

## China and the Beijing Olympics: Effects of Pre-event Media on Host Nation, Host City, and Sport Event Image

*Won Jae Seo, The University of Texas at Austin*

*So Youn Lim, The University of Texas at Austin*

*B. Christine Green, The University of Texas at Austin*

*Yongjun Sung, The University of Texas at Austin*

**Sport tourism  
Abstract 2009-060**

**May 28, 2009  
5:20 PM**

**25 minute oral  
(Congaree A/B)**

Mega sport events are an increasingly important component of tourism strategies (Faulkner, Chalip, Brown, Jago, March, & Woodside, 2000; Hede, 2005; Hinch & Higham, 2001), and provide numerous benefits to host cities, regions, and nations (Getz, 1998; Kim & Chalip, 2004; King & Chalip, 2006). The impact of mega events on international tourism is partially a consequence of their capacity to attract an international audience through the media they obtain (Whitelegg, 2000). The resulting attention can foster an interest in travel to attend the sport event, or to visit the destination at some other time. Most studies of the value of sport event media have focused on the host city's exposure via sport telecasts or sport event advertising. Green, Costa, and Fitzgerald (2003) analyzed telecasts of the 2002 NCAA Women's Final Four only to find that the host city obtained exposure in less than 0.05 percent of the telecast. The media's focus is, not surprisingly, on the event rather than the destination. Chalip, Green, and Hill (2003) tested the effects of advertising for the Honda Indy 300, a telecast of the event and destination advertising on nine dimensions of destination image. Only two of the nine dimensions of destination image were affected by event advertising or the event telecast. Moreover, the joint effects of the two forms of event media were negative. Major events generate intense media interest, not just during the event, but in the time leading up to the event. For events such as the Olympic Games, media interest can begin four years prior to the event.

As a result of the intense focus on the event and its host, audiences are exposed to information about that might never have been reported if not for media interest generated by the event. The power of this information to affect audience perceptions of the host nation, host city, and event is greater than advertising effects for two reasons: (1) they are seen to be more credible because they are not controlled by the event organizers, and (2) they occur over a longer period of time, some beginning years before the event, therefore their cumulative effects are greater than event advertising.

This study used an experimental design to investigate the ways in which pre-event media affected people's perceptions of the sport event, the host city and the host nation. Four types of media exposure were manipulated: positive exposure to China (historical sites, traditional dance, food, martial art, painting, night life and modern China scenes), positive event (sport competitions, facilities, media service, and volunteer system scenes), negative China (news about massive protests in Tibet and China selling prisoners' organs for transplant), and negative event (news about air pollution and athletes' health, and stadium construction by indiscriminate demolition of residents' houses). In order to identify the effects of each form of media, this study was conducted using a 2×2×2×2 (positive China × positive Olympic Games × negative China × negative Olympic Games) experimental design. The two levels of each element were presence or absence. Nine minute videos were produced for each of the experimental conditions. Twenty seven videos were produced, including nine videos with the cells counterbalanced to control for order effects. This experiment was web-based, and subjects watched the videos via website. Data were analyzed via four 2×2×2×2 repeated measures ANCOVAs to determine the effects of the media on respondents' image of China, image of Beijing, and image of the Beijing Olympic Games. Pre-exposure measures of image were collected via online survey 2 months before the Games. Respondents were then assigned to one of 27 conditions. Emails with a link to the video were sent to respondents at three points in time, each approximately 3 days apart. Thus, respondents were exposed to the same video 3 times. There were short questions about the content of videos each time to ensure that they actually watched the video. After the third exposure, respondents completed a second survey measuring their image of China, Beijing, and the Beijing Olympic Games. Both surveys also measured respondents' exposure to information about China and the Beijing Olympics and their knowledge of each.

The pre-test was completed by 207 respondents. Due to the intensity of the commitment, subject mortality was high (61%), with only 78 respondents completing both pre-test and post-test. Results of the first ANCOVA show that exposure to negative media coverage of the event significantly affected respondents' image of China,  $F(1, 45) = 4.70, p = .035$ . No other interactions or main effects were significant. Exposure to negative event media depressed the positive change in image occurring in respondents not exposed to negative event coverage. Results of the ANCOVA on image of Beijing were more complex. Two 4-way interactions were significant: China × negative China × negative event × time,  $F(1, 52) = 12.58, p = .001$ ; and Olympic Games × negative China × negative event × time,  $F(1, 52) = 5.35, p = .03$ . Exposure to negative stories of the event and the

## 2009 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2009)

host country depress one's image of Beijing. Like perceptions of China, the effects of negative media were to depress the degree to which people's images became more positive over time. Respondents' image of the Olympics in general was significantly affected by the 4-way interaction of exposure to positive China, negative China, negative event, and time  $F(1, 54) = 10.17, p = .002$ . The mean scores for every cell are quite high, ranging from 4.50 to 6.56 on a 7-point scale. Examination of the confidence intervals suggests that exposure to China (both positive and negative) and exposure to negative event media is most likely to depress, albeit slightly, image of the Olympic Games. The affects of media on the image of the Beijing Olympics was the most complex. Three 4-way interactions had a significant effect on respondents' image of the Beijing Olympics: China  $\times$  negative China  $\times$  negative event  $\times$  time,  $F(1, 45) = 12.07, p = .001$ ; and Olympic Games  $\times$  negative China  $\times$  negative event  $\times$  time,  $F(1, 45) = 4.90, p = .03$ ; and China  $\times$  Olympic Games  $\times$  negative event  $\times$  time,  $F(1, 45) = 6.91, p = .01$ .

The exposure to media generated by the hosting of a mega-event significantly impacts on the development of viewers' images of the host nation, city, and the event itself. Interestingly, the lead up to the event seems to generate its own positive impact on people's perceptions. Negative media impacts the degree to which image is enhanced, particularly negative media surrounding the event. The effect of negative event media is most pronounced on the image of the host country where it resulted in no image enhancement for China. If enhancing destination image is a primary goal driving the inclusion of sport events in national and regional tourism strategies, then more attention should be focused on pre-event media coverage of the event, the city, and the nation. Although tourism and event marketers cannot control the content of all stories in the lead up to the event, programs such as Australia's visiting journalist program can help to prompt positive stories and monitor visiting journalists.