

(SP) CHARACTERISTICS OF THE OLYMPIC GAMES: A PERCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

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Introduction

The Olympic Games have been described as ‘the most universal expression of sport’ (Miller, 1994: p.3). Yet as numerous journalists and academics have highlighted, the games of today are far removed from the ideals espoused by de Courbetin (e.g. Jennings, 1996; Miller, 1994; Tomlinson, 2005). The Olympic phenomenon, which remains ‘underpinned by an enduring rhetoric of universalist spiritual idealism’ (Tomlinson, 2005: p.62) demands further research to better understand its true positioning in contemporary times. This study examines perceptions of the Olympics in an attempt to learn more about the perceived characteristics of the games.

Method

A detailed questionnaire, based on a previous instrument used by Sandler and Shani (1989) and a comprehensive review of the scientific literature, was designed to address specific areas of perceptions and attitudes towards Olympic Games. A panel of experts reviewed the questionnaire and it was tested on a random sample of 122 university students. Following minor revisions, as suggested by the pretests, the instrument was administered using the mall intercept technique in various markets in the United States of America during the 2006 Torino Olympic Games. For this study, perceptions of 25 characteristics of the Olympic Games were compared. A total of 882 valid responses were collected. Selective random procedures were implemented to ensure heterogeneity of the sample.

Results

Preliminary analyses of results found that characteristic most associated with the Games, were being the best (4.01), global (3.90), multicultural (4.0), and patriotic (3.94). Those found to be least associated with the Olympic Games were a chance to escape (2.11), arrogant (2.25), distant and aloof (1.95), and selfish (2.25). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) highlighted only three significant differences between sexes. Those were American, exclusive and striving. An ANOVA of age differences revealed only one characteristic, striving, to be significantly of the .05 level.

Discussion

These preliminary results are consistent with some findings of the International Olympic Committee research conducted by Meridian Management (IOC, 2001). Characteristics associated with the global and international dimensions of the Games were rank considerably higher than all negative characteristics. Further analysis of the data will explore generational differences, viewing habits and perceptions of media coverage.

References

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