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# Ambush Branding

A reconceptualization of ambush marketing from the ambusher's  
perspective

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# Abstract

<b>Title:</b>	Ambush Branding: A reconceptualization of Ambush Marketing from the ambusher's perspective
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<b>Keywords:</b>	Ambush branding, ambush marketing, sponsorship, brand identity, ethics
<b>Thesis purpose:</b>	The purpose is to explore ambush marketing by reconceptualizing the phenomenon from the ambusher's perspective in the context of mega sports events.
<b>Methodology:</b>	This study conducted a relativist ontology and a constructionist epistemology to allow for the most relevant interpretations of the empirical data. This qualitative research adopts an inductive approach which reflects over the perceptual perspective of the ambusher.
<b>Theoretical Perspective:</b>	A new framework is developed to improve the understanding of the ambusher's perspective of ambush marketing. This framework includes the four research areas of ambush marketing, sponsorships, brand identity and ethical justification which allowed the reconceptualization.
<b>Empirical Data:</b>	The empirical data follows a multiple research design and consists of five semi-structured interviews based on purposive sampling and a content analysis of five cases chosen by theoretical sampling.
<b>Findings/conclusions:</b>	The main finding provides a reconceptualization of ambush marketing from the ambusher's perspective. This new framework provides novelty insights on the topic of ambush marketing. It proposes how this marketing approach can be used as a legitimate branding strategy in the context of mega sports events.
<b>Practical implications:</b>	Ambush branding is a framework that allows companies to approach mega sports events in a legitimate way, without the need to secure any official sponsorship deals. Furthermore, this thesis sheds light on the discrepancies of the marketer's intentions to refrain from ambushing activities while still getting involved with it on a small scale. Therefore, this provides the marketer to change marketing activities if it indeed wishes to refrain from ambush marketing.

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# 1. Introduction

*The introduction that follows will briefly introduce the background of the research topic of ambush marketing, followed by a demonstration of key theoretical and empirical findings that are relevant to the topic. The next part presents the problematization and the unaddressed aspect of the topic, namely the ambusher's perspective, and how this new knowledge will fundamentally advance the scholar's understanding of the topic of ambush marketing. Additionally, the scope of the study is presented, whereas the central research fields of ambush marketing, sponsorship, brand identity, and ethical justification will be the main themes of this research. Finally, the purpose and the research questions are addressed, followed by concluding notes on the delimitations and contributions of this study.*

## 1.1 Background and Problematization

"There is a weak minded view that competitors have a moral obligation to step back and allow an official sponsor to reap all the benefits from a special event" (Bayless, 1988 cited in Meenaghan, 1996, p.109).

The emerging popularity of mega sports events in the last decades is undeniable, considering the high number of global spectators that it attracts. Indeed, the 2014 FIFA World Cup accumulated 3.2 billion viewers (FIFA, 2015), while the Olympics Games generally reach up to 5 billion viewers (Settimi, 2016). The popularity has consequently led to a great marketing opportunity for companies that the event organizers feed off by being able to charge staggering sponsorship fees. The cost to obtain sponsorship rights for UEFA Champions League can reach up to \$200 million which grants the rights to market and associate with the event (2010). Simultaneously, however, the official sponsors are not associating themselves with the mega-events in isolation since their competitors also seek to associate with the same event indirectly. This attempt to gain equal benefits and recognition is defined as ambush marketing and is an approach for non-sponsors to try and neutralize the official sponsor's investment (Tripodi & Sutherland, 2000). In this study, we will explore how this phenomenon is perceived by the non-sponsor.

The importance of sponsorship as a marketing communication has been transformed into an essential resource. While sponsorships provide essential revenues for major sporting events, it also grants commercial advantages for the sponsor who purposely decides to associate with that event ([Payne, 1998](#)) as can be seen in the following quote.

Sponsorship is an important tool of marketing communication that seeks to achieve favourable publicity for a company and/or its brands within a certain target audience via the support of an activity not directly linked to the company's normal business. (Bennett, 1999, p. 291)

Hence, organizations acknowledge sponsorship as a promotional investment that sets out to achieve marketing objectives ([Tripodi & Hiron, 2009](#)). The development of commercial sponsorship emerged as an attractive marketing option due to its ability to both transcend language and cultural barriers ([Meenaghan, 1996](#)). As a result, sponsorship has ultimately grown very rapidly in the last years ([Zdravkovic & Till, 2012](#)), from a US\$300 million industry in the '80s to approximately US\$62.8 billion in 2017 (Weeks, O'Connor & Martin, 2017). The spending also correlated with sporting events which comprise 70% of the sponsorship market ([IEG, 2017](#)). As a consequence, the emerging cost of and popularity for major event sponsors have resulted in the development of a rather contentious marketing alternative where non-sponsors seek either implicit or unofficial association with various events ([Zdravkovic & Till, 2012](#)).

The growth in sponsorships has in parallel resulted in an increase of ambush marketing with the ambition to gain equal advantages as an official sponsor (Shani & Sandler, 1998). In the case of the Olympic Games, the IOC introduced its Olympic Partner Programme in 1984 and revolutionized the sale of official sport sponsorship assets ([Burton & Chadwick, 2018](#)). This initiative changed the structure of their sponsorship and most importantly, decreased the number of official sponsors and resulted in an increased value of their sponsorship package (ibid.). As a consequence, official sponsorship became more exclusive and resulted in higher fees (Shani & Sandler, 1998). Arguably, this led to the first case of ambush marketing during the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games as Kodak lost the sponsorship rights to its competitor Fuji ([Tripodi & Sutherland, 2000](#)). In response, Kodak initiated an ambush marketing campaign by becoming the broadcast sponsor of the Los Angeles Games and managed to be mistaken for being the main



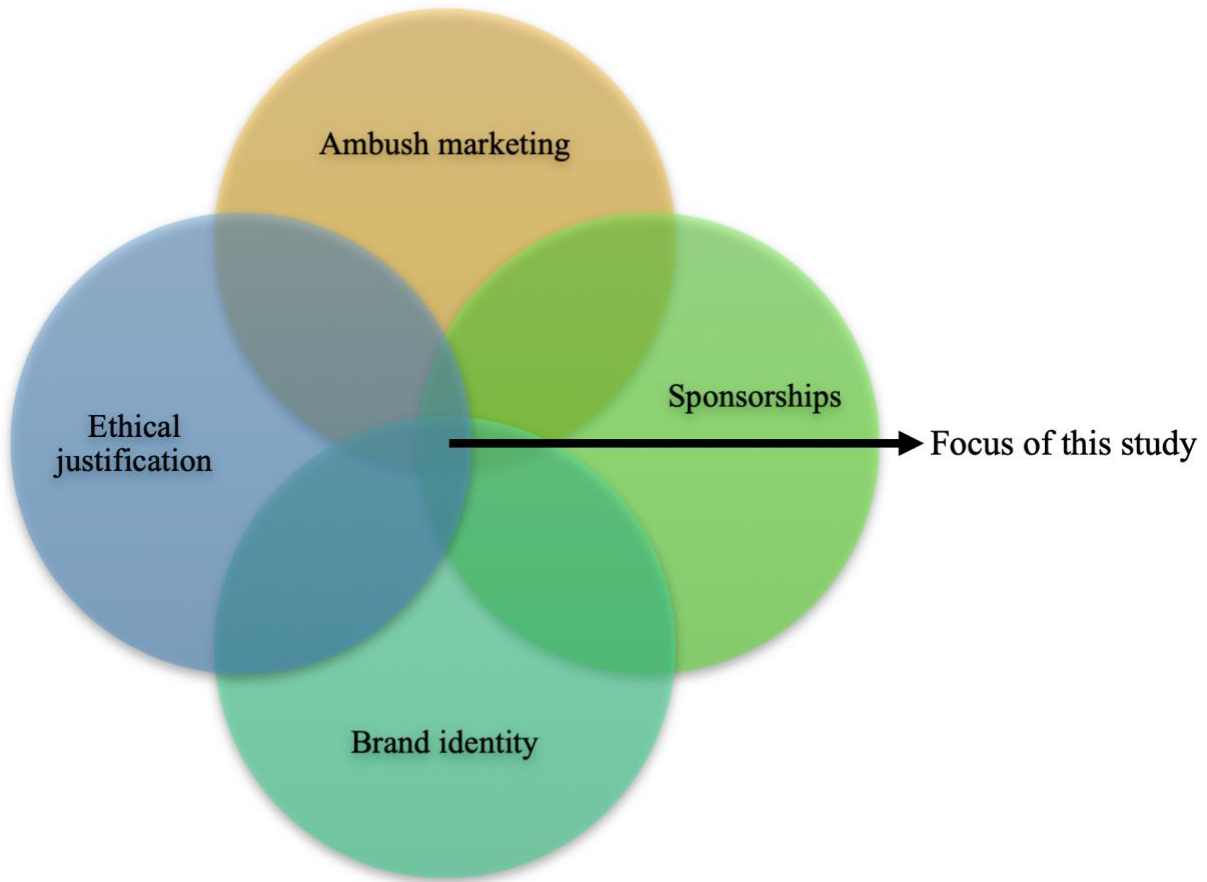
sponsor (ibid.). In the remainder of this thesis, the overarching term that describes unofficial marketing during sports events to get the same benefits as the main sponsor are also simply referred to as 'ambushing'.

Since the first case of ambush marketing in 1984, the interest in the topic has emerged excessively. One of the predominant themes of the topic has been establishing a definition of the activity. One of the first definitions was provided by Sandler and Shani (1989) who stated: "This tactic involves the efforts of an organization to associate itself indirectly with an event in an effort to reap the same benefits as an official sponsor." Notably, the essence of the definition is focusing on evaluating the effectiveness of official sponsorship versus its counterpart. On the same line, Tripodi and Sutherland (2000) highlight ambush marketing as a cost-effective alternative by gaining the equal benefits of official sponsors while avoiding the extensive sponsorship fee. In contradiction, Meenaghan (1994) argues that this narrow view of ambush marketing disregards entirely legitimate methods that capture public attention in the context surrounding big events. Although the various definitions alternate different aspects, they tend to highlight the potential confusion that ambush marketing tends to cause the consumer. Thus, a growing body of literature has begun to question the perspective of the consumer and how they relate to the ambusher's brand (Lyberger & McCarthy, 2001; Mazodier & Quester, 2010; McDaniel & Kinney, 1998; Piątkowska & Gocłowska, 2016; Shani & Sandler, 1998).

In more recent discussions of ambush marketing, a controversial issue has been whether it is considered an ethical strategy or not. On the one hand, in the interest of the sport, ambush marketing should be positioned as unethical and deceptive in the mind of the public (Payne, 1998, p.331). From this perspective, ambush marketing can be interpreted as unethical business conduct with evil intent when a company attempts to weaken its competitors' official sponsorship (McKelvey & Grady, 2008). On the other hand, however, ambush marketing is the natural result of healthy competition and that in the long run, the effects of this strategy makes sponsored properties more valuable (Welsh, cited in Louw, 2012). In the words of Crompton (2004), the opportunity of ambushing arises due to the magnitude of mega-events that provide many opportunities for brands to associate themselves through marketing. The proliferation of sponsorship makes it unlikely for a single company to invest resources to cover the rights to the

entire thematic space. In sum, the issue to classify ambush marketing as ethical or unethical depends on the position of the arguer as either the ambusher or the ambushed ([Ellis, Scassa & Séguin, 2011](#)).<sup>1</sup> In other words, while the knowledge regarding this topic has advanced during the last decades, it remains a partly flawed field of research that needs further investigation from the ambusher's perspective. This perspective needs to be further addressed since a closer analysis of this underdeveloped perspective would progress the ongoing debate of the topic and move the conversation forward with a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. From a practical perspective, it can provide companies with critical insights in ambushing activities that can prove to help these organisations in their marketing campaigns.

Despite the devious perception of ambush marketing, these activities are still practised by well-known brands during major sporting events (Weeks, O'Connor & Martin, 2017). Nevertheless, while the academic understanding of ambush marketing has grown recently, the focus on the ambusher as a key stakeholder is deficient and missing fundamental understanding. Previous research has focussed mainly on the perspective of the event-organizer, the sponsor of the event, and most of all, the consumer of the event. Thus, scholars have acknowledged a gap in the topic and call out for a need to research the ambusher's perspective as well ([Ellis, Scassa & Séguin, 2011](#); [Louw, 2012](#)). When ambush marketing is assessed in more detail, it can be said that the predominant view would characterize it as unethical and as a potentially harmful activity for the brand. Therefore, it is necessary to shift the focus from these widely held assumptions as the perspective of the ambusher has been ignored and calls for an unbiased examination. In addition, by shifting the focus to the perspective of the ambusher, this study seeks to address the conflicting views of it being an unethical activity and try to bridge the understanding of why these activities take place apart from any potential cost-effective reasoning. While certain stakeholders remain irritated by these activities, the fact remains that only a few cases of ambush marketing cross the lines of any legislation or otherwise unfair competition guidelines (Scassa, 2011). Therefore, this research seeks to highlight the perspective of the ambusher and propose that these activities can be legitimate.



*Figure 1 - Positioning of research areas*

A narrow scope has been defined to examine ambush marketing from the mentioned gap. This scope includes the touchpoint of four different fields of study, which will help the investigation of the ambusher's perspective. Therefore, this study will include the research fields of ambush marketing, sponsorship, brand identity, and ethical justification, as illustrated in figure 1. Ambush marketing and sponsorships are very closely related as there is arguably a clear linkage between the fields since ambush marketing emerged as a consequence of sponsorship. The element of brand identity allows for an examination of how the brand values could potentially reflect the corporate communication that occurs through ambush marketing. Lastly, the research field of ethical considerations grants a relevant viewpoint in the justification of the phenomenon and can arguably demonstrate a linkage to the brand identity of companies. Since the ambusher's perspective has not been extensively researched yet, this is where the core of the research lies and what all elements

should touch upon. Therefore, understanding why and how corporations justify these actions is vital for potential future marketing communication in the context of mega-events.

## **1.2 Purpose**

Previous research on the topic of ambush marketing has either attempted to develop a general definition, investigate the consumer perspective or explored the ethical aspect of the phenomenon. As a result, there is a lack of knowledge of the ambusher's perspective. By investigating this in detail, this thesis has the potential to enhance the knowledge of the ambusher's perception and explore the justification of this marketing initiative. Hence, the theoretical gap of the ambusher's perspective has laid the foundation of the purpose of this thesis which is to explore ambush marketing by reconceptualizing the phenomenon from the ambusher's perspective in the context of mega sports events. In doing so, the research questions this study addresses are the following:

- What is ambush marketing from the ambusher's perspective?
- What are the drivers from the ambusher's perspective?
- What is ambush marketing in the ambusher's brand strategy?

This study is investigating the characteristics of this marketing activity and seeks to establish an understanding of this type of marketing communication. To further advance scholar's understanding of this phenomenon, the aim is to develop a new concept by reconceptualizing ambush marketing from the ambusher's perspective by connecting the research field of ambush marketing, sponsorship, brand identity, and ethical justification. In doing so, the research questions are structured in a way that promotes a systematic approach to the reconceptualization. First, ambush marketing is examined to present a holistic picture of the phenomenon with the focus on the ambusher. This is followed by closing in on the ambusher's perspective and mapping out the drivers of this marketing practice. Finally, the concluding research question explores how this marketing initiative is used in a branding strategy that ultimately aims to uncover fundamental aspects of the reconceptualization.

### **1.3 Delimitations and Contributions**

As a result of filling the gap of the ambusher's perspective, the other perspectives are excluded. This delimitation has been done deliberately, as this paper had the aim to broaden the knowledge of ambush marketing by focusing on this new research scope. Ambush marketing includes other stakeholders such as the event organisers, official sponsors, and consumers, which have been sufficiently covered by previous scholars. With researching the ambusher's perspective, we set out to uncover what the drivers are to engage in ambush marketing and how this could be potentially justified.

In order to provide a solid foundation to uncover this new perspective, four research fields are chosen. These are ambush marketing, sponsorships, brand identity, and ethical justification. As we gather and develop knowledge, we aim to contribute theoretically and pragmatically to these research fields. Since this paper presents ambush marketing from the perspective of the ambusher, which has not been researched before, it adds to the theoretical contributions. More significantly, the theory of ambush branding, which is very much associated with ambush marketing, provides theoretical contributions that challenge common beliefs on the matter and applies a new theoretical basis to it. Practical contributions are made in the form of explanations on the conditions when the new concept of ambush branding is justifiable. These contributions would allow companies to act on situations that provide opportunities for non-sponsored marketing activities with practical techniques.

### **1.4 Outline of the thesis**

The structure of this thesis is divided into seven different chapters. The outline is organized in an order that supports the development of the reconceptualization of ambush marketing.

**Chapter 1 Introduction:** This chapter provides a background, key theoretical insights, and problematization of the research topic. It includes the purpose and the research questions, together with the delimitations and contributions.

**Chapter 2 Literature Review:** This chapter presents a comprehensive summary of the relevant research on the topic under scrutiny. It focuses on previous research and explores the background

of the relevant areas, namely sponsorship, ambush marketing, brand identity and ethical justification.

**Chapter 3 Methodology:** This chapter discusses and describes the methodological steps that have been taken to address the research questions. It motivates each step in how the data is collected, how it was analyzed and how it reflects over the methodological problems.

**Chapter 4 Empirical data:** This chapter elaborates on the company profiles of both the respondents we interviewed as well as the companies we analyzed through the qualitative content analysis. The respondents' empirical results and the ambushing initiatives of the cases are presented before being analyzed in chapter 5.

**Chapter 5 Analysis:** The empirical results are presented that led to the four themes that are included in the Ambush Branding Framework.

**Chapter 6 Discussion:** This chapter discusses the empirical results and relates them to previous research and elaborates on the findings that led to the reconceptualization of ambush marketing.

**Chapter 7 Conclusion:** This chapter provides the key points that answer the research questions. Furthermore, it shows the theoretical and managerial implications, as well as the limitations and further research.

## **2. Literature review**

*In the following chapter, an analytical summary of the literature is presented and focuses on the previously mentioned research fields. Firstly, the research field of sponsorship is presented as this is arguably a central aspect of the emergent field of ambush marketing which is the second field that is discussed in detail. This is followed by a review of brand identity, which is of central importance in the attempt to grasp a deeper understanding of companies' marketing efforts. Lastly, in an attempt to present another measure to legitimize marketing efforts, the research area of ethical justification is presented and how ethical considerations are relevant in the topic of ambush marketing.*

### **2.1 Sponsorship**

Sponsorship can be described as an important marketing communication apparatus that aims to accomplish positive publicity for an organization and the products they offer (Bennett, 1999). This sponsorship reaches the brand's consumer through supporting events or other activities that are not necessarily associated with the brand's regular operation (ibid.). The objective for sponsors with high involvement products is to manage a relationship activation strategy with a clear focus on the image of the brand (Davies & Tsiantas, 2008) which is achievable for sporting events through events like the Olympics. Sponsorship seeks to match the consumer's perception with the brand values by communicating it through these events. Therefore, it is essential for companies to not only help build their brand but also deliver an experience in their marketing and external communication (Cliffe & Motion, 2005). Furthermore, sponsorship differs from traditional advertising due to the second party, which is the sponsors (Speed & Thompson, 2000). Sponsorship allows an opportunity to create brand awareness and enhance the brand image, but instead of advertising, brand recognition is communicated through the medium, i.e. the sporting event Meenaghan (1996). Dees, Bennet and Villegas (2008) argue that sponsorship also has shown a tendency to be both cost-effective and time-efficient when a brand is associated with a sporting event. In contrast to advertising campaigns, which in comparison are more expensive and time-consuming, sponsorships in sports events can achieve communication objectives and simultaneously build brand equity (ibid.). In sum, the marketing tool of sponsorship allows the image of the event to communicate a favorable image through the linkage to mega-events.

Sponsorship has become an established communication tool for brands in the case of sporting events to build both brand awareness, brand image and corporate image (Cornwell, Roy & Steinar II, 2001). The exchange between the sponsor and event property is the definition of sponsorship (Humphreys, Cornwell, McAlister, Kelly, Quinn & Murray, 2010). The event organizers create revenue while the sponsor obtains the right to associate with the event to develop awareness (ibid.). According to Chien, Cornwell and Pappu (2011) sponsorship as a marketing tool can generate a favourable image for the brand. The meanings that are being held by an event could be transferred to the brand as a function of sponsorship. Kourovskaja and Meenaghan (2013) would argue and go further by stating that the brand is a corporation's most valuable financial asset. Therefore the brand must be continually nurtured when it is encountered with the consumer and continuously evoking different associations.

The willingness to spend money on sponsorship continues to grow and, heading into 2018, the spending was projected to grow with 4.9% globally, which constitutes \$65.8 billion. The spending is also correlated with the larger segments, where sports are the biggest segment which represents 70% of the market (IEG, 2017). As a consequence of the growth, the market of sponsorship has become immensely more competitive, and therefore, it has become essential for brands to manage their sponsorship investments very carefully to ensure its effectiveness (Fahy, Farrelly & Quester, 2004). In the case of sport events, it is essential to properly manage sponsorship due to the lack of control over the images of the brand and in what context it is being paired with (Cornwell, Lipp & Purkis, 2016). More importantly, while corporate sponsorship has grown, so has the practice of ambush marketing due to the increasing cost of sponsoring major events (Sandler & Shani, 1989; Meenaghan, 1996).

## **2.2 Development of Ambush Marketing**

Due to the immense cost of sponsorship fees during major sports events, companies that lack the financial means to become an official sponsor can, therefore, struggle to associate their brand during these sports events. Indeed, it is the high fees and the exclusion to associate with any activities imposed by the organizers that initially drove non-sponsors to get involved in ambush marketing (Nufer, 2016). Consequently, more ambushing cases arose that targeted the untapped marketing opportunities from mega sports events and by doing so, managed to get the attention

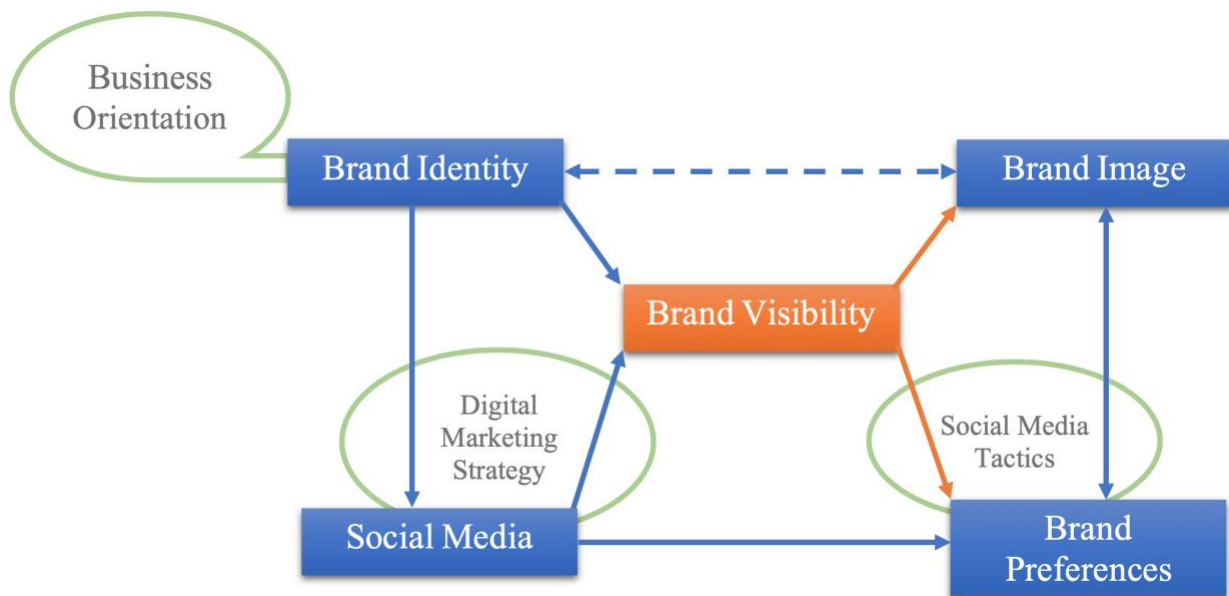


benefits in a more cost-effective manner (McDaniel & Kinney, 1998; Nufer, 2016). However, the financial reasons to ambush ought to be nuanced as many companies have the means to sponsor, but still choose to ambush. In contrast to small-scale ambushing activities, large-scale ambushing activities often prove to be highly costly (Crompton, 2004). This leaves the question of why companies would ambush if not for the - at first sight - financial benefits. A reason for that is to gain the same resulting benefits as the main sponsor and to diminish the position of the competitor brand that has bought the sponsor rights (ibid.). With that being said, there are potentially high costs involved in certain ambush marketing strategies. Rather than framing ambush marketing as a cheap approach of attaining exposure, some promotions or initiatives represent a detailed planning effort and simply are not ad-hoc or potential one-shot commercials (Sandler & Shani, 1989; Crompton, 2004). In conclusion, then, the financial justifications for engaging in ambush marketing have historically been a key driver for certain companies, but nowadays, it is not necessarily the main reason anymore.

Ambush marketing thrives on drawing the attention of the customer to their brand rather than the official sponsor's brand (Burton & Chadwick, 2018; Chadwick & Burton, 2011; Ellis, Scassa & Séguin, 2011; McDaniel & Kinney, 1998; Meenaghan, 1996; Pitt et al. 2010). Accordingly, the ambushing brand utilizes the attention that certain mega-event attracts with its marketing campaign and gains the attention of its direct consumers on place, and indirect consumers through media coverage. Furthermore, there are multiple types of ambushing strategies that are applicable when battling for the attention of its consumers. 'Coattail ambushing' is the deliberate association attempted by an organization when it associates itself with the event through a legitimate link, most notably competing athletes or participating teams (Chadwick & Burton, 2011). In doing so, an organization manages to successfully associate itself with the sporting property while not forced to have an official sponsorship deal with the event.

A way how organizations can reach their customer's attention is with high brand visibility, which can assist in long-term customer relations (Yan, 2011). With regards to successful brand visibility that a brand is striving for in ambush marketing, it improves the links between brand identity on one hand and brand image and brand preference on the other hand (Sääksjärvia & Samiee, 2011). In other words, it is the brand visibility that aligns what people think about the brand (image) and

what the brand constitutes at its core (brand identity). Besides the reinforcing nature of the brand visibility between the brand identity and the brand image, it is critical to note the importance of the brand identity for the visibility. This is because it draws its strength directly from brand identity and indirectly from brand identity through social media within the brand’s digital marketing strategy (Capitello et al., 2014). In the end, the reinforcing element of brand visibility to a certain brand influences the brand preferences of the customers. Brand visibility, in brief, is essential for a company since it is the binding factor between what the consumer thinks of the brand and what it actually is, which subsequently influences the consumer’s brand preferences which the company is fundamentally looking for. It is essential for attracting consumers to the brand with the aim of getting higher sales. Please refer to figure 2 for a visualization of the central role that brand visibility takes in the communication of the brand.



*Figure 2 - The reinforcing function of Brand Visibility relative to other branding elements  
Based on Capitello et al. (2014)*

Ambush marketing is not limited to mega-events or the world of sports (Louw, 2012). However, sporting mega-events provided the environment in which this marketing phenomenon could quickly develop into a significant and ever-recurring controversial marketing phenomenon (ibid.). To further explore ambush marketing, it is essential to note what a mega-event constitutes. Müller wrote a paper regarding the lack of adequate definitions of mega-events and formulated the following definition himself:

Mega-events are ambulatory occasions of a fixed duration that attract a large number of visitors, have a large mediated reach, come with large costs and have large impacts on the built environment and the population (2015, p. 638).

The model that accompanies this definition can be viewed in figure 3 and will be explained as follows. The economical, spatial, and organizational dimensions determine the degree to which an event can be identified as a mega-event (Valentino, 2011). Although the degree of the dimensions is prone to subjectivity, it provides the researcher with a framework of comparability. The spatial axis determines the globality of the event. Generally, the higher the spatial degree of the event, the more people it attracts from outside its geographical boundaries (ibid.). The organizational axis determines the complexity of the event with regards to, i.e. the number of different involved actors. Lastly, the economic axis regards the financial picture, which is often the most constraining element of an event. A rule of thumb is that the higher the event is placed on the economic axis, the larger the event will be and the more impact it will have on the host-cities and the people living in and around them (ibid.).

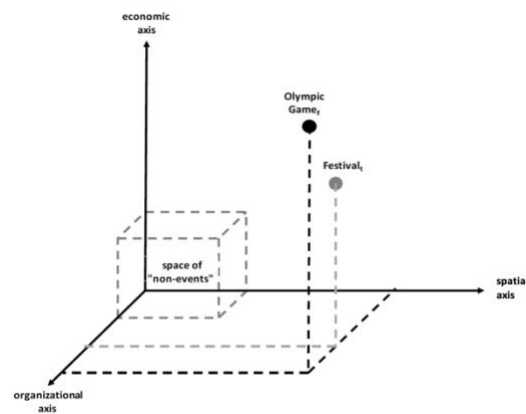


Figure 3 - Dimensions of mega-events (Valentino, 2011)

After the assessment of the aforementioned definitions of ambush marketing and the theories that are very much associated with the concept, the following preliminary definition was established:

Ambush marketing is a financially attractive communication initiative that aims to give the impression that a brand is a sponsor of an event without paying for the sponsorship fees that would grant the rights of the event's intellectual property.

## 2.3 Brand identity

### 2.3.1 Branding

Branding can be defined in many different ways, but the following twelve points touch upon most definitions' essence:

(1) A legal instrument, (2) a logo, (3) a company, (4) a shorthand, (5) a risk reducer, (6) an identity system, (7) an image in consumers' minds, (8) a value system, (9) a personality, (10) a relationship, (11) an added value, and (12) an evolving entity (de Chernatony & Riley, 1998, p. 426).

Additionally, branding can have some defining elements that, at its core, it is about differentiation from other brands and that successful branding results in a unique offering to its customers (Keller, 2020). It can also be defined to include a name, symbol or design to differentiate the brand from its competitors and is used to create a certain identification of the offered goods and services for the customer (Keller, 2020). Slightly below the surface, branding also includes a co-creation activity that involves all stakeholders to increase value (Merz, Yi He & Vargo, 2009).

Since the number of brands that are digitally native is increasing, the way in which consumers are using those brands also is (Swaminathan, Sorescu, Steenkamp, O'Guinn & Schmitt, 2020). This is, in turn, because it has never been this easy to gather information, which is a result of the invention of the internet. Brands are increasingly dropping the traditional structure where the brand is owned by one party and are adopting a structure where multiple stakeholders are co-creating the brand meanings parallel to the brand managers of the company (Swaminathan et al. 2020). In addition, the hyperactivity that people in this day and age experience through the internet, enables brands to reach communities beyond their geographical area, when at the same time new elements of branding evolve, such as ideas, people and places (ibid.). This stretches the branding space in which brand managers operate.

Consumers are nowadays more aware than ever about companies' practices behind their regular operating field. This results in that consumers can more easily condemn or praise these practices on an ethical scale (Alwi, Ali & Nguyen, 2017). As a response to that, companies not only ought

to manage their income streams but also their ethical brand identity (Balmer, Powell & Greyser, 2011; Okoye, 2009; Powell, 2011; Van de Ven, 2008). This concept dictates that the companies are citizens in society and should take their responsibility and have rights (Alwi, Ali & Nguyen, 2017).

### 2.3.2 Corporate Brand Reputation

The foundation of a strong corporate brand reputation (CBR) consists of four building blocks that follow each other up in order: corporate personality, corporate identity, corporate image, and finally corporate reputation (Fill, 2009). CBR encompasses all views of the stakeholder regarding CBR together with the brand image and identity (Roper & Fill, 2012). The quest for a strong CBR has to consider the four characteristics: trustworthiness, credibility, responsibility, and reliability (ibid.). It is crucial for the quality of this study to examine how the different attributes that CBR includes influence or are influenced by ambush marketing. This could, i.e. lead to a gap between ordinary corporate values and ambush marketing practices, which subsequently would need to be tackled. Closely affiliated theories and concepts that can be considered are:

- **Corporate personality:** The core nature of the organization. This aspect naturally functions as the starting point of analysing the brand and its practices (Fill, 2009).
- **Corporate identity:** The way the brand is introduced to and wants to be perceived by the stakeholders. This feature explores the way how one brand differs from another and includes the brand's symbolism, planned and unplanned communications, and the management and staff's behaviour (Olins, 1989). Insights into how ambushers want to be perceived will likely be interesting. No brand wants to be perceived as unethical, but ambushers often are perceived that way (Tripodi & Sutherland, 2000). Brand identity will be discussed further in the literature review. Since we find this feature particularly of interest for the subject of this thesis, we will elaborate on it in the next sub-chapter.
- **Corporate image:** The way how the different stakeholders actually perceive the brand. Analysing this alongside corporate identity can potentially show thought-provoking gaps.
- **Corporate communication:** This functions as the cement between the building blocks. In fact, corporate reputation is established and sustained through corporate communication. The three main types of communication are marketing, management, and corporate

communication (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007). Studying the foundation of the ambusher's corporate reputation is essential to get a better understanding of the approach ambushers take with regards to ambush marketing.

### 2.3.3 Corporate Brand Identity

The identity of a brand is the most critical factor of a corporate brand (Iglesias, Landgraf, Ind, Markovic, Kaporcic, 2020). It sets the brand from its competitors and makes it relevant for its stakeholders. Furthermore, the identity that a brand carries can be seen, felt, heard, and so forth (Wheeler, 2013). The brand identity reinforces the recognition of the brand and differentiation from others (Iglesias et al. 2020; Kapferer, 2008; Wheeler, 2013). It can be defined as the brand's vision that is used as the driving force for the creation of products and services (Kapferer, 2008). The vision includes the chief beliefs and core values of the brand.

The Corporate Brand Identity Matrix is a model that can provide assistance in identifying different components that are necessary to build a strong brand (Urde & Greyser, 2019). It consists of nine elements, of which three are external, three external/internal, and three internal. The elements can be seen in figure 4 below:

<b>EXTERNAL</b>	<p><b>VALUE PROPOSITION</b></p> <p><i>What are our key offerings, and how do we want them to appeal to customers and other stakeholders?</i></p>	<p><b>RELATIONSHIPS</b></p> <p><i>What should be the nature of our relationships with key customers and other stakeholders?</i></p>	<p><b>POSITION</b></p> <p><i>What is our intended position in the market and in the hearts and minds of key customers and other stakeholders?</i></p>
<b>EXTERNAL/ INTERNAL</b>	<p><b>EXPRESSION</b></p> <p><i>What is distinctive about the way we communicate and express ourselves and makes it possible to recognize us at a distance?</i></p>	<p><b>BRAND CORE</b></p> <p><i>What do we promise, and what are the core values that sum up what our brand stands for?</i></p>	<p><b>PERSONALITY</b></p> <p><i>What combination of human characteristics or qualities forms our corporate character?</i></p>
<b>INTERNAL</b>	<p><b>MISSION AND VISION</b></p> <p><i>What engages us (mission)? What is our direction and inspiration (vision)?</i></p>	<p><b>CULTURE</b></p> <p><i>What are our attitudes, and how do we work and behave?</i></p>	<p><b>COMPETENCES</b></p> <p><i>What are we particularly good at, and what makes us better than the competition?</i></p>

Figure 4 - Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (Urde & Greyser, 2019)

What is most interesting in this model is the dependability of the individual elements to each other, which subsequently creates paths. There are four paths designed to provide a deeper insight into the linked elements of a brand that create a stronger corporate brand identity (ibid.). All the paths touch upon the brand core, which is at the heart of the brand's identity. These are:

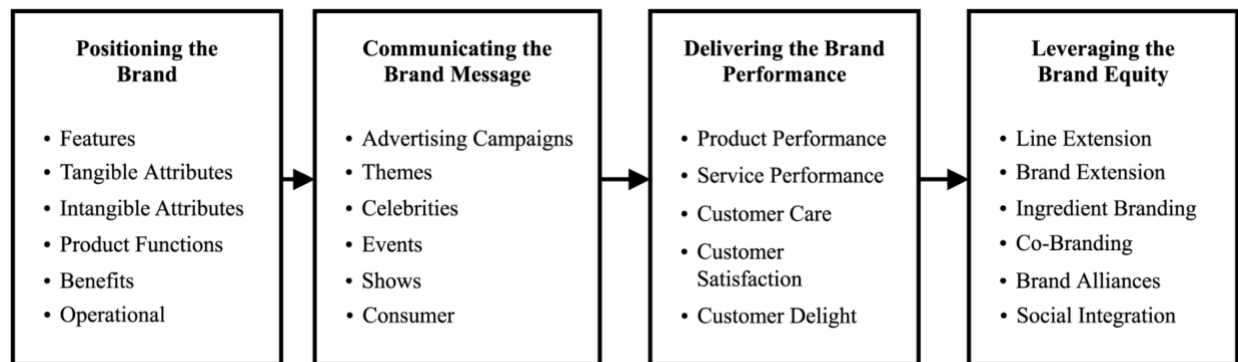
1. Strategy path, which leads from the mission and vision, to position. It provides insights in how far the organization inspires internal and external stakeholders. Additionally, it assesses the brand promise to the customer, which is ideally rooted in the brand's positioning.
2. Competition path, which assesses the linkage between the values between value proposition and competences. The abilities of the brand should provide a stage for the brand in which it can safeguard the brand promise. This path should result in a fruitful set-up for the brand to reach a strong value position.
3. Interaction path, which leads from relationships to culture. This path regards how well the values and culture that are integrated into the organization actively interconnect with the internal and external stakeholders. The organization should be able to identify the desired nature of the relationship with these stakeholders.
4. The communication path flows from expression to personality and explains that the personality that a brand has supports the brand core. This communication can take many tangible and intangible forms and should be well planned and executed to communicate the right message to all stakeholders.

Another model has been developed to assess how a brand ought to be built in a competitive market (Ghodeswar, 2008). This is a model that logically combines brand identity – through several steps – with brand equity. The model, as seen in figure 5, explained as follows:

1. The positioning of the brand explains the brand identity and the value proposition so that the consumers understand the brand to create a competitive advantage (Aaker, 1996). There are eight positioning tools: “feature-driven prompts; problem [and] solution prompts; target-driven positioning; competition-driven positioning; emotional/psychological positioning; benefit-driven positioning; aspirational positioning; and value positioning” (Upshaw, 1995 cited in Ghodeswar, 2008 p. 6). When a brand has successfully positioned itself, the consumer ‘saves’ the brand in his/her mind for the brand’s niche product/service offering.
2. The positioning of the brand lays the foundation of communicating the brand message (Ghodeswar, 2008). Communicating the brand message explains that successful brands support the organization in reaching the stakeholders to affect the customer’s consumption choices. Brand awareness is central in this communication, which is defined as the understanding of a potential consumer that a brand is part of a particular product category (ibid.). The focus that is chosen in the first quadrant is translated into creative advertisements in the communication quadrant. These creative advertisements make the brand to stand apart from the conventional advertisements and subsequently help the brand to have a greater impact on the target market. When the brand is differentiated sufficiently from its competitors, it can create emotional and rational connections between the consumer and a brand, a product, or a service (Knapp, 2000). Successful brands are made when the brand communicates creatively through different channels of communication with the consumer (Ghodeswar, 2008). When the brand communicates messages that touch upon the feelings of the consumer, the brand aims to build an emotional relationship with their consumers. Companies need to invest in long-term integrated communication strategies that clarify the brand’s necessity to the consumers (ibid.). The brand message ought to be aligned with all the brand identity elements of which the brand values and the brand personality are the most important ones.



3. The delivery of the brand performance is essential as it has the objective to track the progress of the brand in the market, the effectiveness of the marketing campaigns and the subsequent changes in the brand strength. Examples of elements that can be tracked to estimate the brand's progress are brand recognition, brand/advertising awareness, brand recall, and purchasing numbers.
4. Leveraging brand equity is the process that makes the linkage between the brand and another entity, which subsequently generates associations of the brand to the being (Ghodeswar, 2008). At the same time, the existing brand associations are affected as well.



*Figure 5 - PCDL Model (Ghodeswar, 2008)*

### **2.3.4 Brand identity and ambush marketing**

According to the previous definitions of brand identity, it can be concluded that, besides the physical or observable aspects of a brand, recognition and differentiation are the main elements. With regards to ambush marketing, it can take place on physical/observable elements such as tangible products of the brand, or on physical structures such as buildings. These marketing initiatives would increase brand recognition to conquer a particular part in the consumer's mind before the competitor does. Arguably, getting the brand in the consumer's mind is the first step to brand loyalty.

When ambush marketing is evaluated through the PCDL model, it can be said that when the brand positions itself so that ambush marketing would not result in a misalignment from the brand and what it stands for, ambush marketing can be implemented if the brand aims to stay true to the

essence of the brand. That consideration roots in a business standpoint, rather than a moral standpoint. The way how brands intend to stay true to their core starts with the right positioning. Within ambush marketing, competition and benefit-driven positioning are mostly interesting, as this is the reasoning for ambushing in many cases. This marketing practice is subsequently the essence in the communication of the brand message. At the brand performance, the ambush is evaluated, in which the brand awareness and recognition within and outside of the event are mostly interesting. If consumers would find out that the brand is ambushing, purchasing numbers will have to be monitored most closely. If the previous steps are well aligned, and the brand is leveraged correctly, the brand equity logically benefits from this.

### **2.3.5 Co-creation and consumer exploitation**

Brand co-creation can be defined as the value-adding addition via the contribution of customers and is an essential part of branding nowadays is the co-creation within branding (Cassinger, 2017). It is based on the presence of two variables: a social setting and certain perceptions of the brand that result in its symbolism (ibid.). Companies need to provide the customers with some empowerment and encouragement through freedom so that he or she can give meaning to the brand him/herself, but the brand cannot allow the consumers to use the brand in any way they like. That is why the brand should remain present as an observer at the co-creation activity (ibid.). It can be said that this concept of branding challenges the conventional setting in which a company-centric perspective is taken in the value-producing logic. This is contested by this theory by claiming that customers can indeed have a prominent role in the value-adding process of the brand (Hatch & Schultz, 2010).

There is also a certain ethical feature to consider. Since we determined in this piece that brand co-creation is a value-adding practice, is it just to make customers do immaterial labor if they are not compensated for it? Previously, we also determined that brand co-creation needs a social setting and brand symbolism. For this, consumption is needed, which results in the immaterial labor that here describes the labor that creates the necessary setting for brand co-creation. So the brand gets compensation from the customer through the purchase of the product or service and through the immaterial labor of co-creation. This form of branding that carries immaterial labor can be translated into a certain general value, which simply could be 'capital' (Arvidsson, 2005). The

ethical perspective hinges on the assumption that brands feed of society and the everyday life within society (Cassinger, 2017).

It can be argued that ambush marketing can use its customers to co-create the brand during large events. Some supporters might bring certain merchandise that provides the brand with some visibility that might influence other consumers. However, the question that remains is if this form of immaterial labor is morally right. As mentioned before, companies should manage their ethical agenda well in order to avoid a backlash from its customers who are more involved than ever. In fact, companies might even want to create a positive buzz around their ethical agenda to lure customers to the brand. That is why companies should assess the use of co-creation carefully.

## **2.4 Ethical Justification**

In the academic research of ambush marketing, questions regarding the ethical debate have emerged as one of the central themes within the topic (Burton & Chadwick, 2018; Ellis, Parent & Seguin, 2016). As a result of the worldwide growth in sponsorship, the practice of ambush marketing has developed parallelly (Meenaghan, 1994; Shani & Sandler, 1998) and also created two distinct perspectives regarding the marketing practice being considered ethically and morally justifiable. Payne (1998) puts this contested debate into context with the famous underdog story of David-and-Goliath. The opposing positions represent very distinct perspectives whereas one can either perceive the event owners as monolithic bullies as opposed to the ambusher being considered an underdog marketer who is inspired by neutralizing a competitive advantage (ibid.). The essence of this argument is that the opinion of ambush marketing being unethical or not varies and could arguably be derived from the position of the debater (Payne, 1998).

Since all stakeholders voice their opinions on ambush marketing particularly strongly, these stakeholders show their stance and strongly reflect their self-interest (Crompton, 2004). On the one hand, the property owners and the official sponsors insist on it being unethical and complain that the ambusher is usurping benefits from which they have not paid for. It is highly likely that critics of ambush marketing are the ones negatively affected and regard it as a threat to their investments. Not surprisingly, the IOC defines ambush marketing as the following:

The use of intellectual property associated with the Olympic and Paralympic Games or the misappropriation of images associated with the Olympic and Paralympic Games by organizations or individuals, without authorization from the IOC, IPC, and the organizing committee, which are the rights holders of this intellectual property (Protection of Intellectual Properties, 2020).

In other words, any attempt to mislead the public into believing that a company is a sponsor categorizes as ambush marketing. From the standpoint of the event owners, these efforts threaten the viability of sports that are highly dependent on funding sponsors and to protect the revenue base, which makes it necessary to frame the activity as unethical. In addition, ambush marketing is manipulating the basics of ethical business practices, namely the truth in business communication (Payne, 1998).

However, on the other hand, some proponents advocate it as a legitimate marketing behavior. Sponsorship investments are not free from competitive pressures, and it is the responsibility of the sponsors to evaluate the parameters of what they are purchasing as these do not operate in a vacuum (Crompton, 2004). From an ambusher's point of view, ambush marketing has emerged from the escalating prices of sponsorship. In addition, it lies in the interest of the sponsorship's competitors to take advantage of major events and is portraying it as unethical it simply intellectual rubbish from sloppy marketers (Welsh, cited in Louw, 2012, p.139). Due to the limited number of companies that possess the financial means to participate as official sponsors, it could be argued from this perspective that taking advantage of untapped profit opportunities and optimizing marketing opportunities is not unethical per se (Nufer, 2016).

O'Sullivan and Murphy (1998) investigated matters further by conducting a study and discussed the ethical principles of ambush marketing from four ethical perspectives - utilitarianism, duty-based ethics, stakeholder analysis, and virtue ethics. Utilitarian theory emphasizes the consequences of actions and is considered ethical when it brings the greatest amount of good to the largest number of people. From this theoretical lens, ambush marketing is portrayed as ethical in the spirit of financial utilitarianism when the greatest financial good is offered to all competing companies (O'Sullivan & Murphy, 1998). In contrast, duty-based ethical theory evaluates the intention of the decision-maker instead of the consequences. The ethical evaluation of ambush

marketing therefore depends on if the ambusher deliberately intends to hurt their competitors or perceive it as an untapped opportunity, as the latter would be considered ethical (ibid.).

The third theory is the stakeholder theory and incorporates all the various stakeholders that are affected by the outcome of ambush marketing. The outcome of ambush marketing is determined as an ethical action when this indirect stakeholder (ambusher) does not intentionally seek to mislead the consumer and at the same time, does not negatively affect or harm the primary stakeholder (the official sponsor) (O'Sullivan & Murphy, 1998). Lastly, the theory of virtue ethics was applied to question ambush marketing and differs significantly from the previously mentioned theory. This is because it moves the focus to the person or organization rather than the decision or action. A virtuous character is defined by habits that reflect a moral standard, and therefore, the risk of deceiving consumers would automatically indicate that the potential ambusher would not participate in such actions (ibid.). The rationale for a just corporate character, which applies virtue ethics to organizations, is threefold. The central role of community in virtue ethics is reflected in the modern corporation with many members and rules, the informal culture is shaped by the individuals who act in a certain way and finally, the most desirable individuals virtues can be translated into corporate ones (Murphy, 1999).

When the concept of virtuosity in organizations is further researched, the notion that virtuous actions are closely linked to the purpose of the organization comes to light. Accordingly, the purpose indicates the first indication of virtue in organizations and therefore highlights the importance of defining the purpose in terms that the individual can carry it out (Collier, 1995). Furthermore, the importance of the role top management has in shaping the organizational values and a purpose that people can identify with, should not be forsaken (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1994).

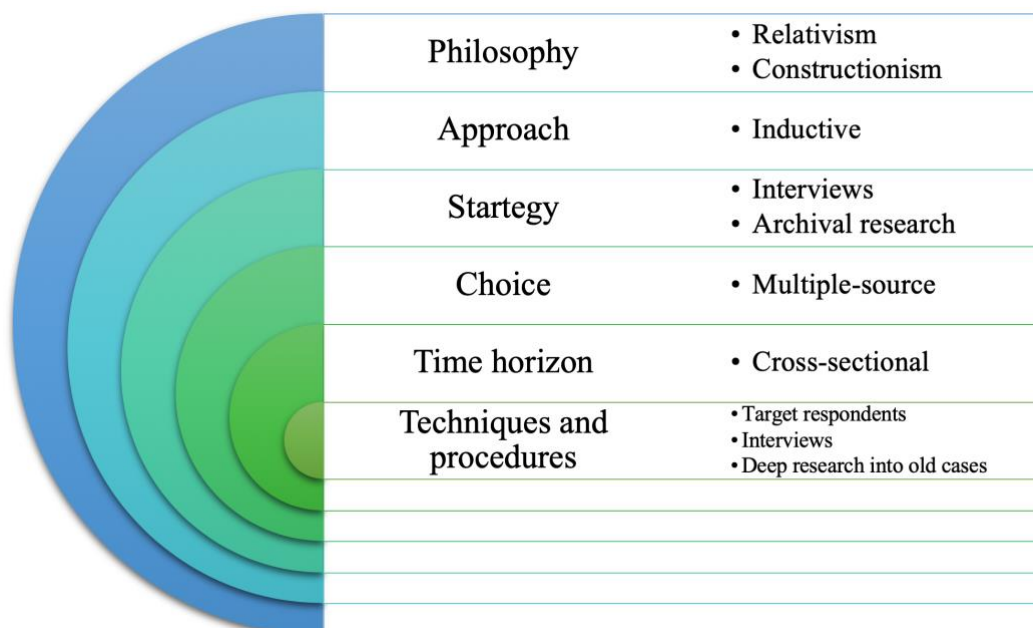
The lack of consensus when framing ambush marketing as ethical or not is of much relevance to investigate the issue even further. The negative perception of ambush marketing is inherently the dominant one. Therefore, it is important to probe the ethical issues even further from the ambusher's perspective to identify the underlying arguments of participating in these marketing activities. While various ethical theories allow different perspectives of ambush marketing being

ethical or not, they remain relevant in discussing the perception of the marketer in more detail and aid the understanding of the practice from their perspective.

### 3. Methodology

*In the section that follows, the selected methodology will be discussed and motivated in detail. This chapter will elaborate on the methodological choices and give a detailed review of the specific approach that this study takes. First, the philosophical considerations are discussed that lay the foundation of the additional methodological choices, followed by an argumentation for a qualitative research design that also examines the inductive approach undertaken. Next, the sampling technique is reflected upon that closely relates to the data collection methods that were used to gather the relevant data. Finally, the chapter reviews the analysis approach and concludes with a review of the research quality criteria and a critical reflection over ethics, reflexivity and politics.*

Figure 6 shows the layers of the methodological foundation of this study. Although there is not a single right approach within the different layers, the different elements of the layers all have their advantages and disadvantages over the alternatives (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). The following sub-chapters will explain the made choices regarding the elements of the different layers of the model.



*Figure 6 - Methodological foundation*

### 3.1 Research Approach

A solid foundation in philosophical knowledge can help us to determine a successful research design, even if the field of research is beyond our past experience. This philosophical knowledge provides us with abstract understanding, which contributes to a research process that is as efficient as possible. More specifically, it gives us the ability to determine which other elements of the research process will probably work and which will not, and the limitation that the approach of the research would subsequently encapsulate (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Jackson & Jaspersen, 2018).

The fundamental questions of humanity can be addressed with philosophy to which ontology and epistemology belong (Brinkmann, 2017). Ontology can be described as the way people view the world and what they think of it, whereas epistemology asks the question of what people think and which knowledge they can gather from it (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). The toolbox we need to investigate the world's phenomena is defined as methodology and the research techniques. However, it is the first question ('what do we think about the world?') that influences the epistemology and methodology, and research methods and techniques (ibid.). The philosophical element is essential, not only because it provides us with the knowledge of the sort of data that is required and how it should be processed, but also because it determines the way how the data is answering the questions of the research (ibid.).

Therefore, the choice of research philosophy is not one that should be taken lightly, as it determines choice in the research strategies and methods as well (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Nominalism and relativism are in the qualitative spectrum of the ontological approaches. Relativists explain that there are multiple truths and that the facts are subject to the observer, whereas nominalism explains that there is no certain truth and that facts are created by humans (ibid.). This study uses a relativist ontology, as it takes the standpoint that there are many truths and that facts hinge on one's viewpoint. Since ambush marketing is being explained by justification from the ambusher or by condemnation from the sponsors or the event organizers, there are many viewpoints that all ought to be approached as the respondents' version of the truth. This makes this ontological approach particularly applicable. Additionally, a relativist approach would not focus on the actors in their physical states and activities, but on their justifications behind them. These justifications include the development of new strategies to deal with the



actions of the opponents (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). Logically, for this study, that would pose the question of what the reasons of the ambushers are to develop the ambushing initiatives.

A level that is coming more to the surface than ontology is epistemology, and - as mentioned before - is the study of the manner in which the nature of the world is enquired (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). The two antitheses are positivism and social constructionism. Positivism explains that human interests are irrelevant and generalizes on statistics (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). Social constructionism, however, explains that what is deemed to be 'reality' is constructed by humans instead of external factors (ibid.). This is why understanding the reasoning behind this sensemaking is most interesting. It explains that our knowledge stems from what we construct in social groups. This epistemology elaborates that sampling is done by the selection of a few numbers of cases for specific reasons and that all respondents paint a complete picture of an entire situation. Because this study researches a phenomenon with a very specific point-of-view (ambusher's perspective), this epistemology allows us to provide an understanding of ambushing that still considers all sports marketers, to investigate the ambusher's perspective. The alignment of a relativist ontology and a constructionist epistemology paves the way for this study to generate theories as an outcome (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). This approach is appropriate in relation to our purpose and research questions to establish a better understanding of the ambusher's perspective that seeks to result in a reconceptualization of ambush marketing.

The reason for a qualitative study - contrary to a quantitative study - is that in-depth qualitative interviews are suitable in scenarios when the researcher seeks to understand the meanings that the interviewee attaches to a certain issue (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018), which is what we want to find out. This research aims to probe into the organization's underlying reasonings for 'ambushing' and the justification for it. This is not a topic that can be answered by numbers or can be put on a scale that has 'ambushing' on one end of the scale and 'sponsoring' at the other. Fundamentally, the research highlights what the organizations have done and to some degree said, which is an ideal qualitative set-up (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). It also has a rather explorative nature and uses open-ended questions rather than closed predefined questions, which again links to a qualitative approach (ibid.).

This alignment with theory generation asks for an inductive reasoning process (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). An inductive process also leaves space for interpretation and does not have to exist in rigid structures, which is the case for deductive reasoning. Furthermore, inductive reasoning is involved with the context in which the research topic takes place, which appropriates the use of a small sample of subjects (ibid.). This approach allows the study to start with certain questions about the research topic, which can, i.e. be answered with the help of cases and archival research into previous occurrences of ambush marketing (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). This is indeed the approach this study takes as well. It should provide us with the rich and deep knowledge of the research topic to assess the complex phenomenon of ambush marketing as a whole so that the new theory of ambush branding can be developed.

### **3.2 Research Design**

In designing a research study, there is a clear interplay between the philosophical orientation and the research problem that dictates the most suitable design (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). In essence, the research design composes the means to evidently achieve the goals of the research as it links the used methods and the available resources to the theoretical framework, questions, research, generalization, and presentational goals (Flick, 2014). As the topic of ambush marketing consists of seemingly different and conflicting interpretations, a number of relevant cases were analyzed and several respondents were consulted to enhance the understanding of the ambusher's perspective. Therefore, with the aim to reconceptualize the concept of ambush marketing, a multiple case-study approach was chosen to obtain further in-depth information to investigate the phenomenon from the ambusher's perspective. The benefits of this approach is that it allows a detailed illustration of the phenomenon within its context and allows for multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2018). This approach allows us to gain a more holistic understanding of the ambusher's perspective as the multiple sources complement each other. Hence, in an attempt to achieve a better perception of this perspective, this design fits the aim of this study.

The case-study design consists of distinct variations whereas the more traditional positivist epistemology advocates multiple cases in contrast to the constructionist epistemology that usually involve sampling from a single case (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). Recently, an intermediate position has been advanced that is inspired by the contrasting epistemologies. This intermediate

alternative is particularly useful for this study as it develops theories using multiple methods (Eisenhardt, 1989). A major strength of this approach is that the creative insights that result across cases provide a means to generate a novel theory. This is because the unraveling of conflicting realities can ‘unfreeze’ thinking which can allow theory building with less research bias in contrast to theory building based on incremental studies (Eisenhardt, 1989). In our case, generating a reconceptualization of ambush marketing is suitable for this approach as it goes in line with our epistemological approach that reflects the most appropriate way to evidently answer our research question.

However, this approach is not solely justified by the conflicting views, but also by the lack of existing theory that demonstrates the underlying reasoning of the ambushing activity from companies. Ultimately, developing a new theory by theory-building in contrast to theory-testing research allows the use of the insights from relevant qualitative data to allow for a greater understanding of this phenomenon and to expand the field of this research (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). In sum, our study seeks to complement the perspective of the ambusher as this scope in the topic of ambush marketing is yet to be truly investigated.

### **3.3 Sampling**

#### **3.3.1 Sampling of cases**

Within the frame of this research, the discussion seeks to investigate the perception of the ambusher. Therefore, the sampling of cases under investigation needs to be applicable to fulfil the aim of this study. It is essential that we take great care in the selection of the cases, as this influences the foundation of theory building (Eisenhardt, 1989). We sought to be as transparent as possible regarding the case selection as the population of cases, in turn, defines the limits of our samples. However, with regards to developing a new theory in contrast to testing a theory, the premise of case selection is not seeking to be representative of the chosen cases but rather illuminate the relationships among constructs. Therefore, theoretical sampling is applicable for choosing the cases as they are likely to offer theoretical insights (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Moreover, basing the case selection on theoretical sampling allows the likelihood of insights into an unusual phenomenon and also an elaboration on the emergent theory (ibid.). In addition, on the

notion of saturation, Eisenhardt (1989) argues that there is no ideal number of cases but at the same time, recommends a number between four to ten cases. Studying fewer cases than four tends to complicate theory generation as it risks being unconvincing. In contrast, more than ten cases result in a high degree of complexity when that amount of data is challenging to cope with (ibid.). Following this recommendation, the number of cases that were chosen to be analyzed was a total of five with respect to the data also collected from interviews.

These recommendations have ultimately laid the foundation of the criteria for the case sampling. One of the techniques and procedures used to perform this research was by selecting cases that were not based on a specific industry but rather the controversy that their marketing campaigns had caused in this context that follows from mega sporting events. The cases that were analyzed are characterized by the considerable media attention they received and caused by multinational companies during mega sporting events. The cases that were analyzed are summarized in figure 7.

<b>Ambusher</b>	<b>Sporting event</b>	<b>Campaign</b>
<b>Nike</b>	Olympic Games 2012, London	'Find Your Greatness' ad campaign
<b>Bavaria</b>	FIFA World Cup 2010, South Africa	Orange Bavaria dresses
<b>Beats by Dre</b>	Olympic Games 2012, London	Sponsoring individual athletes with headphones
<b>Pepsi</b>	FIFA World Cup 2014, Rio de Janeiro	'Live for Now' ad campaign
<b>Kodak</b>	Olympic Games 1984, Los Angeles	Sponsoring the broadcast network of the Olympics

*Figure 7 - overview of case samples*

### **3.3.2 Sampling of the respondents**

Since we want to investigate ambush marketing from the perspective of the ambusher, interviewees allowed us to get a versatile opinion about how their organizations position themselves in large sporting events. Ahead of 2018, sponsorship spendings were projected to grow with 4,9% globally, and 70% relates to sponsoring the sports segment (IEG, 2017). (IEG, 2017). With the large scale of sponsorship deals and how much money it compromises, companies that have image-based congruence with sporting events were of particular interest. Therefore, before contacting company representatives, the criteria of them being active in sponsorship was

fundamental. Being engaged in sponsorship would increase the likelihood that the company has ambushed before or has the potential to do it in the future. Purposive sampling was suitable in order to match the purpose of the study and approach the specific respondents. This kind of sampling refers to a sampling design where the criteria for inclusion are defined, and the researcher seeks to collect data from a particular population (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). While ambush marketing is considered an option for all types of companies and not only sports brands, the risk of limited knowledge of the topic was at risk. Moreover, while convenience sampling would offer a time-effective approach, purposive sampling is arguably the most relevant approach with regard to the aim of this study. Also, the role of the respondents was crucial for the gathering of the needed data as people who directly work with external marketing have first-hand knowledge<sup>2</sup>. The cases that were analyzed are summarized in figure 8.

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Date &amp; Time</b>	<b>Setting &amp; Location</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Consent</b>
<b>Abacus</b>	Marketing Manager	2020/03/03	Face-to-Face, Abacus HQ	1 hour and 7 minutes	Yes
<b>Red Bull</b>	Global Social Media Intern	2020/04/16	Face-to-Face, Lund University	35 minutes	Yes
<b>Nike</b>	EMEA Event Manager	2020/04/17	Telephone, N/A	28 minutes	Yes
<b>Mizuno</b>	Marketing Manager Nordics	2020/04/21	Skype, N/A	36 minutes	Yes
<b>Vitamin Well</b>	Marketing Manager	2020/04/22	Skype, N/A	30 minutes	Yes

*Figure 8 - Overview of the participating respondents*

### **3.4 Data Collection Method**

#### **3.4.1 Primary data through interviews**

This research has a cross-sectional time horizon as we do not assess the phenomenon of ambush marketing over a long period since we are constricted to a relatively short time span. In contrast, longitudinal studies have the aim to research a phenomenon's change over time (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009), which we did not set out to do. The techniques and procedures that we have chosen are, among others, in-depth qualitative interviews as they are suitable in scenarios when

researchers seek to understand the meanings that the interviewee attaches to a certain issue ([Easterby-Smith et al. 2018](#)). In doing so, this approach allows the participant to feel a sense of autonomy and speak freely about their perceptions and motivations. Moreover, for this research, it is suitable to conduct single participant interviews. The motivation to not use a focus group or any other alternative was due to the topic under scrutiny. This approach allows some elements of ambush marketing to be discussed, which could be a sensitive subject to discuss with other companies present. Rather, we focused on developing an in-depth understanding of how each specific respondent frames their opinion in their own words.

In this study, we expand the knowledge and the perspective of the ambusher by examining their practices by using semi-structured interviews, which offers a creative process that includes both flexibility and openness. Doing so goes in line with treating the interview like a meaningful conversation which allows it to develop naturally ([Easterby-Smith et al. 2018](#)). In addition, the construct of semi-structured interview allowed us to cover a predetermined set of topics that was relevant to address. Crafting a topic guide refers to creating a list of topics that guides the interview by addressing pre-decided topics (*ibid.*). That means that we have to revisit the research question to help clarify the purpose that subsequently forms the different topics. Our interview guide covered the topics of brand identity, sponsorship, ethical considerations, ambush marketing, and corporate brand reputation. Semi-structured interviews have an open approach, whereas we planned that the first three topics had to be addressed before leading up to the final topic of ambush marketing not to lead or affect the respondent's answer. In line with this structure, we assigned to have two different roles during the interview. While one of us focused on asking the question for each topic, the other took notes and focused mainly on asking follow-up questions to investigate the answers more thoroughly<sup>3</sup>.

### **3.4.2 Archival data**

There is no definitive necessity to collect new primary data when doing research ([Easterby-Smith et al. 2018](#)). There is simply such an abundance of information across many different fields that can be accessed easily. This information often takes shape in a textual form that includes statements from the relevant managers regarding their businesses' performances among many departments (*ibid.*). In addition to the techniques mentioned above and procedures of targeting

respondents and the use of semi-structured interviews, this study complements the gathered data from the interviews with the use of archival data from previous ambushing cases. Archival data provides a complete approach to studying this phenomenon since “people don’t always do what they say” (Fellman, 1999, p.21) in the context of social sciences. This is also true for sensitive topics as ambush marketing for example. The availability of online archives has created a valuable source of data in the form of people expressing themselves through text and arguing over controversial issues (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000). Online archives as newspapers proved to be a relevant source to grasp the ambusher’s perspective of ambush marketing.

One of the primary reasons why we chose to use archival data is because getting enough respondents from different ambushing companies was expected to be hard. The difficulty is that it involves a subject that might be deemed as sensitive for companies that are involved in ambush marketing of some sorts. Therefore the interviews are complemented with secondary data from previous ambushing cases that were documented. Archival data can be subdivided into reactive data and non-reactive data (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). Reactive data is data that is produced through the researcher’s provision of new data, through surveys, for instance, whereas non-reactive data that has not been created for research purposes. This study will mainly use non-reactive archival data as newspapers and company websites provided the most detailed and holistic descriptions of the ambusher’s actions. The archival data was analyzed by conducting a qualitative content analysis that is further explained in section 3.5.

### **3.4.3 Secondary data**

Secondary data include published summaries, but can also include raw data (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). It can be defined as “research information that exists in the form of publications or other electronic media, which is collected by the researcher” (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018, p. 173). A first general advantage of the use of secondary data is that it allows us to be efficient in our work and costs, as we can make use of previously gathered data instead of gathering it all ourselves (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). A second example is that data that is published by governments or companies have the appearance to be of high quality (ibid.). The principal part of the secondary data that we used in this study consists of peer-reviewed journal articles. This type of data has been assessed by multiple researchers in the study’s particular

field, which safeguards the reliability of the data. However, this does not imply that we can simply assume that the gathered secondary data is always credible. We also should be very much aware of the lack of control of the data's quality and should be on the lookout for signs that might create suspicion about the data's credibility (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). All secondary data is produced and made public for a reason, and knowing this reason is essential to test its credibility. Before using secondary data other than peer-reviewed articles, we carefully assessed the quality of the source through understanding indeed why it was made public. A third example of an advantage of the use of secondary data is that it can provide relevant insights in a situation's historical background, which could not be gathered through primary data collection (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). This is one of the reasons why we have chosen archival research to analyse other ambushing cases; it might be challenging to get access to people who were involved in these practices many years ago.

Secondary data comes in several forms such as documentary, survey-based, and multiple-source secondary data (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Documentary secondary data are often used in a study that also includes primary data and includes textual information such as transcripts, diaries, minutes, and correspondence between parties (ibid.). Survey-based secondary data includes logical research that is based on surveys and is more linked to quantitative than qualitative research (ibid.). Multiple-source secondary data regards data that can be a mixture of the two data collection methods mentioned above. The differentiator here is that multiple data sets have been merged to form a new data set before the scrutinized data would be accessed (ibid.). For this study, a multi-source approach was chosen, as many papers have key survey-based insights into ambush marketing and papers that describe ambush marketing on a more abstract qualitative layer. However, studies into organization's internal affairs often prove some difficulties when trying to access the actual secondary data of that research (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). However, these internal documents are still very fruitful for the research topic. With this study, we used, i.e. mission and vision statements that could support the justification for ambushing, and newspaper articles that elaborate on the ambushing activity.



### 3.5 Data Analysis

Once the interviews had been conducted, and the archival data was gathered, the follow-up phase concerned the analysis of the qualitative data. In qualitative studies, it is common to acknowledge the problem that concerns the large amount of data that is generated (Bryman, 2016) and how to successfully compile this information into a convincing story (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). Therefore, the data analysis sets out to make sense of the material, and the way this is approached depends not solely on the type of data or research design, but also reflects the research questions under scrutiny (ibid.). The way we approached our analytical work was mainly motivated in the reflection of the main purpose to reconceptualize ambush marketing. The approach of our analytical work sought to find the most relevant themes that allow for the most legitimate portrayal of the ambusher's perspective in our research topic.

When assessing how to manage the qualitative data, various analytical tracks that describe the topic explain that it is challenging to scale down qualitative research as one true process or a single mapped-out route (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). However, scholars in the qualitative field have presented a diversity of opinions in which they each introduce a particular authority (ibid.). For example, Kvale (1996) has primarily focused on qualitative interviews and argues that the process of interview studies follows seven stages. More recently, Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) offered a more comprehensive description of step 5, which concerns the data analysis. Their idea proposes a systematic approach to structure and interprets the data; our present study chose to follow their guidelines as we consider they offer a suitable procedure that benefits our reconceptualization of ambush marketing when theorizing the empirical data.

The analytical work of Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) follows a three-stage process that each touches upon crucial areas of the analytical work. The first step, *sorting*, entails spending time with the material and identifying different kinds of data while simultaneously tending to the 'problem of chaos' (ibid.). This initial step allowed us to familiarize ourselves with our large set of data where we sought to find interesting categories that could entail original meaning and thus generate relevant results. The second step is *reducing*, which provides an overview of the material and later reduces the categories. By doing this, we as authors address the problem of representation as it is only possible to use a small part of the categories previously outlined (Rennstam &

Wästerfors, 2018). Also, this essentially excludes certain themes by emphasizing other themes that are deemed more relevant to the study. As a result of this step, the available categories were evaluated in their ability to provide valuable insights that would allow us to answer our research questions. The resulting categories were ensured to be of relevance and were presented as metaphors to provide an easier association to the reader. Lastly, the third step concerns the crucial phase of *arguing*, whereas the theorizing of the empirical material occurs. This last step features the ‘problem of authority’ where the researchers have to argue for their collected material in dialogue with established researchers (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Completing this step allowed us to as we managed to put explicit labels on these themes and could easier understand them in relation to the theoretical concepts and perspectives from our literature review.

After adopting the procedure reported by Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018), the empirical data was finally reduced to 4 themes that portray the relevant elements necessary to answer the research questions. The themes of 'Hype' and 'Gains' were chosen as they represent essential elements of ambush marketing. Hype regards the global exposure that results from mega-events. The following theme that resulted from the analysis approach regarded the discussion of event sponsorship, namely the cost aspect and was given the metaphor Gains. Following were the two themes that were the most prominent in concluding the reconceptualization of ambush marketing. ‘Ethos’ was chosen as it explains the ethical justification against and possibly for ambushing a certain event. Additionally, this topic has not been excessively described as a true influencing force in the discussion that revolves around ambush marketing, which is also true for the theme of ‘DNA’, which relates to the identity of the brand. These themes will be further described and theorized in detail in chapter 5, Analysis.

This approach of working with the data analysis was conducted on the qualitative interviews, and later, the same themes were at the basis for the qualitative content analysis of the old ambush marketing cases. The methodological method, qualitative content analysis, allows us to systematically analyze various texts and core ideas that manifest in the form of text (Drisko & Maschi, 2015). The focus of this method is the identification of themes that simultaneously summarizes the textual content and also highlights the main content, whereas the themes were already defined beforehand (ibid.). Since we are searching for multiple interpretations of the

ambush marketing phenomenon, the identification of alternative perceptions through analyzing texts that allow oppositional readings, the qualitative content analysis is convenient (Krippendorff, 2004). Therefore, analyzing the content of old ambush marketing cases in addition to conducting qualitative interviews adds more of a holistic and in-depth understanding. Moreover, rather than merely presenting a detailed review of the cases, we aim with this qualitative content analysis to understand the general underlying legitimation of ambush marketing.

### **3.5.1 Metaphors to construct concepts**

It has become common today to acknowledge qualitative research as a craft that involves disciplined creativity to achieve well-made research (Prasad, 2017). In contrast to testing theory and focusing on the context of justification, developing a new theory emphasizes creativity and the context of discovery (Swedberg, 2012). Reading previous works on the subject of ambush marketing, the conflicting perception of the phenomenon was evident and called for a creative approach to develop further knowledge from the perspective of the ambusher. According to Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018, p.188): “It is only in relation to the previous work of others that the individuality of our work becomes clear.” In other words, qualitative research represents a constant process of discovery, and by learning from previous work, it is possible to define a personal approach. As it is common among the general public to dismiss ambush marketing and associate it in a negative context, the analytical work is set out to craft our interpretation based on the gathered data.

The way this study aims to strengthen its qualitative research quality is through the use of metaphors. A metaphor is a figure of speech where a word or phrase is linked to a different action but still is analogous to and makes it applicable (OED, 2020). Ultimately, using metaphors in a research context helps to make sense of complex ideas and encourages a reconceptualization of what is already given (Davies & Chun, 2003) by comparing the research topic to something else which allows for new perspectives (Swedberg, 2012). Throughout the empirical data that was gathered, our categories that emerged from the empirical data was given a metaphor. Hence, using metaphors was used to stimulate creativity and simplify the presentation of our themes that led to the reconceptualization by combining the relevant themes.

### 3.6 Reliability and Validity

Although researchers should always try to make the research as perfect as possible, it can never become completely flawless. Hence, the criteria that guided us to strive for a methodologically correct thesis should be addressed. While it can be said that reliability and validity are essential elements to judge the quality of a quantitative study, this might not be as apparent in qualitative studies (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Certain scholars believe that these two criteria are important to concede that the meanings behind these terms ought to be changed (ibid.). Guba and Lincoln (1994) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) have suggested replacing reliability and validity with trustworthiness and authenticity to assess if a study is of quality. Within the criteria of trustworthiness, there are four sub-criteria, which are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Since the methodological approach of this study does not claim that there is a single truth and that the criteria mentioned above are developed from the same perspective, it is a right approach for this study. For us to reach a high-quality qualitative study, the four themes were carefully assessed as the following paragraph shows.

First of all, credibility refers to how the researcher handles these different truths and presents his understanding of them to the reader. This means that we aspired to carry out the research in a sound way and that we present the gathered data to the research subjects for confirmation. Second of all, since qualitative studies often revolve around data gathering from individuals or small groups, qualitative findings often aim to be unique in context and in the findings of the social world that is studied (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The judgement if the findings hold or not is based on the empirical evidence and rests on the context and the case (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Instead, a rich amount of data on the scrutinized subject should be gathered that can be deemed to be transferable to other contexts (ibid.). Thirdly, compared to what is referred to as reliability in quantitative studies, dependability applies to qualitative studies. For researchers to be ‘dependable’, they are required to file all documents that are gathered along the research process (Bryman & Bell, 2015). As mentioned before, this study gathers data both through semi-structured interviews as archival research. We ensured that all transcribed interviews were safely stored offline together with the accompanying notes and audio recordings. Lastly, for us to harmonize with the last criteria of ‘confirmability’, we acted as objectively as possible. We did this by consciously asking ourselves

- and each other - if our personal feelings or values were not interfering with the research which could influence the findings.

Besides the four elements that fall under ‘trustworthiness’ that has just been described, there is another criteria labelled ‘authenticity’. A criteria that falls under authenticity is fairness, which prescribes that the researcher should present the data fairly, which means that the different viewpoints are presented as they are in reality (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Although we concede that the number of respondents from companies that are involved in strategies that align with our framework of ambush branding is relatively low, the focus of all interviews and archival data was always on the ambusher. Additionally, the purposive sampling used to target respondents that are aligned with ambushing activities allowed us to target the most representative pool for a fair presentation of the data.

### **3.6.1 Source criticism**

We cannot only assume that someone that has been carefully selected to be a research subject will always provide accurate information on the subject discussed during the interview. Additionally, the mere use of validity and reliability is not enough to determine a source’s quality, as this also depends on the trustworthiness and authenticity of the source (Nilsson, 2020). Trustworthiness is strived after by seeking people whose credibility is high through validation. Since we adopted a relativist ontology, we are not looking to uncover a single truth regarding the research subject. Instead, we are looking to create a better understanding of the viewpoints that exist from key actors, which is why authenticity can be interpreted in a more detached way.

Logically, events that happened close to the point in time when the interview took place are easier to reproduce orally than events that happened long ago. This time frame is one of the factors that should be considered when evaluating the respondent’s veracity. However, it is also the closeness to the research subject that is of importance (Nilsson, 2020). That is why we decided to reach out merely to people who were expected to have first-hand knowledge on potential ambushing practices of their employer. Furthermore, marketing managers of those companies were identified to have the most expert knowledge and insights, which aided the veracity.

Secondary sources need to be gauged on biases that the study might include (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). This research paper used peer-reviewed journal articles since the contents of the article has been verified by other scholars, which relieves doubt regarding the quality. Although books are generally not peer-reviewed, some books, that were deemed to be essential reading regarding the topics of business research and ambush marketing, were used nonetheless. The books that were used were either recommended by one of Lund University's professors or recommended by other authors in the field of ambush marketing. These books and journal articles were predominantly accessed through the Lund University library.

### **3.6.2 Ethics**

This study relies on our judgment with regards to data collection methods and the research strategy that are grounded in ethical motivations and if that would provide valid data. As we regarded an ethical research process as highly significant, the research design never interfered with our research subjects to drive them to physical or mental impairment, to any harm to the respondent's ego, and may not result in material damage (Bell & Bryman, 2007; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). In addition, also the research community ought to be protected, which has been ensured through being transparent and honest on the research intent and the relationships to the research subjects, and by reporting the research finding truthfully (Bell & Bryman, 2007). The respondents were always asked if they wanted to be referred to as anonymous, which is especially applicable in this case since ambushing organizations find the subject of ambushing rather sensitive. Although ambush marketing is by several experts deemed as ethically questionable, the researchers never made this sentiment shine through in the interviews. This was to ensure that the research subject would not feel embarrassed or uncomfortable when discussing the matter.

### **3.6.3 Reflexivity**

When it comes to the topic of reflexivity, most of us will readily agree that reflexive practices have been acknowledged as a central element in enacting change to oneself or in a social context (Hibbert et al. 2019). This study acknowledges the importance of understanding how to apply a critical orientation to analyze tensions and approaching the knowledge claims that underpin these tensions (Antonacopoulou, 2010). To further understand the process of reflexivity, this study looks at how it is affecting people. The term reflexivity means considering what a person is doing to

encourage insights about the state of social science and notably, the role that language, knowledge connections and social interest plays in producing particular explanations (Alvesson, Hardy & Harley, 2008). Ambush marketing is arguably a sensitive topic and especially when the objective is to gain insights from the perspective of the ambusher. Accordingly, we, as the authors, attained a neutral viewpoint and sought to dismiss personal opinions of the practice during this process and mainly during the data collection from marketers.

The way how the research questions for this study were developed, was done in a reflexive manner which stems from identifying and challenging the existing literature. This reflexive approach was undertaken to develop more influential theories (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011). If the research questions had been generated simply by identifying existing gaps that need to be filled, it would lead to underproblematization and reinforcement rather than challenging the influential theories that are available (ibid.). As a consequence, the gap-spotting approach reduces the chances of producing novelty theories, which we set out to do with this reconceptualization of ambush marketing. The problematization and formulation of our research questions go beyond the shallow identification of the unexplored perspective of the ambusher but also seeks to emphasize a theoretical generation to extend the established literature on the topic. In addition, it calls for a reflexive approach when conducting interviews with the ambition to generate knowledge about individuals experiences (Alvesson, 2003). The assumption that the interviewee is a moral truth-teller goes in line with idealizing the interview situation and calls for a reflexive approach to be able to consider different theoretical viewpoints that can be applied (ibid.). The interviewed respondents for this study spoke freely about their marketing communication that potentially was influenced by the personal or corporate interest, which inherently called for a reflexive approach throughout the dialogue and when analyzing the data.

#### **3.6.4 Politics and Access**

The different people and institutions involved in this paper and the power relationships between them - also referred to as politics - influence the study's development. Business research requires a certain level of access to companies, which has to be discussed with the appropriate managers (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). We were well aware of the power relationships that exist between them and the representatives of the organizations that are interviewed and us as researchers. In

contrast to the researchers, organizations are not in immediate need of the interviews for this study but could be persuaded of the advantages of cooperation at most. Therefore, it was discussed that the main findings were to be shared with the participants, as this could provide them with insights on the ambush marketing issue. This relevance for the organization and the minimum of resources and time they had to make available provided the researchers with a foot behind the door. Additionally, contact was initiated through marketing managers of ambushing companies or marketing representatives of companies that could ambush during large sports events but also through HR managers. HR personnel could function as gatekeepers since they are often willing to help if they see that there is something to be received in return for the help (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). Again, in our case, these were the theoretical and mostly practical insights in ambush marketing.

The access that is established in this research is informal, which means that access is not granted to gather data from within the organization, but through people in the organization (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). Companies that could include respondents which potentially had the experience of ‘ambushing’ before or could do so in the future was in focus at this stage. Respondents were then selected through the status of (mutual) contact on LinkedIn and subsequently approached. Since ambush marketing is a topic that can be sensitive for companies to talk about, getting access can prove itself to be somewhat of a difficult task. Although cold calling is traditionally not the most effective way to get access (ibid.), it provided us with various respondents from companies that represented those criteria nonetheless.

### **3.7 Limitations**

As with any research, this study includes several limitations that need to be mentioned. One such limitation was that we were able to interview very few ambushing companies. In case more ‘ambushers’ would have reacted positively to our invitations for interviews, it could have resulted in a deeper understanding of the ambusher’s side of the ambush marketing phenomenon. The respondents that we interviewed were therefore not always employed in companies that were ambushing, but could potentially be. This resulted in the case that the concept of ambush marketing was not entirely known for all respondents. Although we explained the concept thoroughly to the respondents if they did not know about it yet, it could be that they were not expert enough to



provide us with well-considered judgements. Since many people would deem ambush marketing as unethical, it could very well be the case that they would answer in a way where they condemn ambush marketing to be perceived as an ethically correct company.

## 4. Empirical Data

*In the following chapter, an overview of the empirical data will be presented. Firstly, the company profiles of the respondents for the qualitative interview are presented and given a brief overview of the profile of the company they represent. The later section introduces the ambushing companies that were chosen for the content analysis. The presentation is structured with a brief presentation of the company and followed by an in-detail description of the ambushing initiative.*

### 4.1 Company Profiles

#### 4.1.1 Abacus

Abacus is a brand that develops sportswear for golf. The brand has been in operation since the 1990s and originates from Sweden. The company claims that its products showcase Swedish quality and functional design so that the golfer only has to focus on his game (Abacus, 2020). Nowadays, the brand is sold in more than 25 countries, which is expected to grow further.

The slogan of Abacus is ‘Count On It’, which translates into the company’s product quality and what they stand for more abstractly. With regards to the apparel, Abacus wants the customer to feel confident that he/she can count on the brand that it will function as it should so that the golfer does not have to focus on anything else than the game. Their mission is to provide “functional and smart clothing for the active golfer” (Abacus, 2020). Regarding the more abstract level of the slogan, the customer should feel confident that Abacus can be relied upon with regards to their business agenda. In other words, customers ought to be able to assume that the company is not getting involved in unethical practices in any regard.

Abacus is a company that uses a mix of marketing practices of which sponsorships is a predominant one. They choose the athletes that they partner with on the bases if the athlete in question can be counted on. Would they advertise the brand of Abacus in a way that would fit the brand, personally and professionally? Ambassadors are used to creating engagement between the spectators and the brand. They partner up with the top of the Swedish golf sport. Creating a strong bond with the athletes is essential as it is important to know what they are thinking of the products

of Abacus. If they are satisfied with them, then the athletes play better, which is better for the player and the brand as well. However, it is not only sponsorships that make up the sponsorship portfolio, but Abacus is also the main clothing sponsor of the Solheim Cup. This is the biggest female golf event in the world and sponsoring that event means that the twelve best female European players wear the brand. They also sponsor the national golf teams of Germany and Norway for the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo, Japan.

Giving back to the world of golf is one of the prominent reasons for sponsoring certain events. A way how they do this is through the support of Handigolf, which is a golf competition that is played by physically impaired people.

#### **4.1.2 Red Bull**

This company that produces energy drinks has been in existence since the 1980s. The uniqueness of Red Bull was born in Austria when the beverage, which was completely new at the time, got paired with a unique marketing concept. This marketing concept included the organization of events that had some kind of extreme sports factor to it. Not long after these events, Red Bull organized its own Music Academy, which expanded its reach in events that carried the Red Bull name. In 2019, the company sold over 7.5 billion energy drink cans with a value of €6.6 billion (Red Bull, 2020)

As described earlier, Red Bull has a unique marketing model that allows them to thrive off the events they organized themselves. The brand embodies a certain lifestyle which creates a huge pull factor, which is accentuated by its brand ambassadors. These ambassadors should be the absolute best in the sport they are doing and create Red Bull's brand visibility through the clothing and gear, which carries the brand's name. Red Bull's respondent explains that people simply really want to be associated with the brand and that it is more profitable to organize own events during which other brands can sponsor as well as to pay high sponsorship fees for other events.

However, Red Bull also tries to get into the action during events that have different sponsors than Red Bull, because they have an internal vision to be available everywhere. The attention generated by events is utilized by offering their products in close relation to the physical area of the event.

Moreover, this also happens online when Red Bull posts the question on social media if people already got their Red Bull drinks for ‘the big game tonight’ when indirectly associated with the Super Bowl.

### **4.1.3 Nike**

Nike is one of the world’s largest sports brands that offers shoes, clothing, sports equipment, and accessories. The headquarters of the brand is in Oregon, USA, where it was founded as well in 1964. The name ‘Nike’ comes from Greek Mythology where it was the name of the goddess of victory. Nike’s slogan ‘Just Do It’ is already in use since 1988 and has been selected as one of the top five slogans of the 20th century. In the 1980s, Nike decided to reach more people worldwide and with a larger product line. Throughout the years, Nike also became a fashion brand increasingly alongside their sports brand base. From the 1990s, Nike has been involved with several controversies that involved poor working conditions for the bottom-end workers.

Nike has been at the forefront of marketing ever since the company took off. It was one of the first companies that used the internet as a platform for marketing and used narrowcast instead of a broadcast to reach a niche group of customers. It has been awarded the advertiser of the year award at the Cannes Advertising Festival in 1994 and 2003. No other company had ever received the price twice before. Additionally, they received two Emmy Awards for best commercial. Nike is sponsoring many athletes in order to increase Nike’s brand awareness. In the 1990s, Nike significantly expanded its brand presence in the sport of football by sponsoring many top players, mainly in Europe. In 2012, they expanded this to Asia by signing a partnership with the Asian Football Confederation. Also in the sports of tennis, golf, and cricket, Nike became one of the main sponsors of top athletes.

Nike’s mission is to “bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the world” and go on by saying that “if you have a body, you are an athlete” (Nike, 2020). They want to increase whatever is humanly possible by developing innovations, sustainable solutions, and by building teams that have a positive impact on the communities where they work (ibid.). The team is described to be empowered, diverse, and inclusive.

#### **4.1.4 Mizuno**

Mizuno is another sports apparel brand that mainly focuses on shoes. The brand originates from Japan, where the headquarters is also based. Mizuno is over 100 years old and provides clothes for all major sports, including football, cycling, and tennis. It wants to position itself as a high-quality brand that aims to offer products to people regardless of who the person is, how good he or she is, or which sports he or she does (Mizuno, 2020). In 1935, Mizuno had the world's largest golf club showroom and was the only Japanese manufacturer of golf clubs. After they opened their first factory in America in 1961, they signed many sponsorships with athletes from many different sports. Their slogan is 'Reach Beyond', which should reflect their intention to push forward (Mizuno, 2020).

Mizuno makes use of ambassadors to promote the products of Mizuno. For a given period, they have to post a certain number of pictures or posts that would feature Mizuno in them. Their ambassadors are instructed to exclude other brands in their pictures. This also applies when athletes sponsored from other brands are partaking in the very same event. Once a month, all posts of all ambassadors are assessed internally at Mizuno. Furthermore, Mizuno sponsors several events throughout the world, of which one was the Amsterdam Marathon. On the one hand, they sponsor these events to give back to society, as their sponsorship makes the entry fee of the marathon lower. On the other, they logically want to get more brand attention.

#### **4.1.5 Vitamin Well**

The drinks that Vitamin Well produce are the product of the idea to produce healthier alternatives to the classic sodas on the market today. It was founded in Sweden in 2008 to fulfil that gap in the domestic market. However, since many other countries had the same characteristics, they expanded quickly to other countries (Vitamin Well, 2020).

Vitamin Well is growing rapidly and is offering its product in 35 countries. What is unique about the products of Vitamin Well is that each beverage has - besides obviously a different taste - a different function. They call these 'smart beverage options'. There are beverages to wake up the consumer or to concentrate, for instance. This allows the company to market the beverages in

different ways than companies that simply sell beverages for the taste. The company also invested in a product line called 'Vitamin Well+' which targets consumers who are into sports.

Nocco, another Swedish-produced beverage that is owned by Vitamin Well, is an energy drink that is specifically designed for people that are into sports. The difference between Vitamin Well and Nocco is that Vitamin well is designed to be more of a lifestyle, whereas Nocco is marketed as a drink for tough people.

Authenticity is one of the most critical factors to achieve with marketing, according to the respondent of Vitamin Well. They sponsor several ambassadors as they show a certain authenticity that people can relate to. Another channel that matches well with the brand to support this authenticity is through sponsored events. Examples of events that they sponsor are golf competitions and CrossFit events.

## **4.2 Content analysis cases**

### **4.2.1 Nike: Find Your Greatness**

As the company profile of Nike has already been described in chapter 4.1.3, only the ambush case of Nike is described in this content analysis. The 2012 Summer Olympics was held in London, the United Kingdom, after it secured the bidding over Madrid, Moscow, New York City, and Paris back in 2005. During the London Games, Adidas was recognized as the dominant sporting brand that had paid for an official sponsorship that cost approximately \$60 million (Passikoff, 2020). Similar to other cases of Olympic events, the brand of the London Games is considered its most valuable asset, and in an attempt to protect it, sponsoring rules have been set to protect the brand. The legislation regarding the words that companies were not allowed to use was divided into two groups, group A consisting of Games, Two Thousand and Twelve, 2012 and Twenty-Twelve whereas. Furthermore, group B covered London, Medals, Sponsors, Summer, Gold, Silver and Bronze (Peachey, 2012). However, despite these restrictions, Nike set out to launch a marketing initiative in the very same week as the London Games.

Although not being an official sponsor, Nike was set to make its presence known during the London Games by launching a campaign at the same time as the Games. The video campaign was entitled ‘Find Your Greatness’ and focused mainly on portraying everyday athletes that were competing in places named London around the world but deliberately left out London in the UK for legal reasons. According to Nike’s brand Chief Greg Hoffman, the idea with the campaign was to “[...] simply inspire and energise everyday athletes everywhere and to celebrate their achievements, participate and enjoy the thrill of achieving in sport at their own level” (Sweney, 2012a). The campaign was launched in 25 different countries and was released in time to the opening ceremony of the London Games. As previously mentioned, the ordinary athletes in the video are for instance, two male cyclists riding in London, Nigeria and runners cooling down after a marathon in London, Canada. As the spokesperson, Charlie Brooks of Nike said in an interview: “is that greatness doesn’t just happen in the stadiums of London. We’re saying that greatness can be anywhere for anyone and you can achieve it on your own terms” (Segal, 2012). In doing this campaign, Nike is not breaking any restrictions or laws by referring to other geographical locations named London and purposely gaining attention and associations to the Games in a fair manner.



*Figure 9 - Nike’s ambush - Find Your Greatness (Nike, 2020)*

### **4.2.2 Bavaria**

Bavaria is a beer brand with a rich history and one of the oldest breweries in the Netherlands. The company was started more than 300 years ago and is today a well known international beer brand (Bavaria, 2020). Ever since the brewing of Bavaria has been strongly associated with craftsmanship and authenticity that has allowed for a unique blend that makes the brand what it is today. The company is characterized as a special blend that is strongly influenced by a focus on quality, an innovative desire, and in combination with the conviction that the pilsner can bring individuals together (Bavaria, 2020). In 1934, the Bavaria Brewery decided to open its own malt house to ensure consistent quality. In addition to having access to fresh spring water, most of the product chain consisted of in-house operations. Furthermore, Bavaria has, during the last decades, managed to rise into a strong position due to its innovative product introductions. The brand is not only famous in the Netherlands but also the rest of the world. Most notably, in the middle-east due to its introduction of their alcohol-free beer back in 1978 (Bavaria, 2020).

### **4.2.3 Model ambushing**

In an attempt to grasp the attention of a large audience during a mega sports event, Bavaria initiated an ambush marketing case during the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa. During a game between Denmark and the Netherlands, the camera caught the attention of 36 women wearing dresses in the famous orange color, which also was associated with the brewing company Bavaria (Kelly, 2010). This case of ambush marketing is categorized as indirect ambushing by the intrusion. It is characterized by the main objective focusing on taking advantage of the high amount of spectators that is present during massive events (Amézquita, 2016). Bavaria sold the orange mini-dresses in the form of a gift pack. They were made recognisable before the World Cup as they were modelled by the famous Sylvie van der Vaart, the wife of one of the internationals representing Netherlands (Kelly, 2010). During the event, the brewing concern Anheuser-Busch which is famous for the beer brand Budweiser was the official beer sponsor of the World Cup in South Africa (The Guardian, 2010).

This marketing effort from Bavaria was, on the one hand, a small effort in the sense that it only included 36 individuals. However, on the other hand, after FIFA had intervened, Bavaria gained much attention that resulted in their website rising from nowhere up to the 5th most visited beer



site in the UK. FIFA was mainly criticized for their approach to the situation as they went as far as arresting two people for arranging the ambush, something that raised the awareness for Bavaria and put FIFA in a lousy spotlight (Fry, 2010). According to Oresti Patricios, the chief executive of the brand and reputation company Ornico, he commented on the situation saying that:

The news value of the event was so compelling and the volume of coverage so overwhelming that the matter instantly became a talking point for the media [...] which clearly positioned the brewery and the women as the heroes of this story. FIFA was cast as the villain (Fry, 2010).

Indeed, the ambushing effort from Bavaria was simply achieved by a group of individuals wearing plain orange dresses. However, the action from FIFA by ejecting the women from the stadium and to arrest two of them resulted in Bavaria achieving more brand publicity than if FIFA would have done nothing at all (Brooks, 2010). Commenting on the turnout of the incident, the British author Pete Brown said that:

Let's be realistic: even though Bavaria have denied involvement, of course it was a marketing stunt: why else would forty identically dressed women turn up in one block? But it's a brilliant stunt: once again, Bavaria has had acres of free press coverage, and Fifa and Bud have been made to look really quite sinister and scary. [...] But that's because they are. We all know it's a marketing stunt, but it doesn't break any rules. The rules prohibit competitive beer branding around the stadium. There was no branding. End of (Brown, 2010).

In sum, the efforts to prevent Bavaria of FIFA indicates just how serious the event owners perceive these marketing initiatives to be.



Figure 10 - Bavaria's ambush - World Cup Dress (The Guardian, 2010)

#### **4.2.4 Beats by Dre**

Beats by Dre or also known as Beats is one of the globally most known brands in the music world. The brand was founded back in 2006 by Dr. Dre and Jimmy Lovine which mainly produce headphones and speakers. The brand is characterized by offering premium quality and is mainly successful for its ability to mediate energy, feeling and excitement in recording studios but as well for music teachers all over the globe (Beats by Dre, 2020). The initial idea from Jimmy Lovine was that when the company was founded, it was music videos that proposed a prominent channel to reach young music listeners. As a result, together with Dr. Dre, they founded the headphones to bring back the emotion of music by focusing on sound quality (Finkle, 2020). As the brand was closing in on their first product launch, the headphones were starting to appear in famous music videos and were distributed to famous people such as LeBron James where they got valuable feedback. The product placement proved to be very prominent for the brand as the exposure in music videos in combination with the credibility of the owners resulted in it being framed as a status symbol and improved the price tag (Finkle, 2020).

#### **4.2.5 Free headphones for athletes**

The brand gained a lot of media attention for its marketing campaign during the 2012 London Games as it endorsed several competing athletes with their headphones. During the London Games, Beats were not an official sponsor and approached the individual athletes with special versions of their headphone range that were branded specifically with the flag colors of the athletes (Sweeney, 2012b)

During the London Games, Beats successfully gained media exposure without any official sponsorship deal with the Olympics as they deliberately sent their gear directly to athletes with the hopes of the stars would wear their headphones during the Games. The exclusive design was important for its success as British athletes were seen wearing headphones in the Union Jack colors, the US basketball team wearing gold headphones, and some Chinese athletes wearing their national red and yellow headphones (Brandchannel, 2012). It could be argued that Beats outfoxed the IOC in the sense that they got global exposure as it was among the most widely seen brands seen at the Games. During the London Games, the official sponsor for that segment was Panasonic

who paid an estimated £64 million for the role. At the same time, the only expense of Beats in was the distribution of a few hundred headphones to the athletes. (Muston, 2012).

The success of their campaign was much due to their approach to distributing free examples that athletes could pick up at from a collection point and thus not releasing any press launch or global PR campaign. Not only did they succeed in terms of visibility, but they managed to align their brand with the famous and recognized athletes who are considered role models for individuals all over the world. The English department store of John Lewis reported that general headphone sales had increased by 19% during the games (Carter, 2012).



*Figure 11 - Beats by Dre's ambush - Headphones for Athletes (Nishikawa, 2015)*

#### **4.2.6 Pepsi**

Pepsi began offering its refreshment beverage to its consumers more than 100 years ago and is currently one of the brands that belong to PepsiCo, Inc. During this timespan, the brand has grown immensely, and today it is one of the major brands that produce soft drinks. The company is continuously working with innovative ways of creating new tastes and packages in various shapes always to meet the demand of its customers. By doing so, they are continuously looking for new ways to ensure that their product is what their consumers want when they want it and where they want it (PepsiCo, 2020). To unveil its full potential, the mission of PepsiCo is to ‘Create more smiles with every sip and every bite’ which also goes in line with their vision to ‘be the global leader in convenient foods and beverages by winning with purpose’ (PepsiCo, 2020).

#### **4.2.7 Live for Now**

During the 2014 FIFA World Cup that took place in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, the relationship between FIFA and Coca Cola was still prevailing. Coca Cola is the biggest competitor of Pepsi and remained the main sponsor of the summer event and had been so for the last five decades. Nevertheless, Pepsi decided to make their presence known during the event and ‘toed the line’ to what is allowed without being an official sponsor. Their marketing initiative is considered their biggest-ever football campaign by featuring top players from all around the world to take part in their campaign. According to Pepsi Global CMO Kristin Patrick:

It’s the first time we’ve rolled out a global football campaign to this magnitude. It’s in 130 countries, and also we have a large body of content from television, short films, digital content. We have events happening every single month leading to up to the summer.

(Sports Business Daily, 2020). The campaign features world-class players including stars like Lionel Messi, Jack Wilshere, David Luiz, Sergio Ramos and Robin van Persie and is taking place in the slums of Rio de Janeiro. While avoiding direct linkages to using the words World Cup 2014, the link to the event is clear.

The essence of this campaign is that by sponsoring individual players, Pepsi is associating their campaign with the hysteria of the World Cup and making their presence known. The current deal that is struck between Coca Cola and FIFA stretches from 2005 to 2022 and a VISA which is a



sponsor in the same tier as Coca Cola recently made a similar deal, worth a total of \$120 million (Idrottens Affärer, 2014). Pepsi has collaborated with players before bringing exclusive content to its fans, and in an attempt to bring fans closer to the game, the CMO Kristin Patrick commented that:

Pepsi has had a tremendous relationship with football, going back nearly 15 years. We've brought together our most impressive Pepsi football roster yet, comprised of players who truly embody our brand spirit (Chapman, 2020).

The campaign named 'Live for Now' was a long-year campaign with various activities leading up to the World Cup in Rio de Janeiro.



*Figure 12 - Pepsi's ambush - Live for Now (O'Reilly, 2014)*

#### **4.2.8 Kodak**

Kodak is a large technology company that specializes in chemicals and print and advanced material. Being in the frontend of its business, Kodak offers industry-leading hardware and software to customers all over the world that work with commercial print, packaging, manufacturing and entertainment (Kodak, 2020). Kodak was established back in 1888 and has historically been prevailing with its portfolio on a more professional level by offering print systems and enterprise solutions. It is only until recently, they have begun to focus more on the consumer market as it released its photography-first smartphone (UnderConsideration, 2020).

#### **4.2.9 Ambushing the broadcasting**

As far as ambush marketing is closely related to the Olympics, equally associated is Kodak with being the notable example that first initiated the practice. During the 1984 Olympic Games, it was the rival Fujifilm that had secured the exclusive sponsorship rights to that year's Olympics. However, they initiated a campaign to associate themselves with the Games in Los Angeles. Kodak went on to sponsor the broadcasting of the event and thereby obtained the exclusive rights to show the Games on television (Carrillat, Colbert & Feigné, 2014). The strategy of sponsoring the media coverage of the event is deemed successful in the sense of the greater access available through media compared to the on-site audience. In addition, this strategy is arguably the most legal approach compared to other strategies in which Kodak managed very successfully (Meenaghan, 1996). The ambushing strategy was considered successful in the sense that the consumer's confusion could not separate the official sponsor Fuji from the ambusher, Kodak (Tripodi & Sutherland, 2000).

Not only did Kodak sign a deal with broadcasting the event, but they also went further by sponsoring the US track team and skewed the misinterpretation from the consumers even further by posing as an official sponsor (Campaign, 2020). Furthermore, it has appeared that a series of memos had unboxed the motivation of these marketing efforts as it highlights the tactics that were used during the Los Angeles Games. Kodak had realized that their competitor Fuji was spending a considerable amount to support consumer advertising and realized what they had to do as a

response. One internal memo named ‘Consumer-KBU Managers and Advertising Managers’, a high-ranking Kodak executive announced what Kodak could do in response by:

We must recognize what we cannot do. We cannot stop Fuji from spending excessive amounts of money to buy certain sponsorships. We can preempt them from sponsorships that Kodak considers key and we can make it difficult, and expensive, for Fuji to buy major sponsorships. [...] What we can do is minimize the mileage Fuji gains from these substantial sports investments (McKelvey, 2020).

Indeed, the memo indicates the threat that their competitor needs to respond in order to generate equal visibility and awareness.

## 5. Analysis

*In the following chapter, the presented empirical data that was gathered in the interviews, together with the archival research, will be analyzed in order to develop the Ambush Branding Framework. The four identified themes are Hype, Gains, Ethos, and DNA. These will be defined through supportive empirical evidence. Following the analysis of each theme, the chapter concludes with a presentation of the reconceptualized framework of ambush branding that includes the new definition.*

### 5.1 Hype

When it comes to the topic of ambush marketing, one of the most central aspects concerns the global exposure that results from mega-events. Conventional wisdom in this topic would agree that this is one of the most apparent reasons to engage in ambush marketing. Throughout our empirical data, the respondents and the cases indicated the relevance of the exposure and attention that mega-events generate. Hence, the first theme that emerged from the empirical data we defined as ‘Hype’. Ambush marketing has to include a certain hype to it, what we think of as a high level of attention that is generated by the event. Without this attention, there would be a significantly lower drive to ambush. This can be due to the sponsorship fees that are logically lower for smaller events, which would make sponsoring much easier, as well as the notion that ambushing smaller events would have a smaller outcome for the ambusher than larger events. Ambushing activities from Nike, Kodak, and Beats by Dre at the Olympics, and Pepsi and Bavaria at the FIFA World Cup, all show that there is a profound and broad level of attention from the worldwide consumer that the companies are thriving on. The following paragraphs describe the three ways of how hype is an essential pillar for ambush marketing. These include attention, influencing of the consumers, and brand visibility.

A first way to examine the hype is through assessing the attention that ambushers seem to strive for. The respondent of Abacus explains the importance for a brand to be present at events with a large audience: “[The sponsors] put something in so they should get the attention [, instead of the ambushers].” This Narrative indicates one of the goals of sponsorship or ambushing the event. The goal is to achieve attention of the consumer, which is done by mentioning or linking the brand to



the event. Red Bull's respondent describes their presence during large-scale events that "Being there and exposing our product to all the potential customers [is important] because that is exactly our target-customer who attends the event." This goes in line with the theory that ambush marketing thrives off piggybacking of the attention is given to mega sports events by a vast audience of consumers (Burton & Chadwick, 2018; Chadwick & Burton, 2011; Ellis, Scassa & Séguin, 2011; McDaniel & Kinney, 1998; Meenaghan, 1996; Pitt et al. 2010).

A second way how the theme of 'Hype' can be explained is through the PCDL model, which is explained in chapter 2.2.3. The second step of this model (communicating) describes that companies ought to convey the brand message to the consumers so that consumption choices are influenced (Ghodeswar, 2008). The respondent of Red Bull explains the consumer's reaction to their ambushing activities that "the consumers will not understand that we are not sponsoring the event." This way, the consumption choices of the consumers are influenced by the communication of Red Bull's creative marketing strategies. The respondent from Nike acknowledges that for some companies ambush marketing "is a legitimate marketing practise" and that "[it] is a good way to get a foot in the door." These two quotes highlight the seeming alignment with the theory as they highlight that ambush marketing can indeed influence consumption choices.

Lastly, brand visibility can support the hype factor of ambush marketing. If a company is choosing to ambush instead of completely refraining from any marketing activities, it invests in increasing its brand visibility. As described earlier, successful brand visibility improves the links between brand identity on one hand and brand image and brand preference on the other hand (Sääksjärvia & Samiee, 2011). Red Bull's respondent points out how their brand visibility increased through marketing campaigns and how this is linked to the brand identity. They advocate their brand identity through advertising "the lifestyle of Red Bull [where] you cross boundaries, you do not care, you do whatever you want." Also, in the example of Dr Dre during the Olympics where they handed out headphones to the Olympians, they used the Olympic's stage and attention to increase their brand visibility. This is a classic example of how ambush marketing can be co-created within this case – athletes. Without the athletes, the brand would not receive the attention to the brand. This was similarly the case with the orange dresses from Bavaria, as the public was co-creating Bavaria's ambush. In fact, when the dresses became available to the public, the campaign became

a co-creation between Bavaria and the consumers who were wearing the dress. As a more specific example, people that would see someone in the orange Bavaria dress would make the association to the brand.

The respondent from Vitamin Well highlights the connection between brand visibility and brand image by claiming that their marketing strategies are designed to communicate a product that is significantly healthier for people and planet than what its competitors are offering. The goal with this is that they use their marketing platform to influence the perception that their target market has of them. Mizuno's respondent explains the link between brand visibility and the brand preference by explaining that "the competition [of sponsors] is just doing whatever they can to get the sales." In other words, even though an ambusher might be involved in, what the respondent from Mizuno would describe as, disputable marketing activities, it does so to increase the brand preference of the consumers to the company in question. What is essential to note and to stress here is that all the explanations as mentioned above of the connection between brand visibility and the individual other variables need a certain hype during which the company can exercise its brand visibility. The hype that revolves around a mega-event is a textbook example where a company can strive for increasing its brand visibility.

## **5.2 Gains**

In the previous section, we argued about the fundamental aspect concerning the exposure that goes in line with mega sporting events and how the phenomenon of ambush marketing is present in this context. We argue that extensive attention during these events offers an opportunity that allows for increased brand visibility. Nevertheless, whether one seeks to increase brand visibility through official sponsorship or ambush marketing, there is one critical aspect that needs to be taken into consideration for evaluating the efficiency of the marketing effort. The aspect of cost-efficiency in regards to sponsorship was identified as the second most relevant aspect after exposure. Therefore, the second theme emerged from the financial considerations and is what we categorize as 'Gains'. In this section, we will review the financial cost that is involved in corporate sponsorship and how it reflects upon ambush marketing initiatives.

The very nature of ambush marketing allows a brand to gain brand awareness and image objectives without any large-scale investments and ultimately achieve the same benefits as an official sponsor (Meenaghan, 1996). The empirical data from old ambushing cases support this claim as the ambush campaign from Beats by Dre proved very successful in attracting both media and consumer attention when distributing free examples to the athletes who were participating in the London Games 2012. Beats by Dre demonstrated that creative design and approaching the individual athletes without involving any press launch or PR campaign ultimately resulted in the very same, if not better, benefits as an official sponsor does. During the 2012 London Games, it was the electronics company Panasonic who bought the official sponsorship rights for an amount of £64 million (Muston, 2012).

The idea that low to medium-scale ambush marketing activities are generally cheaper than the multimillion sponsorship fees was true according to all the respondents we interviewed. The respondent from Mizuno explains that “[ambush marketing] is more cost-effective than sponsorships and it’s just hard to avoid. The competition [of sponsors] is just doing whatever they can to get the sales.” This passage arguably acknowledges the notion that ambush marketing allows companies to tap into sales opportunities that would go untapped if only the sponsor could advertise (McDaniel & Kinney, 1998; Nufer, 2016). With regards to the narrative from Mizuno and the previously mentioned case by Beats by Dre, the essence of this empirical data contributes to an important discussion that goes in line with the untapped opportunities. The tremendous cost of sponsorship rights has sparked innovative approaches to replicate the benefits that the cost of being an official sponsor is supposed to return. The return, in this case, would generally refer to brand visibility. As a result of the popularity of mega-events, ambush marketing allows for a cost-effective marketing approach to capitalize on the exposure for some brands. Although some readers or stakeholders may object to its legitimacy, that notion will be examined in the following section (5.3).

Having just argued that ambush marketing revolves around grasping untapped opportunities, let us now turn our attention to just how companies would do so in a cost-effective manner. Scholars have argued that the emerging cost that official sponsorship entails tend to result in brands not being able to secure official sponsorship (Shani & Sandler, 1998). As a result, various strategies

have developed to associate with events and the one distinct way to approach it is coattail ambushing where the brand often associates itself with a competing athlete or team (Chadwick & Burton, 2011). However, sponsoring a top athlete does not necessarily imply a low-cost deal, but it could give a more legitimate way to market one's brand during a mega sporting event. Therefore, it is worth examining the narrative from our respondent from Vitamin Well, especially when the discussion touched upon their marketing initiative in the US. The respondent exemplifies the bidding for being the headline sponsor against their competitors in various CrossFit events. It occasionally resulted in the bidding being lost due to their competitors larger budget. While this reflection merely indicates that Vitamin Well might have a lower budget against competing brands in the US, the question of how they then go about resulted in the respondent stating:

It is tricky, we have athletes going to Olympics or World Championships but obviously can't use the Olympic's logo but we obviously want to be part of their journey there and want to support them. But we follow the rules on what we can and can not do. We are there to support the athletes, not to do anything else and would not use the Olympics in a press release to get more attention.

This narrative suggests that while following the legal precautions, Vitamin Well intends to do what they can to support their participating athletes during the bigger events. While Vitamin Well intended to be a part of their athletes' journey in supporting them in a more low-scale fashion, Pepsi sought after capturing the attention of the 2014 FIFA World Cup through sponsoring top football athletes. Their video campaign was set in Rio de Janeiro where the World Cup was played and was argued for being "[...] comprised of players who truly embody our brand spirit" (Chapman, 2020). Both cases suggest that the integration of individual athletes and associating one's brand with them constitutes a way to approach untapped opportunities without paying the enormous official sponsorship fee.

So far, this section has mainly portrayed ambush marketing as a cost-effective strategy. Nevertheless, some scholars disagree with the assertion that ambush marketing is a low-cost strategy and argue for it being a well-planned effort and not a simple one-shot ad (Sandler & Shani, 1989; Crompton, 2004). By contrast, certain marketing efforts constitute expensive budgets. This can be exemplified with the recent example of Pepsi's strategy of shooting video commercials for

several months leading up to the World Cup with world-class football players. In addition, Nike similarly approached the London Games by linking its brand in a commercial with individual athletes from all over the world. ‘Find your Greatness’ was shot in geographical locations named ‘London’ except for the one where the Olympics took place and evidently associated its brand with the coming event. The cases of Nike and Pepsi demonstrated that ambush marketing is not merely motivated as a cost-effective alternative to the high sponsorship fees. Rather, their efforts exemplify that top brands that assuredly have the financial means to pay for the official sponsorship fees still participate in these marketing efforts.

### **5.3 Ethos**

At this point, it is worth looking in more detail how these activities can be justified from the ambusher’s perspective. As we have just argued why companies engage in these activities and what to consider, an attempt to explain how these marketing initiatives are being justified is important. When it comes to the topic of ambush marketing, the standard view is to condemn that marketing activity and frame it as something negative or unethical. However, it is fundamental to acknowledge that the majority of those arguing against ambush marketing are the stakeholders that are being undermined by the marketing initiative. These often represent those who organize the events and to some extent, the official sponsors of that event. Throughout our empirical study, the respondents and cases presented reasons to why or why not their company engaged in ambush marketing and resonated from an ethical standpoint. These beliefs were identified as a common theme titled ‘Ethos’ that encompasses the ethical reasonings to the phenomenon. In contrast to previous studies that mainly explored the ethical dilemma without including the ambusher, the following section will demonstrate the ambusher’s perception and provide a theoretical exploration of the ethical aspect that reflects their marketing efforts.

When questioning whether ambushing is ethical or not, Crompton (2004) emphasizes that the conflicting views reflect their self-interest. In contrast, property owners view it as stealing and those who engage in ambushing consider it a healthy business practice. If the group of authors who endorse the idea that the ethical standpoint could be explained by referring to their self-interest, as we think it to a certain degree can, then it is necessary to evaluate what these self-interests are. For this reason, the conducted interviews covered the ethical aspect concerning their marketing

activities to identify if any potential guidelines form their marketing efforts. Throughout the interviews that were conducted, the responses tended to vary. However, a usual reply was that there was a lack of specific ethical guidelines and the replies tended to refer to the mission and values of the company. For example, in the interview with Abacus, the respondent provides an explanation of their reasoning behind their marketing activities:

No ethical guidelines directly connected to marketing specifically, but then I would direct you to the company values. They reflect on how we act and what we do. It is not specifically for marketing, but for the entire company.

The respondent explained that their values are represented in their slogan ‘Count On It’. Notably, during this narrative, the respondent made a strong case for the negative feelings towards ambush marketing. Moreover, the respondent of Abacus would reason even further and explained that “From a moral aspect of things, we would not get involved in something that we would not be allowed to be involved in.” As argued by Collier (1995), who states that a virtuous organization often starts with a clear purpose, the indication of disregarding ambush marketing is potentially linked to their company values. Therefore, it seems in many respects that the self-interest of Abacus would reflect moral values that do not go in line with participating in ambush marketing. In contrast, the empirical data from the Kodak case proved that the self-interest indeed was to engage in the marketing initiative to weaken their competitor’s sponsorship deal. As stated in the memo, Kodak’s self-interest reflected an intention to weaken the campaign of Fuji. The initiative that Kodak eventually engaged in is from a virtuous perspective truly deemed to be unethical (O’Sullivan and Murphy, 1998)

However, when exploring the narratives regarding the ethical standpoint, it is perhaps easy to leave the topic after they have established being very critical to it. The majority of the respondents readily agreed that is considered unethical and similar to Abacus, the respondent of Mizuno stated that “It seems like cheating so we would definitely not be into that.” Though we concede that their perception of ambushing is framed as unethical, we would still insist that it is necessary to shed some light on the question of whether these values reflect their marketing efforts. When asking the Mizuno respondent about their marketing efforts during larger events, the person replied that their brand ambassadors, marathon runners, in particular, have contracts stating that they have an

obligation to post pictures on social media when participating in marathons. Notably, the explanation from the respondent particularly emphasized that no other brand was allowed to be included in these social media pictures but Mizuno. There is a similarity in the case of Pepsi with their marketing campaign leading up the 2014 FIFA World Cup, where the intention was to indirectly associate the brand with a mega event for desirable associations.

These findings can to some degree reflect the findings of O'Sullivan and Murphy (1998). They argue that from a duty-based ethical theory, ambushing is evaluated as ethical when there is no intention from the ambusher to hurt any competitor and rather regard it as an untapped opportunity. When exploring the narratives from the respondents and interpreting the cases, it becomes evident that there seems to be a discrepancy between the individual perception from the marketer and their marketing efforts. Within section 5.1, the argument revolved around brand visibility in the context of mega-events. The evaluation of the desired outcome and the self-interest with the brand's marketing efforts implies the grand exposure that goes along associating the brand with the events. Given the knowledge that ambush marketing tends to cause confusion among consumers regarding who the official sponsor is, the classification of ambush marketing as a virtuous marketing effort can arguably be excluded. As argued by O'Sullivan and Murphy (1998), the risk of deceiving consumers would evidently classify it as unethical. In contrast, if the mission and vision of the company would reflect their marketing efforts in the simple sense that they seek to spread awareness during mega-events, it could be deemed as an ethical marketing effort.

## **5.4 DNA**

In the section above, we argued and explored the theoretical explanations that concern ambush marketing from the ambusher's perspective. While we have shown that self-interest is paramount to consider in deeming the marketing initiative as ethical or not, another aspect remains crucial to understand in evaluating how ambush marketing can be justified as a legitimate branding strategy. In the empirical data, we recognized that the values and identity of a company are a central aspect that has a clear relevance in the marketing initiatives they engage in. Hence, the last theme that emerged from our empirical data was 'DNA' that concerns the core values from the brand that comprises their identity. As we will demonstrate in the following section, we will explore how the brand identity will reflect companies' branding strategy.

The answer to the question ‘*to ambush or not to ambush*’ can be explained from the brand identity of a company as well. In contrast to the external nature that includes 'Hype', 'DNA' is a form of justification for or against ambush marketing that is rooted within the company. In this case, ambushing is a marketing phenomenon that does not stand far away from what the company promises and stands for at its core in regards to values, which is mirrored in the company culture. This explanation aligns with the interaction vertical in the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix as it discusses the alignment between the company’s brand culture, brand core, and relationships to create a resonance and engagement with people inside and outside the organization (Urde & Greyser, 2019). As mentioned before, the respondent from Abacus says that the company has the slogan ‘Count On It’ which describes that consumers should be able to count on the quality of their products, but also on the practises of Abacus. This is also seen by the organization as an crucial company value that guides Abacus in the selection of its ambassadors, the production of the products, and its communication to the stakeholders.

Also within this theme, the PCDL model from chapter 2.2.3 can be applied. Again, this relates to influencing the consumer’s choices through creative marketing campaigns. However, within DNA the way this can be related to ambush branding is different from the way within the theme of Hype. DNA in this case relates to what the core of the company is at its essence and how this relates to the decision regarding getting involved in ambush marketing activities. The respondent of Abacus explained that:

This is a very important point because in the end it comes down to making a decision whether to ambush or not, and that comes down to the decision maker and a ‘company culture’ that should show, also in decisions made. So yes, it does matter.

The remark about the company culture is a central one as it describes a variable that is very much related to the core of the company explained in the Urde and Greyser’s Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (2019). Several variables ought to be aligned with the brand core for a sound corporate brand identity. These are the company’s brand culture, brand core, and relationships as described before. The respondent of Red Bull is even more explicit in the reasoning for ambushing:



I think it is really aligned with our brand because we are rebels and we are crossing boundaries. We are not doing what people are telling us to do, we are trying our own way to do stuff and by not sponsoring events but still imply that we are sponsoring without doing it, it is one way of actually showing our lifestyle.

This is very much in line with the notion that ambushing is done from an internal perspective. It seems to be simply done because this uncontroversial marketing strategy is condoned by what the brand is at its core. This justification can be applied as well to the Nike campaign of ‘Find Your Greatness’ during the 2012 Olympics. The mission of Nike is to “bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the world” in which an athlete is described as “if you have a body, you are an athlete” (Nike, 2020). In their justification for the campaign, they argue that greatness does not only happen by the Olympians, but also by regular people. What they stand for internally (that everyone is an athlete) justifies the reasoning for ambushing, since the ambush aims to reach everyone in the world regardless of their athletic background, rather than merely the people interested in the world’s highest achievements in sport.

When this case is assessed with the help of the brand positioning, it is interesting to see that Red Bull’s respondent confirms that their consumers would understand the ambushing activities: “But for those who are truly brand lovers and can lovers, we really believe that they would think like ‘that is so cool and they are crossing boundaries [...]’” So Red Bull’s respondent argues that because their customers understand what Red Bull is at its core, (marketing) activities, such as ambush marketing, are acceptable strategies. The meaning of this passage is aligned with brand positioning described by Aaker (1996) as he argues that it has the aim to explain the brand identity in order for the consumers to understand the brand. Red Bull and Abacus are not the only ones that agree to justification through the alignment with the brand core. Nike claims that it depends severely on the core of the business in question and that it could be advertised with the correct channel so that it is still a legitimized strategy. This marketing strategy confuses the consumer about who the real sponsor is, according to Abacus’ respondent. This intentionally created confusion goes in line with the PCDL model where Ghodeswar (2008) argues that a company is trying to convince the consumer to buy a product through their marketing activities. This

convincement is done by confusing them on which company sponsors the event that the consumer is a consumer and possibly a (great) fan of.

## 5.5 Ambush Branding

After carefully examining the empirical data, it has been established that our preliminary ambush marketing definition – that is explained in chapter 2.1.1 – ought to be revisited. The preliminary definition was as follows:

Ambush marketing is a financially attractive marketing initiative that aims to give the impression that a brand is a sponsor of an event without paying for the sponsorship fees that would grant the rights of the event’s intellectual property.

However, we would argue that ambush marketing can be a single-use marketing technique that does not need to include the themes of DNA and Ethos, as mentioned in the previous chapters. This is because a single-use abusing advertisement does not necessarily need to resonate internally within the company and/or externally with the company’s environment. It is merely done to reap the benefits that the sponsors have which exist around events that create a certain hype. Therefore the final definition of ambush marketing has been established as the following:

Ambush marketing is a financially attractive communication initiative that does not need to resonate with the company’s brand identity or the external environment, which aims to associate the brand to an event without paying for the sponsorship fees to reap the benefits of the sponsor.

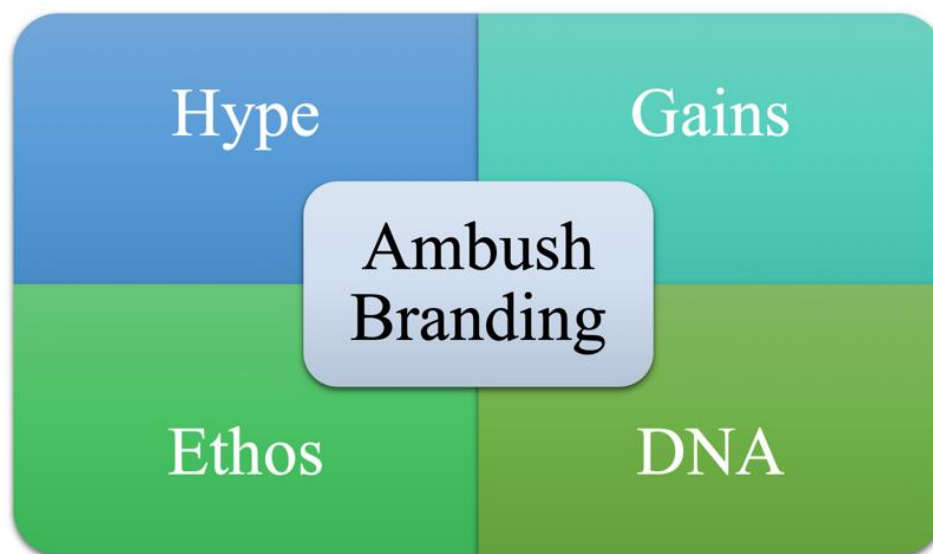


*Figure 13 - Elements of Ambush Marketing*

Within this definition, the combination of the ‘financially attractive communication strategy’ and ‘reaping the benefits of the sponsors’ is part of the Gains. The ‘association of the brand to an event’ is the description of how the brand that launches the ambush marketing initiative wants to get in on the hype surrounding the event. Therefore, the definition only includes the themes of Gains and Hype, as can be seen in figure 13.

With regards to ambush branding, four guiding themes constitute the central aspects that concern companies that initiate ambush branding marketing campaigns. Whereas the themes of DNA and Ethos were excluded from the definition of ambush marketing, these are essential elements in the definition of ambush branding. Therefore, the central elements of ambush branding are Hype, Gains, Ethos, and DNA which have been separately analyzed in previous sections. As a result, when examining these themes from the ambusher’s perspective, the reconceptualization of ambush marketing has been developed and consequently formed a new phenomenon. This deeper form of ambushing that we entitle as ambush branding with its elements can be seen in figure 14 and is defined as follows:

Ambush branding is a well-planned marketing strategy that aims to associate the brand to an event which is justifiable from an ethical standpoint that is integrated with the brand's identity.



*Figure 14 - Ambush Branding Framework*

## 6. Discussion

*In the following chapter, we will examine the results in relation to our research questions while also associating them with the purpose of this study. The key findings will be discussed in relation to existing research and indicate how these contribute to the reconceptualization of the phenomenon of ambush marketing from the ambusher's perspective.*

The topic of ambush marketing has up until now been studied from several perspectives. These include the ethical, the event official's, and the consumer's perspectives. The lack of an ambusher's perspective resulted in the call for investigating the perspective of the ambusher and their role on sponsorship (Ellis, Scassa & Séguin 2011; Louw, 2012). The lack of studies that seek to examine this perspective leaves the question, 'what is the reason for a company to engage in ambush marketing?' As sponsorship for mega-events has developed into a costly marketing tool, companies with insufficient financial means are unable to secure these official sponsorship deals. As a result, ambush marketing has emerged as a lucrative and cost-effective alternative in an attempt to gain the same benefits as the official sponsor. Indeed, according to Crompton (2004), there is an additional goal with ambush marketing. This regards the inferior position that non-sponsors have in relation to the official sponsors. The inferior position rests on the attention the sponsoring brand gets in comparison to the non-sponsor. When a company sees that one of their competitors sponsors an event, it can choose to ambush in order to diminish the superior position the sponsor has by turning consumer's attention away from the sponsor and to themselves to weaken the position of their competitor. We agree with Crompton on his perception of the two complementary goals of ambush marketing. However, our empirical evidence contradicts his notion that it is always an intentional effort. In regards to the goals of ambush marketing, our previously presented empirical evidence indicates that ambush marketing initiatives have been practiced without the marketer being aware of it. In example, if a company that sells sports shoes asks their ambassadors to post pictures on social media of them every month with the shoes, it would be simply regarded as marketing. However, when the ambassador then posts a picture online of them that shows or insinuates a sponsored event, it would be considered as an unintentional ambush marketing initiative.

Now that we have provided a reconceptualization of ambush marketing, it is time to examine the actual difference between ambush marketing and ambush branding. What came to be apparent from the empirical data, is that ambush marketing is an easy way for a non-sponsor to get a foot in the door of mega-events. Sandler and Shani (1989) are right to argue that ambush marketing is not an ad-hoc marketing practice, but they exaggerate when they claim that it is a well-planned effort. An analysis of the phenomenon from the ambusher's perspective reveals that it is a marketing initiative that has a very short-term, sometimes single-use, nature. The well-planned ambushing practice that they are insinuating goes well in line with our developed framework of ambush branding.

Our qualitative interviews displayed a common belief as they presented that there is a prominent negative perception of ambush marketing. The respondents do not want to be associated with a marketing practice that claims to reap the benefits of the sponsor without providing a certain compensation for it. Their narratives endorse the idea presented by Payne (1998), which portrays ambush marketing as an unethical way of business. By focusing on the mere definition of ambush marketing, our respondents and Payne overlooked a deeper problem. In contrast, Welsh (Welsh, cited in Louw, 2012) emphasize that ambush marketing is a natural result of healthy competition. We acknowledge Welsh's notion, while at the same time, our research displays a discrepancy between the respondent's perception of ambush marketing and their marketing practices. Moreover, while they perceive it as something negative, they still show tendencies in their marketing initiatives to engage in ambush marketing as we defined it (see section 5.5). Therefore, our reconceptualization does not only present a new definition of ambush marketing, but also attempts to change the contextual meaning to something that is not negative, but a legitimate practice.

As mentioned before, we argue that ambush marketing consists of the two segments of Hype and Gains, whereas ambush branding complements these segments with Ethos and DNA. Accordingly, when the ambush is a mere short-term initiative to reap the benefits that official sponsors might otherwise only get, it would be unethical, as is the case in ambush marketing. In contrast, the ethical considerations of ambush branding endorse it as a legitimate practice when the companies' motives are striving for delving into untapped profits in mega-events. In this line of thinking,

O'Sullivan and Murphy (1998) suggest that according to the duty-based theory, the intention is deemed ethical if indeed the motive is to grasp the untapped opportunity in the mega-events. We wholeheartedly agree with this ethical theory when evaluating the ethical aspect of ambush branding. Additionally, we suggest that our empirical findings add weight and provide a crucial foundation for the distinction between ambush branding and ambush marketing.

Besides the ethical justification, a brand can also justify its ambushing practices from a brand identity perspective. Within ambush marketing, the brand does not necessarily need to justify that the marketing initiative is rooted in the core of the brand. However, the ambush brander has a clear internal ambition to communicate their values and what they are fundamentally about in their branding efforts. Urde and Greyser (2019) claim that the relation between individual elements of the brand core, expression and brand personality needs to align well in order to communicate the right brand message internally and externally. We unconditionally agree as ambush branding is the right brand message, thus, justifiable if the communication of the brand (the ambush) is in alignment with the brand identity. Therefore we argue also in the light of a company's DNA that ambush marketing is not justifiable as it does not necessarily resonate with the brand core but rather merely reaps the sponsor's attention. Conversely, ambush branding is a legitimate marketing strategy since it is a marketing tool that genuinely has to resonate with what the brand is at its core.

## 7. Conclusion

*This final chapter will present the key points that the study has contributed to answering the research questions that were presented in the beginning. Drawn upon these findings, the theoretical contribution of this study will be presented and also highlight the managerial implications. Finally, we present some aspects based on this study that implies its limitations and allows for different approaches for further research.*

The purpose of the current study was to explore ambush marketing by reconceptualizing the phenomenon from the ambusher's perspective in the context of mega sports events. In order to do so, the aim was to look at the phenomenon of ambush marketing from the ambusher's perspective and by doing so, develop a new conceptual framework in which this activity is perceived in a different light and used more legitimately. In doing this reconceptualization, the following specific questions were formulated to be answered in this thesis:

- What is ambush marketing from the ambusher's perspective?
- What are the drivers from the ambusher's perspective?
- What is ambush marketing in the ambusher's brand strategy?

The findings from the qualitative interview and the content analysis shed new light on the phenomenon of ambush marketing from the ambusher's perspective that further laid the foundation of the new concept ambush branding. The definition put forward of ambush branding is that it is "a well-planned marketing strategy that aims to associate the brand to a mega-event, which is justifiable from an ethical standpoint that is integrated with the brand identity". This reconceptualization incorporates the four themes of Hype, Gains, Ethos and DNA which all offer valuable insights into how this phenomenon is perceived and also practised by brands in mega sporting events like the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup.

Ultimately, the development of this framework has allowed a conclusion to the research questions mentioned above. Regarding what the meaning of ambush marketing is from the ambusher's perspective, this study has shown that it is a financially attractive communication initiative that aims to give the impression that a brand is a sponsor of an event. This association would be established without paying for the sponsorship fees that would grant the rights of the event's

intellectual property. The essence of this phenomenon embraces the fact that there are untapped opportunities present during mega-events that ambushing brands seek to utilize to spread its brand awareness on a global scale. This is closely related to the second question, whereas this study has found that ambush marketing is considered a cost-effective alternative to secure official sponsorship rights. However, the more significant findings to emerge from this study is when answering how this phenomenon is capitalized as a branding strategy that ultimately paved the way of the reconceptualization of ambush marketing. Ambush branding contradicts ambush marketing in the sense that it is not necessarily motivated as a cost-effective branding strategy. Rather ambush branding is a well-planned marketing effort that seeks to grasp the exposure from mega-events in an ethically way that additionally is aligned with the brand identity of the ambushing company.

## **7.1 Theoretical Contribution**

By revisiting the purpose of this study which set out to explore ambush marketing by reconceptualizing the phenomenon from the ambusher's perspective in the context of mega sports events, this thesis resulted in 3 theoretical contributions.

Firstly, by identifying the research gap that indicated a limited knowledge of the ambusher's perspective, this study bridged that gap with relevant findings by proposing the reconceptualized framework of ambush branding that offers a theoretical explanation how this branding strategy can be used legitimately. Moreover, this thesis is a first of its kind in providing an original reconceptualization of ambush marketing from the perspective of the ambusher which has been previously unexplored. It illustrates contemporary theoretical insights that challenge the existing knowledge of ambush marketing as the results advance our understanding in the perception of the non-sponsor. While this study's findings suggest how these stakeholders approach the untapped opportunities that result from mega sporting events, it also provides an understanding of how this phenomenon can be utilized as a branding strategy in a legitimate way.



Secondly, this study has shed novelty theoretical light on the ethical puzzle that concerns companies' ambushing practices and expanded how the self-interest and motives behind the marketing practice determine it as ethical or not. By revisiting the original motivation of this study, the ambition to resolve this theoretical puzzle that concerns the ethical aspect of ambush marketing has resulted in expanding the field of marketing activities during mega-events. Previous studies indicated two contrasting views of its ethical legitimacy. This study offers valuable insights from the ambusher's perspective with results that suggest that it is ethically justifiable based on motives behind the marketing effort. Furthermore, our argument has advanced the notion of O'Sullivan and Murphy (1998), 'Ambush Marketing: The Ethical Issue' who provided a holistic framework of how various ethical theories could interpret and evaluate the ethics of ambush marketing. By limiting the scope of this study to focus on the ambusher solely, this study provided new knowledge on the ethical considerations from the ambusher's perspective. This is because only when the intention of this marketing strategy is first identified, then it is possible to deem the phenomenon as ethical or not. This helps us to distinguish the contrast between ambush marketing and the newly presented ambush branding framework, whereas the intention that motivates the initiative plays a significant role in deeming it ethical or not. We argue that ambush marketing, as presented by us, is an unethical marketing initiative that solely tries to reap the benefits of a sponsor of an event. However, from an academic standpoint, our theoretical contribution frames ambush branding as an ethically sound marketing strategy as the ambush brander does not try to hurt another brand, but only tries to fill untapped opportunities.

Lastly, this study contributed with relevant insights as the results challenged the widely held assumptions of framing ambush marketing in a negative context by reconceptualizing the phenomenon with the ambushing stakeholder in focus. By not simply scratching the surface of the ambusher's perspective, this thesis shifted the consensus by going more in-depth into how this practice is legitimized and therefore, complementing the understanding of the topic regarding ambush marketing. When analyzing the intention to ambush or not, the PCDL model (Ghodswar, 2008) offered a theoretical tool that linked the brand identity and mainly how to communicate the brand message. This model generated a crucial aspect of the reconceptualization of ambush branding by understanding how brand identity plays a central role in spreading brand awareness in mega-events. In other words, taking the brand identity into consideration when investigating

ambush branding activities allows us to understand how this strategy is being legitimized. The ambush brander is not trying to ‘trick’ anyone in buying their products or services, as the PCDL model suggests, but simply communicates its brand identity. Our findings suggest that ambushing cannot only be viewed as a single-use marketing initiative but also as a profoundly rooted branding strategy and therefore contributes to advancing the topic into the brand management literature.

## **7.2 Practical Implications**

The findings of this study have resulted in some practical implications. One of the most prominent challenges that concern the topic of ambush marketing is the determination of it being a legitimate marketing practice. To determine its legitimacy, this study introduced new findings in explaining how this phenomenon can be managed and utilized legitimately. Nonetheless, the negative associations to ambush marketing was manifested by the respondent, even though showing tendencies to be participating in ambushing initiatives to some degree.

Hence, the first and most significant practical implication of this study for marketers is to look beyond the shallow perception of ambush marketing in a negative context and rather, encourage ambush branding as a compelling alternative to official sponsorship to gain the desired outcomes during mega-events. In fact, Jerry Welsh who coined the term ambush marketing disagrees that it is some kind of commercial theft and would argue the following instead:

In the world of modern marketing, sponsor and ambusher are not moral labels to be assigned by the self-appointed arbiters of ethics, but merely the names to be given to two different and complementary, though competing roles played by competitors vying for consumer loyalty and recognition in the same thematic space. (Louw, 2012, p.139).

In sum, ambush branding is an attempt to present a framework of a legitimate marketing strategy that seeks to capitalize on the opportunities that go untapped as official sponsorship during mega-events is unable to fill all the available associations to an event.

Secondly, with regard to the aim of the present study which was to reconceptualize the phenomenon of ambush marketing from the ambusher's perspective, but despite this focus, the findings may be significant for other stakeholders to a certain extent as well. Due to the excessive growth in the sponsorship market, it has become crucial for all the stakeholders to manage their investment carefully. As this research has strengthened the idea of ambush marketing being legitimate, these insights are paramount to take into consideration for other stakeholders, more precisely the official sponsor. When the official sponsor is evaluating the efficiency of their investments, it is important to acknowledge the potential presence of these marketing practices from their competitors.

Lastly, this reconceptualization encompasses valuable insights derived from the juxtaposition of how ambush marketing was, according to some scholars. Most notably, ambush branding illustrates a branding strategy that is not a simple and cost-effective alternative in contrast to securing official sponsorship deals for mega sporting events. The evidence from this study suggests that the execution of ambush branding is a planned effort that seeks to derive the same outcome as ambush marketing. However, while ambush marketing is portrayed as a financially attractive corporate communication approach, ambush branding, on the other hand, is defined as a planned effort that is partly characterized by including a costly budget. For instance, in the examples of Pepsi and Nike who planned marketing campaigns several months ahead of their respective mega-events, indicate that ambush branding occurs as a deliberate marketing effort that includes a certain budget effort.

### **7.3 Limitations and Further Research**

Despite previous scholars efforts to explore different stakeholder responses to ambush marketing, this research was from as far as we can tell, the first academic project that focused primarily on the perception of the ambusher. While previously outlining the theoretical contributions and the practical implications, this following section will present the limitation of this study that should be considered when interpreting the results. Lastly, while acknowledging the limitations, they provide beneficial aspects on this topic that allows further research to be conducted.

Firstly, as a result of the narrow scope of this research in combination with the arguably sensitive topic, one of the main weaknesses of this study was the gathering of ideal respondents for the qualitative interviews. While also being limited to a relatively short period, those respondents who potentially would have hands-on experience of ambush marketing were not possible to get in touch with for an interview. When analyzing the ethical considerations in section 5.3, it is evident that the clear majority of respondents features a negative perception of the phenomenon and lack knowledge of the potential benefits of ambush branding. Therefore, this study could benefit from being repeated using respondents that have a clear link to ambushing initiatives to examine their aspirations of those initiatives. In addition, while this study met its number of respondents that was established in the early stages of the process, future research could benefit from a larger sample as that could benefit the generalisability and offer more fruitful empirical data.

Furthermore, notwithstanding the limitation regarding the relatively small pool of respondents, the study partially offered valuable insights on the ambusher perspective regarding ambush marketing. A further study could assess the contradicting perspectives regarding ambushing practices by conducting a comparative design that would allow a meaningful comparison of different stakeholders. Since the competitive pressure of utilizing the exposure of mega-events is growing, new innovative approaches will emerge, and further research in comparing ambushers and event organizers' perspectives would be a useful way of exploring the contradicting perceptions. For instance, in the case of Bavaria's ambush marketing during the 2010 FIFA World Cup, their competitor Budweiser managed to also gain some recognition as a result of FIFA's behavior against Bavaria. In sum, their extra recognition would be left out unless the restrictions FIFA made against Bavaria and thus calls for an approach from the official sponsor's perspective.

Lastly, the process of collecting empirical data began with the qualitative interviews followed by the qualitative content analysis. As an effect of not including previous experience of ambush marketing in the sampling criteria for the respondent, the initial empirical data resulted in predominant negative associations to the phenomenon. However, the following data collection from the content analysis resulted in an ethical justification of the phenomenon that laid the foundation to the reconceptualization. Notably, the efforts to examine the perception of the respondents could potentially differ if the phenomenon of ambush marketing were to be presented

differently. Thus, by explaining the definition of ambush marketing during the interviews, there is a potential risk that the respondents felt alarmed discussing the sensitive topic. Therefore, if the investigations were to clarify the purpose of the study more clearly, the results from the qualitative interviews could potentially differ. As a result, it could be fruitful for further research to incorporate criteria that allow the framing of ambushing initiatives from individuals with hands-on experience and perhaps increase the representativeness of those responsible for ambush branding strategies.

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# 9. Appendices

## 9.1 Interview guide<sup>4</sup>

Before the interview commences, the respondent is asked if recording the interview for transcription purposes is agreed upon, if not, notes will be done by hand to collect data.

Confidentiality and anonymity are discussed in order for the respondent's full approval and for him/her to feel at ease with the setting and further development of the interview. In practice, if the interviewee does not want to be named in the interview, the respondent will be registered anonymously and in addition, the records of the interview will be deleted after the completion of the thesis.

Lastly, the respondent will be made aware of the fact that the interview and the results of it will only be shared with people directly involved in the project. In addition, the respondent is informed that he or she is free to ask any questions during the interview and also free to stop the interview at any time if that is desired.

### Introduction

1. Could you tell us a little about yourself with regards to the organization you work for?
2. Could you briefly describe your organization?

### Theme 1 - Brand identity

1. How would you describe your brand, what does it stand for?
2. How do you communicate these brand values?
3. In what way does your brand differentiate itself from your competitors?

### Theme 2 - Sponsorship

1. What kind of sponsorships are you currently involved in?
  - a. If any, why are you sponsoring specifically those events?
  - b. If none, why not?

<sup>4</sup>. This text originates from the Pilot Study (BUSR31: Group 1)



2. What are the main goals with your sponsorship?
3. Do you consider sponsorship being a cost-effective way of spreading your brand awareness?

#### Theme 3 - Ethical considerations

1. In case of events you are not an official sponsor for, are there still some (marketing) activities planned from your organization during the event?
2. Does your company have any ethical guidelines that encompass your marketing activities?
3. Have you personally worked in a situation or place where you perhaps were not allowed?

#### Theme 4 - Ambush marketing

1. Have you ever heard of ambush marketing?

“This tactic involves the efforts of an organization to associate itself indirectly with an event in an effort to reap the same benefits as an official sponsor.”

2. How do you feel about companies that are involved in ambush marketing?
3. Would you describe any of your organization’s previous marketing activities as ambush marketing to a certain extent?
4. Do you consider it a legitimate marketing strategy?
5. How do you relate ambush marketing to other stakeholders such as sponsors and event organizers?

#### Theme 5 - Corporate Brand Reputation

1. Is your company’s personality allowing you to ambush?
  - a. Should a brand’s personality have to resonate with it?
2. How would the image of your company be affected by ambush marketing?
3. Could it hurt the brand?

#### Closing questions

1. Is there anything you would like to add or do you have any questions for us?

2. Could you possibly recommend any other individuals that would be interesting to interview for this topic?
3. Thank the respondent wholeheartedly.