

# CRITICAL INCIDENTS, EMOTIONS AND MOMENTS: THE LONDON 2012 OLYMPIC SPECTATOR EXPERIENCE.

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In the affluent western world, consumers are prepared to pay premium prices to engage with emotionally intense and highly memorable sport event experiences. To fulfil the insatiable hedonistic needs of the experience economy, sport management has entered a new era of experience management where a unique interaction of people, activity and place must be understood.

Providing methodological developments in the practical measurement of spectator emotions, the purpose of this research is to better understand the consumer experience using the mega event case study of the London 2012 Olympics. Focused on the critical incidents and accompanying emotions encountered, as well as the generic moments that comprise the holistic spectator experience, this study aims to offer insights into customer value fulfilment, as the first step to creating and effectively managing memorable customer experiences.

Using the contextualization of Tombs and McColl-Kennedy's (2003) social-servicescape conceptual model, the customer's affective response of a shared mega event experience purchase decision was investigated, by applying Plutchik's (1980) integrative theory of emotions.

To explore the complex nature of the ticketed and non-ticketed London 2012 Olympic spectator experience, a variety of quantitative and qualitative research tools were administered in this study. These included questionnaires, interviews, a heart-rate monitoring device, diaries, photographs and texts sent/received journals, as well as participant observations. Geographically, a stratified convenience sample of London-based venues and events was used, and a snowballing sample of spectators selected. This provided an Olympic spectator sample frame that attended 19 of the 26 Olympic sports and covered the full range of paid ticket categories. In summary, 41 individuals completed a questionnaire, 22 were interviewed, 5 subjects completed a structured diary, one participant observation field notes, and one subject completed a photograph and text sent/received journal across 24 hours of their Olympic event attendance experience.

To determine the important consumer-defined service encounters of an Olympic event, questionnaires were used to identify the nature, location and sequence of critical incidents and record the accompanying emotions experienced immediately before, during and after the event. Individual emotions were initially determined using a post-experience self-report questionnaire, with positive and negative activating emotions validated by random use of a Garmin Forerunner 410 heart rate monitor. Interviews and diaries were then used to probe these experiences in more depth. Triangulating the broad range of methodological data collected key moments of the experience were identified. Whereas descriptive statistics from the questionnaire data were prepared using SPSS 20.0, qualitative data were transcribed and imported into NVivo 10 permitting ethnographic and ideographic analyses to be undertaken.

More than 230 critical incidents were identified and applying Meek's (2012) list of emotional adjectives, 52 emotions were reported. The most frequent emotions experienced were pleasant ones, with excitement and happiness experienced three times more than any other emotion. Of the unpleasant incidents and emotions reported, anxiety was most frequently encountered, associated with pre-event travel and crowding within the 'last mile' of the venue, followed by anger, which was attributed to poor information and/or inappropriate people interactions.

Five key moments that ensured a highly satisfying and memorable spectator event experience were identified - to build the moment, watch the moment, be in the moment, capture the moment, and share the moment. These moments were found to not necessarily exist in isolation or occur as a linear sequence, but were considered to be a series of highly interactive and multi-moments which collectively formed the personal experience.

Although recognising the limitations of a small sample frame, this study advances the emerging research agenda on understanding the critical incidents, the emotions, and the value added moments that constitute the spectator's holistic mega-event experience. Furthermore it provides useful insights to event managers as to how they can create and manage the physical and social servicescapes to exceed both adequate and desired levels of customer expectation. Despite spectator needs being recognised as diverse, effective management requires the focus of resources to be on segmented consumer value and their experiential processes. By embracing a broader entertainment objective and initiating, rather than reacting to audience emotions, this case study proposes that more creative opportunities should be developed to stimulate the senses and phases of the customer experience.

## References

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