencies (McCombs, 2007). This particular case demonstrates the influence mass media has when connecting to the world, whether it be to our friends and family, or

from across the globe. The media serves as an almost second-hand reality that is typically created and progressed by both media organizations and journalists. “Contacto” strived to build an image about the unlawfulness of child pornography and the importance of background checks, and they deemed successful when media caught attention and made the issue newsworthy.

Theory Applied to Samsung Case

The public relations professionals used the agenda-setting theory when promoting the Samsung Spirit of Sport contest not only to promote their campaign, but also to gain attention in the media during a time when the media was focused on stories from 9/11. They needed to attract a greater audience from all demographic groups, execute successful strategies, and make their contest newsworthy. The company’s successful “kick off” press release is what essentially started and expanded this campaign into a broader broadcast appeal. Since the press release had numerous United States media attending, it was the perfect opportunity to gain coverage from multiple gatekeepers. These gatekeepers would continue to make the story more valuable in the public’s eye, and influence entries from students across the United States. The campaign spread to numerous big television, print, and radio markets, which focused the event in two key subsystems of the agenda-setting theory, the media and the public. The Olympics already has an immense influence on the public through media, so Samsung’s partnership with them provided an even bigger role in the media attention. Additionally, the use of relevant spokespeople, further achieved the relevance of the contest and the issue that the world needs to come together to support each other and make a difference. Samsung’s

initial goal was to create attention about the importance of a mentor, and the impact they have on forming a brighter future. This goal led to other individuals taking part in the level of media coverage the campaign received because each winning essay chosen, tied in a personal story with it, making it more reader friendly. Personal stories are effective when building a brand name or gaining brand recognition because they are one of the most powerful approaches to inspire, influence, and teach. Stories not only help unite and forge connections between people, but they also accentuate the values from within. Although this campaign does not necessarily focus on politics and chronic social issues, there was still a fight for media attention, and a strategy determined to persuade audiences to enter the contest and think about why their contest matters.

Successes and Improvements

Overall, in my opinion, the campaign both succeeded and failed. It succeeded in terms of gaining effective and appropriate media coverage, however, the timing of the campaign essentially hurt them in their successes. The plan would have been highly successful if it weren't for the tragedies of the attacks happening during that time. Looking past the coverage, entries, and generated company impressions, the campaign succeeded in collaborating with a foreign market to come up with strategies and tactics that fit within another culture's media environment. What I would have done differently was find more ways to connect the campaign to what was happening in the world currently. For instance, instead of just having a contest promoting the importance of mentoring, they could have had essays written about the significance of building up a society that had fallen down, possibly continuing to share stories of those individuals

truly effected by the attack, so they could be heard and not forgotten. The approach of not really promoting their brand was also very affective, so I would keep that in mind when further expanding on the contest. Another element I would have integrated into the campaign was to not only have it accessible through the media. Not everyone uses media as a source of news, so offering more community events where computers are accessible to submit entries could have been ideal, and would allow more individuals the chance to participate. This also would have allowed Samsung a chance to promote new technologies in big local communities. Moreover, I would have figured out a way to expand the Spirit of Sport Contest to an international level that is applicable to the Olympic market, since it is so massive. Having the contest possible to individuals from all around the globe, could further exemplify Samsung's vision of global inspiration. Winners and audiences could have the chance to communicate and listen to other stories from diverse countries, just like the notion of the Olympics. The Olympics brings friendly sport competition that unites the best athletes to represent their culture and history through a flag from their motherland. No matter where they finish, they compete to support their nation and prove that the right sportsmanship is about the endurance, growth, honor, motivation, passion, drive, strength, and desire presented by the athlete. This idea can also be shown through the essay, as individuals write about their own experiences of perseverance. Eric Bergoust, an Olympic skier and spokesperson for the campaign, even mentioned in his essay, "sharing knowledge and supporting each other makes us a better human race" (Kim & Jo, 2004, pg. 52).

Conclusion

The agenda-setting theory has become a redefined media effects theory, explaining how the issues covered by the news eventually develop into issues prioritized by the public. According to McCombs, “the agenda-setting model has been replicated in more than 400 studies that include both election and non-election settings, covering a wide variety of issues, and extending beyond the U.S. to a broad range of countries in five continents” (McCombs, 2007, pg. 44). The Samsung Spirit of the Sport Contest explored the strategies needed to come up with tactics for their campaign, by looking at the effects of the agenda-setting theory. They used tactics, for instance, media tours and print releases, to establish steady news coverage. With the agenda-setting theory, comes great responsibility in providing thorough research to analyze which uncontrolled and controlled media the corporation decides to use. Deciding these two concepts of media platforms, can either make or break the success of the campaign and press release overall. The media used, also needs to be strategically placed in a way that shows the importance of the corporation’s story, so the readers will gain a clear understanding that the article holds more importance than other stories found online. Therefore, as the agenda-setting theory continues to progress and expand, public relations professionals need to further educate themselves on media’s role in society.

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