
CHALLENGING TRADITIONAL MEDIA COVERAGE: YOUTH OLYMPIC GAMES (YOG) SOURCE PUBLICITY AND NEWSPAPER ATTENTION

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Abstract

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) approved the creation of the Youth Olympic Games (YOG) on July 5th, 2007. The YOG was designed as an elite international sport competition for athletes aged 15-18 and has held events in Singapore in 2010 and Innsbruck in 2012. While a few studies (e.g., Digel, 2008; Hanstad, Parent, & Kristiansen, 2013; Judge, Petersen, & Lydum, 2009; Kristiansen, 2012; Parent, Kristiansen, Skille, & Hanstad, 2013; Parry, 2012; Wong, 2012) have examined various aspects of the YOG, no studies have focused on the publicity surrounding the YOG. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine traditional mass media coverage and organizational new media coverage devoted to the two inaugural events of the YOG. Newspaper coverage of the YOG along with the YOG's Facebook and Twitter accounts were analyzed across two, one-year periods for the first Summer and Winter installations. Mass media coverage included articles found through Lexis Nexis, using the key words "Youth Olympic Games" in the "Major World Publications" category. The coding involved 11 variables for the print media and 15 for the social media coverage. Reliability testing revealed that the lowest intracoder reliability agreement was 83% and the lowest Scott's Pi coefficient was .800. A combined 1,687 published newspaper articles, (Facebook) posts, and (Twitter) tweets fit the coding requirements for inclusion in this study. Therefore, 633 posts, 612 articles, and 442 tweets were collected, coded, and analyzed. In terms of newspaper coverage, 64 outlets in 27 countries provided coverage to the YOG across the years examined. In total, 533 of the 612 articles analyzed focused on the 2010 Games, and a majority (54%) of coverage was provided by The Straits Times, a Singapore-based outlet. In terms of attention devoted to the YOG, 441 of the 612 articles were coded as primarily on the YOG while the remaining covered the YOG as a secondary topic. Regarding Facebook coverage, of the 633 posts

examined during this study, eight different accounts made the various posts with the YOG accounting for the vast majority (97%). The content on the YOG Facebook page was produced by the YOG as 342 of the posts were coded as original content and the rest involved content used from 34 other sources. In terms of the Twitter coverage, of the 442 tweets analyzed in this study, the majority (80%) was content produced by the YOG. Data were collected regarding sports covered, topics, shares, likes, comments, retweets, favorites, hashtags, etc. and will be expanded upon in the presentation.

Overall, results revealed that the mass media focused much less attention on the event in its second year, and the YOG organization itself relied more heavily on social media over the time period of the study. A decrease in audience interest following the inaugural event, as well as between the Summer and Winter installations, could account for the reduced media coverage. This trend has been documented, as for example, global viewership of the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics was 4.7 billion, while the 2010 Vancouver Olympics was 1.8 billion (Angelini & Billings, 2010; Angelini, MacArthur, & Billings, 2012). Thus, the YOG shifted its social media strategy to become more promotional and interactive from the 2010 Games to the 2012 Games. One of the most interesting findings in this study revolved around the focus of the coverage. From an agenda setting perspective, the findings indicated that in the first two installments of the YOG, both mass media and the YOG organization set an agenda in which certain sports and athletes were portrayed as more important than others, perhaps to capitalize on their popularity, and increase promotional efforts. These sports included gymnastics, track and field, swimming and diving, alpine skiing, bobsleigh, figure skating, snowboarding, and speed skating. These coverage patterns align with findings in previous Olympic research (e.g., Billings & Angelini, 2007; Billings et al., 2008). This agenda has the potential to impact several global sport stakeholders including sport participants, sport governing bodies, and the Olympic Games.

The findings from this study are important for sport organizations and communication professionals in that they highlight the ever-changing nature of the sport communication landscape. While sport organizations and events previously relied on traditional mass media to provide coverage and raise awareness of their sports, events, and athletes, digital media now allows sport organizations to tackle many of these communication and promotion-related issues themselves. For instance, the YOG was able to combat decreased traditional media attention by creating its own channels by which to communicate with global sport consumers via Facebook and Twitter. With worldwide decreases in the number of journalists employed by traditional media outlets, along with the increasingly fragmented sport landscape in which new sports and events vie for media attention, sport organizations must take on new and additional communication roles in order to effectively communicate their brands, build awareness, gain new fans, and satisfy current fans. These implications for management and communication professionals, along

with implications for researchers, will be discussed in greater depth.

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