Unification of the Two Koreas through Sport the 2018 Winter Olympics and Beyond

Sehwan Kim, University of Georgia
Jepkorir Rose Chepyator Thomson (Advisor), University of Georgia
Kyu Ha Choi, University of Georgia

Communication - Media (Olympic Sport) Saturday, June 1, 2019
20-minute oral presentation (including questions) 1:05 PM
Abstract 2019-380 Room: Napoleon A1

When the International Olympic Committee (IOC) officially approved the unified women’s ice hockey team between North and South Korea only days before the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympic Games, such a breakthrough action had attracted global attentions from both domestic (South Korea) and international media outlets (Berkman, 2018). Given the mass media have played a major role in shaping people’s perception of a variety of issues including sports and politics (Fortunato, 2016), the unified team offered a unique opportunity to understand the role of media and explore contemporary sport diplomacy. The purpose of this study was to examine how both domestic and international print media outlets framed the unified team for pre, during, and post the Olympics. Research questions are as follows: 1) What agendas and attributes epitomize the three respective periods in the media? 2) What role did the media play in shaping people’s perceptions of the unified team? 3) What sport diplomatic implications can be drawn from media agendas? To answer these questions, the second-level agenda setting theory was employed as a theoretical framework.

Method

Content analysis was employed to identify core consistencies and meanings of data (Denham, 2004). The analysis includes three domestic and five international print outlets (e.g., the U.S., the U.K., China, and Japan) based on their wide circulation and influence, appearing between December 9, 2017, and May 28, 2018. The time period was selected to collect articles for the three respective periods of the Olympics. A total of 360 articles from both domestic and international media outlets were collected, coded and analyzed by research team.

Preliminary Findings and Discussion

Preliminary findings suggest that throughout the three periods of the Olympics, three main agendas emerged: public outrage at the South Korean government’s interference with the unified team, the development of peace-building relations with North Korea and subsequent peaceful relations with North Korea beyond the Olympics. Less attention was devoted in international media to public outrage over the unified team compared to the other themes. In addition, international media framing of the unified team remained neutral in tone, whereas domestic media framing of the unified team changed from negative (public outrage) to positive (peace-building relations). Such media focus and changes in media perspective are expected to play a great role in influencing people’s perception of the unified team via agenda setting.

Additionally, attributes of agendas produced by both domestic and international print media outlets were different in that domestic media focused on government intervention with the unified team, but international media placed more emphasis on economic sanctions. Finally, a variety of international sport diplomacy efforts have been witnessed among countries, but the unified team suggests an unconventional form of sport diplomacy as athletes from the two countries fielded a unified team. Fielding such a team could be a potential practical implication for countries which consider employing sport diplomacy to alleviate political tensions. Thus, this study sheds light on the theoretical understanding of the role of media in agenda setting and sport diplomacy.