

Digital Storytelling to Promote Successful Bids for Summer and Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games

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Synopsis:

The main objectives are to review the digital footprint of online publications related to Olympic Games bids through digital storytelling via public relations, advertisements, and advertorials; and the role of digital stories as a tool for successfully securing the bid to host an Olympic and Paralympic Games.

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AIM OF ABSTRACT

The main objectives are to review the digital footprint of online publications related to Olympic Games bids through digital storytelling via public relations, advertisements, and advertorials; and the role of digital stories as a tool for successfully securing the bid to host an Olympic and Paralympic Games.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Digital storytelling involves the use of electronic forms of narratives to articulate accounts or information through web-based technologies. These technologies can take a variety of digital formats (Bakoy & Kalnes, 2010, p. 248) ranging from web-based and interactive stories to audio and video podcasts. The Center for Digital Storytelling (2015) adds that the best digital storytelling involve “stories that emerge to serve as effective tools for change amidst a world of technology and media overload.”

With the continued advances of online environments including the Internet, digital communication has revolutionized how knowledge, information, and even culture are communicated and transferred to current and future generations. As such, media gatekeepers have evolved into global information providers – creating, distributing and accessing content with limited geographic barriers (Gruber, 2014).

According to Nee (2015), “the Olympic Games have been characterized as a major media event capable of creating global connectivity, national unity, and a sense of occasion among audiences and families.” As such, many municipalities and countries are using this belief to further market their destinations to not only attract the Olympic Games, but to enhance the brand awareness of their cities and countries through a multitude of sport marketing and public relations efforts.

While the Olympic Games are covered by many media outlets, there are four whose main purpose is to focus their coverage on elite sports and the Olympic Movement in English: Sports Features Communications (www.sportsfeatures.com), Around the Rings (www.aroundtherings.com), Inside the Games (www.insidethegames.biz), and Games Bids (www.gamesbids.com). Each of these companies produce a range of articles, advertisements and editorials – both of news provided via press releases from sport organizations, as well as material published as related to media contracts with bid cities. In addition, a varying percentage of the publications on each website are digital narratives related to cultural, environmental, and tourism-focused topics.

According to Dush (2013), there are questions as to whether these types of publications are truly digital storytelling, as the relationship is more as a result of a media contract or sponsorship. However, bid cities seem to see the value in engaging in digital storytelling to enhance their brand image in the eyes of the International Olympic Committee, as well as to get the message out about cultural, environmental and tourism opportunities through the global electronic superhighway to the world.

METHODOLOGY

Review of online digital media packages and resulting public relations and advertorial coverage was conducted through one of the four major digital media firms covering the bids for the Olympics. Inclusive of this review was a look at historical data related to the 2018 Winter, 2020 Summer, and 2022 Winter Olympic and Paralympic bid cycles. Simple descriptive statistical analysis in terms of numbers of articles and word counts for articles classified as digital storytelling were analysed to determine if more coverage equated to successfully securing the bid.

RESULTS

The results of the study show that each of the bid cities that successful won the right to host the Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2018 (PyeongChang, South Korea) and the Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2020 (Tokyo, Japan) had the largest digital media contract with the firm researched as compared to the competing cities seeking the bid. As a result of the larger contract, more stories were written on the successful bid city, resulting in greater digital media coverage across the Internet – as stories were picked up by numerous other digital media organisations and republished.

This includes up to 50% more presence in terms of digital storytelling editorial content covering a range of issues and opportunities – further enhancing the digital footprint of the bid through digital storytelling via advertorials and targeted multi-part web articles.

ONGOING RESEARCH

To date, looking at the current bid process for the 2022 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games, Almaty, Kazakhstan has had a significant digital media presence – with its main competitor Beijing, China having very little. Results will be presented at the conference that looks more closely at the results after the July 31, 2015 announcement of the winner of the bid.

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