

Constructing Reality for Sport Consumers Around the Globe: Online Media Coverage of the 2012 Olympic Games on Six Continents

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With over 10,000 athletes from 204 countries competing, 10.8 million ticket holders, and 21,000 credentialed media, the Olympic Games is truly the most global of all international sporting events ("Countries", 2012; "Media fact pack", 2012). While some sport consumers experience the Games in-person, the vast majority of fans must live the Olympic experience vicariously through the media coverage presented in their respective countries.

Research has documented the media's power to influence sport consumers' understanding of sporting events, and one of the most widely studied events in terms of media coverage is the Olympic Games (e.g., Billings & Angelini, 2007; Billings, Brown, Crout, McKenna, Rice, Timanus, & Ziegler, 2008; Bissell & Duke, 2007; Eagleman, Clavio, & Kwak, 2011; Qing, Boccia, Chunmiao, Xing, Fu, & Kennett, 2010). The ways in which media present a sporting event to consumers shapes those consumers' perceived reality of the event, and can have profound effects on not just individuals, but also on nations and cultures (Larson & Rivenburgh, 1991). Eagleman et al. (2011) posited that when media outlets do not provide an entirely accurate depiction of an event, it "creates an alternate reality for those who are not able to experience the event firsthand" (p. 482). Billings et al. (2008) also suggested such coverage can also have implications on the way historical events are recorded.

Past research on media coverage of the Olympic Games focused primarily on traditional print media and broadcast media. Few researchers have examined Olympic coverage in the realm of new media. Qing et al. (2010) suggested that the Internet, a form of new media, could serve as a pivotal aid for media in reporting "accurately and appropriately on the Olympic Games, the host culture as well as on Olympism and sport values" (p. 1631). Initial research on Internet media coverage of the Olympic Games includes studies by Jones (2004), in an examination of ABC News' website coverage of the 2000 Olympic Games; Eagleman et al. (2011), who examined U.S. and Chinese news websites during the 2008 Olympics; and Burch, Eagleman, and Pedersen (2012), who examined U.S.-based news sources' coverage of the 2010 Winter Olympics.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine online media portrayals of the 2012 Summer Olympic in six different countries on six different continents to determine any differences in the Olympic experience depicted to consumers by each country's media. News websites based in Kenya, China, Australia, Great Britain, the United States, and Brazil were analyzed to determine these differences. These countries represent six different continents around the globe: Africa, Asia, Australia/Oceania, Europe, North America, and South America, respectively.

This study was based on agenda setting theory, which posits that the media are very powerful and have the ability to influence which topics people think about, as well as how they think about these topics (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, 1993). Agenda setting has been used as a theoretical framework by many sport management researchers in recent years (e.g., Burch et al., 2012; Burch, Frederick, Zimmerman, & Clavio, 2011; Eagleman, 2009). In an examination of agenda setting on soccer blogs during the 2010 World Cup, Burch et al. (2011) said, "Every coverage decision made by media representatives potentially shapes the perception of the viewing audience" (p. 216). Similarly, Eagleman (2009) stated that the amount of coverage devoted to a specific athlete, sport or issue can affect the perceived importance of the athlete, sport or issue at hand. Because media coverage can affect audience perceptions on issues, it is important to understand how the Olympic experience is presented to citizens of different nations based on the agenda set by their country's media.

A quantitative content analysis methodology was employed for this study, with two independent coders analyzing 16 days of coverage from the top news website for each of the six countries, resulting in a total of 96 coded sites. A codebook was developed specifically for this study and was modeled after those of Eagleman et al. (2011) and Burch

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et al. (2012). The unit of analysis was each individual article on the website's Olympic section. Coders indicated the headline of the article, gender focus, country focus, sport(s) involved, subject of the article, and the inclusion of photographs, audio clips, and/or video clips.

To establish reliability, each coder coded 12.5% of the sample in the fall of 2012, and both percentage agreement and Cohen's Kappa were used to determine whether the coders achieved adequate intercoder reliability. Once reliability was reached, the coders proceeded to code the remaining 87.5% of the sample.

At the time of this submission all data has been collected, and data analysis will take place in November and December of 2012. The full results from this study and their implications for sport communications professionals and sport managers will be presented at the 2013 NASSM Conference in Austin, Texas. This is the first known study to examine online news media coverage of the Olympic Games from six continents. The findings will provide much greater insight into the media's construction of the Olympic Games in six countries, the agenda each country's media sets with its coverage, and therefore the realities constructed by each country's media for their citizens.

Differing agendas and constructions of reality for media consumers around the world can have consequences for both sport organizations and society depending on the reality that is presented to the consumers. Uncovering these elements will aid Olympic organizations such as the International Olympic Committee, International Federations of sport, National Olympic Committees, and National Governing Bodies of sport in establishing new public relations and media relations strategies aimed at working with media outlets to provide the most accurate picture of the Games possible. It will also help to educate media managers (e.g., publishers, editors, and journalists) on any current discrepancies prevalent in coverage of the Olympic Games, and will assist them in developing strategies to improve future coverage of the event. Finally, this study will lay a foundation for sport management researchers wishing to examine multiple countries' media coverage of the same event.

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