

Cementing a marriage and bringing home an Olympic Games: An examination of co-branding practices in Olympic bid city presentation

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Abstract 267**

The organization of an Olympic Games often enables profound social, economic, and political transformation in the host city and nation (e.g., Burbank, Andranovich, & Heying, 2001; Tzanelli, 2004; Waitt, 2003; Xu, 2006). Given the potential benefits and its prestige, the competition of hosting an Olympic Games has been increasingly heated and often involves world-renowned cities (Shoval, 2002). Whereas the impact and leverage of sport mega-events constitute a critical terrain of inquiry in sport marketing and event management (cf. Chalip, 2004; O'Brien, 2006; Roche, 2000), the first and foremost step in the process of organizing an Olympic Games is to promote the city to the relevant stakeholders and constituents, particularly the members of International Olympic Committee (IOC), in order to secure the host right.

In fact, there is an emerging yet small body of literature querying the marketing of bid cities (e.g., Boorstin, 1973; McCallum, Spencer, & Wyly, 2005; Waitt, 1999). This work often grounds in a critical sociological paradigm of urban geography (cf. Harvey, 1989a, 1989b). While the studies provide a comprehensive treat of the wide array of imageries the bid organizers and professional advertisers employ to represent the city, the authors also concern themselves with the contradictions inherent in the process of image creation (McCallum et al., 2005), and the oversimplification and stereotyping of the images in order to gloss over social problems and facilitate political and business agendas in the bid city (Waitt, 1999).

Though acknowledging the necessity of such a critical approach, it should be noted that imageries of Olympic Games projected and promoted in the marketing of Olympic bids are missing in this body of literature. After all, the Olympic Games are the focal point for the materialization of any benefits the city seeks. Practically, the primary concern of the IOC, the sanction body of the Olympic Games, lies in how the Games will be organized rather than where. Indeed, Haugen (2005) demonstrates that an IOC-orientated narrative in a bid that demonstrates how an Olympic Games hosted in a given city will enhance the legitimacy of the Olympic Movement, is imperative for a winning bid. This makes intuitive sense. The practice of hosting an event in a city naturally interweaves the elements incorporated in the two images and one is evaluated in the context of the other (Chalip, Green, & Hill, 2003; Xing & Chalip, 2006). As much as the event organizers concern how the event can be capitalized to promote the city, the event owners are keen in seeking organizers that will safeguard and enhance the brand equity of their event. Hence, an understanding of what constitutes a successful bid mandates an examination of how a bid market both the city and the event. This study seeks to understand the practices of portraying and integrating city and event images in bidding for an Olympic Games.

Two successful bids of the recent summer Olympic Games (Beijing 2008 and London 2012) were chosen for this study. More specifically, the two cities' final presentations to the IOC members immediately before the members voted for the host city were analyzed. The final presentation was deemed as appropriate to understand the event and city images cast by the bid organizers for two reasons. First, with the entry of world-class cities bidding for the Olympic Games, the organizational capacities no longer differentiate the bid cities (Haugen, 2005). Beijing faced close competition from Toronto and Paris. It was even truer for London where it competed with Paris, New York, Moscow, and Madrid. The bids are often so close that technical strengths no longer merit an Olympic Games to a city. Consequently, the visions the bid organizers present to the IOC members shortly before their voting may carry significant weights for their decision. Second, given the temporal and spatial location at which the presentation takes place, it often takes the bid organizers months to craft messages in the presentation. In other words, only the refined essence of the bid is included in that less-than-60 minute presentation. The messages and imageries packaged in the presentations are considered to be of critical importance for IOC members to take away when they cast the votes. The video files of the Beijing 2008 and London 2012 presentations were viewed multiple items and coded for both structure and contents. The content analysis and comparison of the two bid presentations (one from an Eastern culture and one from a Western culture) enable a fuller view of the key elements incorporated in the image projection of bidding for an Olympic Games.

Three groups of themes were emerged from the analysis. In terms of projecting the image of the bid city, while different images were portrayed for the two cities given their different social, cultural, and political backgrounds, three common themes, people, culture, and sport, underlie the image projection. In terms of image projection of the Olympic Games, both London and Beijing offered multi-facet and multi-level portrayal for their Olympic Games. The conceptual images of the Games (i.e., concepts and principles guiding the Games' planning) and its materialization (i.e., the Games' planning) were jointed by anchoring athletes as

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the center of the Olympic Games. Finally, both presentations were able to connect the city with the Olympic Movement. They do so through several strategies. First, both London and Beijing stressed their countries' involvement with the Olympic Movement to establish legitimacy and offer assurance to the IOC members. Second, visions of the Games were developed to both literally and symbolically juxtapose and integrate the images of the city and the Olympic Movement/Games. Finally, the messages stressing the reciprocal relationship between the city and the IOC were employed by both cities to solicit votes in the end of the presentation.

This study demonstrates that image creation for an Olympic bid is a systematic project that involves nurturing and creating images of the city, the given Olympic Games, and the compatibility and integration of the city and the Olympic Movement/Games. These three aspects may be particularly salient in bid city presentation as its sole purpose is to sell the city and its vision of the Olympic Games to the IOC members. Nonetheless, it also bears relevance for practices in general event management and marketing as it reveals the critical aspects required to be addressed in forging relationships between the event organizer and owners when bidding for an event. At a theoretical level, the effect of co-branding in sport has been extensively examined from consumers' perspective (e.g., Chalip et al, 2003; Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Smith, 2004; Xing & Chalip, 2006). By examining the tactics employed in crafting co-branding messages in Olympic marketing, this essay adds the perspective of bid organizers to the domain of event and destination co-branding.