# A pre/post analysis of the domestic image impact of the 2012 Summer Olympic Games for the city of London

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## Abstract

AIM

Given the significance of London's role as the host city of the 2012 Olympic Games, the objective of this research, underpinned by theoretical-methodological social representation theory (Moscovici, 1984), was to evaluate the domestic image impact of hosting the event for the city of London. In doing so, it sought to establish the pre- and post-event content and structure of the social representations generated by UK citizens (pre-event, n=561, post-event n=215) concerning London as a city (i.e. its place image), the Olympics as a mega-event and the 2012 Games as a one-off occurrence, and then to determine whether there was any transfer in the components that make up these entities' social-representation-informed images before and after the 2012 Games took place. The overall aim here was to explore whether hosting the Olympic Games represented an appropriate strategy to develop a host city's domestic brand.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sport-oriented mega-events (MEs), and in particular, the Olympic Games, are contemporarily seen as 'a platform for place branding' (Bodet & Lacassagne, 2012: 359) with the reasoning here being that, 'the pairing of an event [for example, the Olympics] with a destination will benefit the destination to the degree that a desirable aspect of the event's brand transfers to the destination' (Xing & Chalip, 2006: 54). Previous research has suggested that this is achieved for place, event and product through an image-transfer process (e.g. Bodet & Lacassagne, 2012, Xing & Chalip, 2006) whereby brand elements from one entity, e.g. the Olympic Games, which can either be positive, neutral or negative, transfer onto another, e.g. London. Research also suggests that this is a two way process, described in the literature as co-branding, with image elements transferring both ways, from the event to the place, and vice-versa (Xing

& Chalip, 2006). Although, pre-2012, London was already considered to be a leading global city with a strong place brand, an objective for those involved in the development and delivery of the Games was to use the event to manage London's domestic and international image, and to attempt to address any perceived negative associations (e.g. DCMS, 2008).

METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS
Exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling was used to participants. UK citizens (pre-event, n=561, post-event n=215) completed an online, mixed-methods questionnaire before and after the 2012 Olympics were held. These questionnaires, informed by previous research conducted by Bodet & Lacassagne (2012) and Lebrun, Souchet & Bouchet (2013) were comprised of questions measuring personal characteristics, demographic information, and level of engagement in the Olympics (quantitative) and free word-association tasks (qualitative) using London, the Olympics and 2012 London Olympics as inductor terms; i.e., Please give the first 10 words that come to mind when you hear the term…'. Data analysis (also informed by the above research) was comprised of two main stages, which resulted in the construction of the social representation fields, and then determined their structure utilising hierarchical classification (i.e. how terms are connected in the minds of respondents). The aim here was to compare these fields and structures to determine a.) any differences between an inductor's pre- and post-event results, and b.) whether a pre-then-post image-transfer occurred between any of the inductors, i.e. between London and the Olympics, etc..

Pre-event participants were all UK citizens (n=561), predominantly female (57.9%) and white (90%), with an average age of 28.7 (SD ±13.9). Nearly of all of these respondents were located in England (96.6%). Post-event, the majority of individuals surveyed (n=215) were again female (53.0%) and white (93%), but with the average age increasing to 32.8 (SD ±12.7). Again, nearly of all of the respondents were located in England (93.4%).

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS
The results of this research question whether utilising MEs solely to develop the image of a host city (although the authors concede that this is very rarely the case) is indeed a worthwhile pursuit, insomuch that the social representations of London remained largely unchanged through the pre- and post-event data collection; no image transfer occurred from either Olympic entities onto the image of London. From the perspective of 'the Olympic Games', while its unique underpinning values (i.e., those espoused by Olympism) are central features of its branding strategy, such terminology was largely absent from its pre- and post- social representation fields, suggesting a gap between its brand identity and its brand image. In terms of the 2012 event, however, the results of this

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study do suggest some marketing success; specifically, two terms that appeared in the post-event social representation were inclusivity and inspirational, which are representative of two of the main themes underpinning the marketing and branding strategies of the event.

## References

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