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Event brand consistency at the London 2012 Summer Olympic Games

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Following the growing appreciation for the coherency of brands received by numerous stakeholder groups (i.e. the brand image) (for example, the media and the public), the achievement of brand consistency has increasingly come to be considered a priority in today's business environment (Madhavaram, Badrinarayanan & McDonald, 2005). The increasing awareness of a wider audience that brands now have access to – caused by the proliferation of media (traditional and digital) and the gradual power shift in communications from organisation to stakeholders –, have underlined the need to reduce the polyphony of perceptions that might exist around a brand, in order for a coherent and consistent brand identity to be achieved (Duncan & Moriarty, 1997); that is, quite simply, the creation and maintenance of a strong brand identity-image link (Srivastava, 2011). The assumption here then is that if consistency and coherency are achieved, this can have a direct impact upon an organisation's communications campaign effectiveness and the brand's market-based and financial performance (Luxton, Reid & Mavondo, 2015). Yet, despite the perceived importance of such an accomplishment, there have been relatively few studies that have sought to determine whether brand consistency is ever in fact realised. With that in mind then, the aim of this study was to investigate the brand consistency of 'the sports world's most powerful brand', the Olympic brand (Seguin & O'Reilly, 2008, p.62), and specifically, that of the London 2012 Olympic Games.

By examining the perceptions/associations of domestic, UK-based spectators and the UK media before and after the London 2012 Olympic Games took place, an overview of the brand identity, as it was perceived by these two key stakeholder groups (i.e. the brand image) is presented. Cross-examining these perceptions of brand image with the brand identity that LOCOG, and the IOC, were aiming to construct and promote for these Games can then allow for a discussion on the brand consistency of the London 2012 Olympics to be conducted. Thus, in order for this cross-examination to take place, first, the brand identity of the Olympics, as perceived by the aforementioned stakeholders (i.e. the brand image), needed to be established. From a spectator-perspective, native UK residents (pre=561, post=215) completed an online questionnaire before and after the Games, the main element of which comprised a free-word association task requiring participants to provide spontaneous associative responses to the inductor term: 'London 2012 Olympics'. A media content analysis was also conducted, pre- and post-event, on domestic broadsheet and online press stories related to the 2012 Games (i.e. The Guardian, The Times, The Independent, the Daily Telegraph, and the BBC online). The brand perceptions/associations exuded by these two key stakeholder groups were then compared to the brand identity of the Olympic Games, as promoted by LOCOG and the IOC, to determine whether brand consistency of the 2012 event was achieved.

LOCOG's 2012 branding themes of 'inspiration' and 'inclusivity' (cited in Ferrand et al., 2012), nor the three brand pillars comprising the Olympic Games' brand, 'Striving for Success', 'Celebration of Community', and 'Positive Human Values' (ibid), were evident in the brand perceptions/associations conveyed by either the domestic UK population or the UK media pre- or post-2012 Olympics. The findings of this research reveal that the most widely-perceived elements of the 2012 brand, by the domestic UK population, pre-event, were comprised of neutral associations relating to 'tourism and travel' and 'Olympic venues and infrastructure' and negative comments regarding the 'cost (expense)' of the event. However, following the 2012 Olympics these associations were replaced by much more positive ones relating to 'national pride', 'enjoyment' and 'medals'. The media's perception of the Games' brand, on the other hand, was revealed to be much more sceptical, with concerns, pre-event, relating to 'security', the 'cost (expense)' of the games, and its management and delivery, followed, post-event, by a somewhat unfavourable view relating to the 'legacy' and 'cost (expense)' of the Games combined with a positive focus on the 'athletes' glory'. With the above in mind then, although the UK population's perception of the brand appeared to be much more positive following the 2012 Games, unlike the rather unchanging negative perceptions of the media, the results of this study suggest that domestic brand consistency was not achieved at the London 2012 Olympic Games.

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