

Analyzing The Influential Factors of Sports Brands on Brand Equity

Zhixian Zhang

College of Management, Chongqing University of Technology, Chongqing, China

zzx429@stu.cqut.edu.cn

Abstract. For many years, marketing evaluation hazed on brand equity, and there has been an increasing academic interest in measuring brand equity through specific brand experiences. In this area, the sports industry continues to play a growing role, with most major brands participating in sports event marketing activities, including Decathlon. This study aims to explore the use of sports event marketing by the Decathlon Group and explain the effectiveness of this strategy on its brand equity through case analysis. The study reveals that brand association, brand loyalty, and brand value significantly influence consumer decision-making and overall brand equity. Decathlon's partnership with the Paris 2024 Olympic Games benefits its brand association, brand value, and brand loyalty, ultimately improving its overall brand equity from these three perspectives, as proven by examining the details of their marketing tactics and combining them with marketing theory. Additionally, specific suggestions are provided for areas where Decathlon may lack direction in their marketing efforts. These findings serve as a reference point for further investigation into comparing different marketing tactics from this perspective.

Keywords: Decathlon; Brand Equity; Brand association; Brand Loyalty; Brand Value.

1. Introduction

There is a growing interest in sports. With the rapid development of innovation and technology, the world is changing rapidly. This can be anxiety-inducing and even stressful. At present, the global population is facing health challenges, and the health problems caused by sedentary habits and overnutrition are increasing. Childhood obesity is a particular problem, with rates in Europe increasing by 150% since 1980. In light of the widespread national enthusiasm for sports, the Olympic Games stand as one of the most renowned international sports events, boasting several unique features. Firstly, the Olympic Games boast a high event penetration rate, a wide audience, and concentrated and exposed brand visibility during the game. Secondly, the game showcases numerous derivative hotspots and topics, revealing a variety of marketing tactics. Thirdly, the strong emotional value expressed in the game can give the brand positive power. As a result, a large number of head brands will place a high value on cooperation opportunities with the Olympic Games to increase their exposure and visibility and trigger consumer resonance.

Simultaneously, Decathlon, a renowned brand, believes that sport plays a vital role in building a healthier and happier society. The brand has recently undergone brand renewal and strategic innovation. In the three-year countdown to the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris, Decathlon has officially become an official partner. Through this collaboration, Decathlon hopes to share its values with more people and improve its brand equity.

In the past several decades, Parreira has focused on the Decathlon case to study the causes of stock disruption and the brand's relevant strategies [1]. Furthermore, Hillairet et al. have studied the Decathlon Group's management innovation to explore management methods in the global sports market [2]. Gaillard also conducted a case analysis on Decathlon to investigate brand innovation [3]. Furthermore, Ravera's research aims to uncover the replication strategies employed by the Decathlon Group [4]. Apparently, recent research on the Decathlon always focuses on brand management strategies.

Research on brand equity has a long tradition. Farquhar defined brand equity as the “added value endowed by the brand to the product” [5]. Meanwhile, many published studies have explored brand



equity in the marketing field. Researchers have historically viewed Decathlon Group's management strategies as a crucial element in brand development. However, with the increasing focus on sports events, numerous brands have entered the sports industry to enhance their brand reputation and equity. Decathlon has also recently attempted a series of marketing measures to improve its brand equity. To the best of people's knowledge, no prior research has utilized case analysis to examine how Decathlon enhances its brand equity by collaborating with sports games. Therefore, several questions arise, such as whether corporations should focus their marketing strategies on the sports industry and whether these tactics are effective. And what type of purpose seems likely to lead the firms to create more value in different fields, such as economic value and social value, since the case study can provide reference material for other companies?

This article aims to critically discuss the practical implications for improving brand equity and leaders' actions when a firm takes advantage of the opportunity to host sports events to enhance brand association, brand loyalty, and brand value. Moreover, this writing concludes that Decathlon performs more effectively in establishing its brand reputation and social influence when it employs specific methods to reflect consumers' decision-making in conjunction with the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.

The structure of this paper is as follows: the first section covers the study's general background, objectives, and topic focus, while the introduction also introduces the thesis statement, outline, and main content. Next, the second part briefly presents Decathlon's marketing strategies for a partnership with the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. This paper divides this case into three distinct parts, each introducing several steps Decathlon takes to enhance its brand equity during the two parties' cooperative period, which spans from the summer of 2021 to the summer of 2024. The third section is the key core of this essay, which demonstrates the case analysis and evaluation of the practical implications related to sports marketing. This paragraph examines the impact of this action on brand association, brand loyalty, and brand value, utilizing real-world images and pertinent data and information. Additionally, this section integrates pertinent theories to examine the ways in which the marketing strategies mentioned impact these aspects. Next, this paper will outline the recommendations for Decathlon to enhance brand equity, incorporating real-world examples from other sports brands to provide context. At the end, this paper will provide a conclusion that summarizes the key points of the entire article.

2. Case Description

2.1. General Information of the Brand—Decathlon

Figure 1 shows that the new Decathlon brand identity consists of two elements: its brand logo and a new logo in the shape of the "track." Decathlon is a sporting goods retailer from France, founded in 1976 by Michel Rellec. Depending on the type of sport, Decathlon divides itself into 20 distinct brands. For beginners and professional sports, Decathlon can provide sports apparel, equipment, and a variety of creative sports products, and its model of controlling the whole industry chain makes its products have a high-cost performance.



Figure 1. Brand Logo

(Data Source: <https://www.decathlon-united.media/decathlon-new-identity-cn>)

Decathlon officially unveiled the volunteer uniforms for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games on the same day as the Olympics. The design of the uniform mirrors the Olympic visual identity, featuring green short sleeves and pants. Furthermore, as illustrated in Figure 2, the outfits' shades were inspired by the color of the top of the Paris Opera House, leading to the nickname "Opera green".



Figure 2. Volunteer Uniforms

(Data Source: https://www.sohu.com/a/774755536_115533)

Decathlon is the first volunteer equipment supplier in Olympics history to manage the entire distribution of uniforms. Decathlon has chosen UFR STAPS at the Université Paris Cité as its distribution center (see Figure 3). Additionally, Decathlon has launched sports promotion activities in 8 stores near the host city and guided volunteers to receive the full kits.



Figure 3. The staff is handing out clothes

(Data Source: <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1805551914582517340#:~>)

Decathlon has around 1,800 “Terre de Jeux 2024” special communities in France and beyond, organizing sports events aimed at a global target audience. Decathlon held a series of themed events in several markets around the world to publicize and promote the Olympic spirit. (i.e., "Sports to Paris" seven city relay activities in China, see Figure 4).



Figure 4. Sport to Paris "Shenzhen Station Sea paddle board Relay Race

(Data Source: <https://news.sina.com.cn/sx/2023-03-16/detail-imyknznhc4599684.shtml#:~>)

2.2. Supporting athletes and delivering brand values

As exhibited in Figure 5, Decathlon also partnered with athletes for the first time to create the "Team Athletes Decathlon", which united 33 athletes of different nationalities from 21 Olympic sports items. They were recruited by ANS and CNOSF. These athletes are from France, Brazil, Belgium, Mail, Russia, Poland, Italy and the Netherlands.



Figure 5. "Team Athletes Decathlon".

(Data Source: https://www.sohu.com/a/774755536_115533)

For instance, Table 1 shows that Decathlon and the French Embassy and Consulate jointly organized the "Sports to Paris" in seven Chinese cities, including Shenzhen, Beijing, Shanghai, and other regions. This activity advocates a healthy and sustainable lifestyle through multiple sports experiences such as paddleboarding, running, balance biking, skateboarding, cycling, and hiking.

Table 1. Event venue and list

Country	Time	City	Sports
China	14 th March, 2023	Beijing	Running
		Shanghai	Balance bike relay race
		Shenzhen	Sea paddle
		Guangzhou	skateboarding
		Chengdu	Cycling
		Wuhan	Running relay race
		Dalian	Hiking

This event inspired consumers to participate in sports by themselves and improve brand awareness among consumers in the Chinese market. Each sports item attracted a number of people to enjoy sports (for example, the cycling campaign attracted over 100 participants, as shown in Figure 8) This action appears to enhance the brand's influence and reputation, increasing the brand's awareness among a larger audience.



Figure 8. Decathlon Cycling Club in Chengdu

(Data Source: <https://news.sina.com.cn/sx/2023-03-16/detail-imykznhc4599684.shtml>)

This activity enhanced consumers’ sense of belonging to one specific community or group. It provides a wonderful opportunity for individuals to build connections with people who have similar interests as them (i.e., cycling clubs, hiking clubs, and so on). Each sports team has a professional leader, and socially adept leaders are more likely to recruit others. Then establishing relationships with the community built by a brand means that there will be a psychological attachment between consumers and the brand. Consequently, nearly half a million people were deeply involved in these sports activities.

Brand awareness is the foundation of brand loyalty. Jacoby et al. demonstrate that consumers choose brands based on internal criteria, which leads to a psychological commitment to the brand [8]. Consumers' emotional connections to the brand can develop into brand loyalty [8]. Similarly, Aaker has explored the significance of brand loyalty in enhancing brand equity and generating marketing benefits [6].

As a result, according to Figure 9 below, Decathlon's sales in general increased after the lowest point occurred in January 2023. Additionally, with the Paris 2024 Olympic Games starting in 2024, there had been a significant increase in sales by June 2024. Consequently, cooperation with this sports event has a positive impact on sales, mitigating the adverse situation of declining brand sales.



Figure 9. The changes in Decathlon's sales

(Data Source: <https://www.mktindex.com/>)

3.3. Effectiveness on Brand Values

The spread of such values is beneficial to Decathlon's long-term development, making the brand occupy a higher cognitive level in consumers' minds.

Decathlon has joined forces with an athletic team for the first time. This team brings together 33 men and women of different nationalities. These incredible champions and would-be champions all share and acknowledge Decathlon's values of respect, team spirit, sharing, raising the bar, and authenticity. The brand supports athletes throughout their preparation for the Paris 2024 Olympics and Paralympics, acknowledging that shared emotions and experiences transmit the joy of sport. Meanwhile, these athletes' performances represent not only Olympic spirit but also brand values.

All the athletes on this team are well-known and have won multiple medals in international games. Yohann Diniz, for example, holds the world 50km walking record. In addition, as illustrated in Figure 10, Decathlon's official website showcases the introduction and personal narrative of these athletes. Further, their fans and people encouraged by their attitudes towards challenges are more likely to understand the brand values and become consumers. Therefore, there will be deeper psychological connections between consumers.



Figure 10. Team composition and medals won.

(Data Source: <http://www.decathlon-united.media/decathlon-athletic-team-paris2024>)

4. Suggestion

4.1. Suggestion on Providing Personalized Service

Based on the current situation of younger consumer groups and increasingly strong demand differentiation, large-scale and mass production modes can no longer meet consumers' individual needs. Decathlon always focuses on experiential marketing. Initially, Decathlon has specially prepared various sports venues, such as courts and ice rinks in some stores, so that consumers can fully experience the products before deciding whether to purchase them. This marketing method helps establish a communication medium between products and consumers.

However, it is evident that Decathlon lacks personalized service, which has the potential to enhance brand association and subsequently improve brand equity. Therefore, the company should consider exploring customized service options. Keller notes that attributes are one of the types of brand association, and brand attributes mean the tangible and intangible features of the brand product or service [7]. Similarly, Aaker suggests that perceived quality plays an important role in brand equity [6]. Decathlon can enhance brand association by providing better and more comprehensive services to its customer's, as personalized service is an integral part of the brand's physical characteristics. As shown in Figure 11, this paper takes Nike's personalized service as one specific example. The Nike Air Max 720/95 is Heron Preston by You debuted in April 2019, offering consumers a host of new customization options. As Nike by Your 3D modeling services develop, you can see product details up close with the zoom function. As a result, Nike officially launched this limited-edition custom shoe in mid-April, and it sold out in just three days. As depicted in Figure 12, the service is evolving, enabling consumers to select from a variety of shoe types. Therefore, Decathlon could learn from Nike's action.



Figure 11. The Nike Air Max 720/95 Heron Preston by You.

(Data Source: <https://www.flightclub.cn/news/a/sneaker/2019/0414/50024.html>)

4.2. Suggestion on Establishing Low-carbon Theme Stores

According to the International Energy Agency's 2023 Carbon Emissions report, Figure 12 shows that global carbon emissions are 37.4 billion tons, a record high, an increase of 1.1% over 2022. The total amount of carbon emissions has led to frequent extreme weather events around the world, such as the Hawaii wildfires that killed 101 people. Therefore, it is essential for companies to take the responsibility for protecting the environment, and many brands have already taken relevant measures.

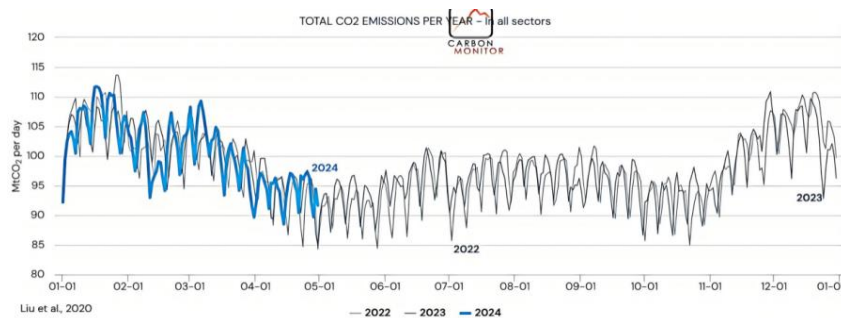


Figure 12. Total carbon dioxide emissions per year.

(Data Source: <https://www.carbonmonitor.org.cn/#:~:text=Global>)

According to Decathlon's carbon footprint survey, the manufacturing of products, particularly in the raw materials and production stages, has the biggest impact, accounting for 73% of the company's global CO2 emissions. In fact, Decathlon's design team has established a complete process for eco-friendly design, including ecological design of raw materials (see Figure 13), dyeing ecological design (see Figure 14), and ecological design for readability (i.e., 80% of the most common breakages and failures of the product must be repairable).

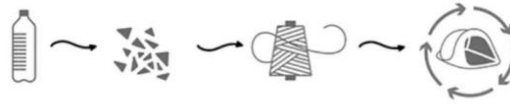


Figure 13. ecological design for raw materials.

(Data Source: <https://www.decathlon-united.media/ecodesign-2023-cn/xingdong>)

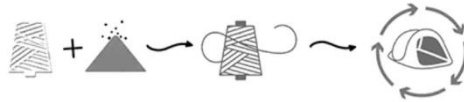


Figure 14. Non-aqueous solvent dyeing.

(Data Source: <https://www.decathlon-united.media/ecodesign-2023-cn/xingdong>)

However, it's important to acknowledge that Decathlon's offline efforts to promote its low-carbon brand image are insufficient. This paper believes that the brand could open retail stores with a low-carbon theme to increase brand awareness. Anderson asserts that brand activation influences consumers' decision-making [1]. Krishnan also hypothesizes that high-equity brands tend to have a positive brand image and associations [9]. Figures 15 and 16, for example, show that the "ANTA ZERO" store sells eco-friendly products, and its "Mach IV" shoes sold more than 10,000. Then, in 2024, ANTA Group received a "BBB" rating in the MSCI ESG rating, rising two levels in one year, making the fastest progress, and becoming the highest-rated company in China's sporting goods industry.



Figure 15. ANTA ZERO store

(Data Source: <https://www.ellemen.com/information/a60598966/anta-zero-0-sustainable-202404/>)



Figure 16. Anta "Mach IV" shoes

(Data Source: <https://www.ellemen.com/information/a60598966/anta-zero-0-sustainable-202404/>)

4.3. Suggestion on Advertising Marketing

According to Statista data exhibited in Figure 17, the global outdoor equipment industry revenue scale in 2022 is about 2002.0 billion US dollars, an increase of 10.49%, and the data is expected to reach \$226.5 billion in 2024 and \$236.3 billion in 2025. Apparently, the global outdoor equipment industry is developing [10].

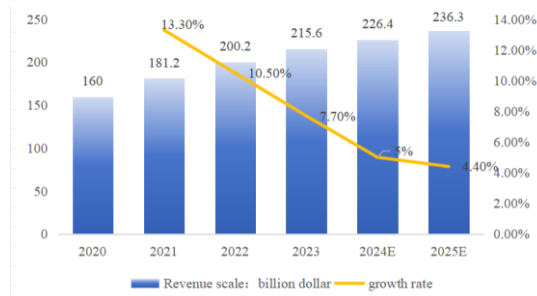


Figure 17. the changes in the global outdoor equipment industry revenue.

Decathlon has established four separate professional brands: VAN RYSEL, KIPRUN, SIMOND, and SOLOGNAC for four professional sports: road cycling, running, climbing, and hunting, and has cooperated with athletes and teams such as two-time Olympic medalist Paul Chelimo. Decathlon obviously hopes to get a share of the outdoor brand, which is why the four high-performance products Decathlon chooses have outdoor properties.

However, Decathlon still needs to enhance its advertising and marketing strategies, with a particular focus on promoting the brand's emotions and values. According to Aaker and Biel, it is crucial for companies to understand how to enhance their brand equity by establishing their brand values and cultivating a positive brand image through advertising and marketing strategies [11]. One clear example is Nike's typical video advertisement. In 1984, Nike signed a contract with it for \$25,000 and shot the video for Air Jordan 1. As Jordan led the Chicago Bulls to the NBA championship and became an icon for fans around the world, sales of Air Jordan 1 reached \$130 million in 1985. Similarly, Nile always focuses on the interpretation of sportsmanship. For example, "Four o'clock in the morning in Los Angeles" displays a player's real life, inspiring people through the power of idols.

5. Conclusion

According to the case analysis method, in this research this paper divided the particular case into three sections, including and briefly introducing them, respectively. Then, the results show that this marketing action has a positive impact on Decathlon's sales. Furthermore, this essay posits that brand equity encompasses brand association, brand loyalty, and brand value, drawing from Aaker's perspectives, with a particular emphasis on these three aspects. The objective of this study was to evaluate the impact of Decathlon's marketing strategy, which involved partnering with internationally renowned sports events such as the Paris 2024 Olympic Game, on its brand association, brand loyalty, and brand value. The findings clearly indicate that becoming the official partner of the Olympic game is beneficial to Decathlon's brand equity from three aspects, including brand association, brand value, and brand loyalty. Therefore, this article also makes some recommendations for Decathlon to improve its brand equity, such as concentrating on designing personalized services or customized products, establishing low-carbon theme stores in certain areas, and exploring diversified advertisements with strong resonance.

This paper's findings make several contributions. Firstly, this paper makes a significant contribution to the theory of brand equity. People commonly believe that brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, and brand loyalty comprise brand equity. Hence, this writing provides actionable insights for improving brand equity from different aspects. Additionally, this paper's findings contribute to the practical aspects of marketing. Most previous studies have primarily focused on Decathlon's management or on understanding and measuring brand equity, indicating a lack of research on improving brand equity based on Decathlon's case. Therefore, the results highlight the importance for sports brands to participate in sports events to improve brand equity.

The model offers a reliable tool for analyzing future marketing strategy and methods for improving brand equity. However, it must be recognized that the model and its predictions have limitations due to the absence of experimental research such as quantitative analysis, other statistical methods, and

problem analysis. The future study of measuring a certain brand's equity should combine the real case with the qualitative analysis method to evaluate individuals' attitudes towards the marketing promoted by a brand and examine the effectiveness on brand equity. Furthermore, future research should look into the problems faced by Decathlon.

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