Sports Mega-Events and City Branding: A Comparative Case Analysis Between Beijing and Sydney

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Abstract: This paper compares how Beijing and Sydney used the Olympics to promote their city's image and values to targeted audiences. It addresses three research questions and introduces a six-step methodology for conducting comparative case analysis. The study finds that both cities successfully used the Olympics to communicate their intended image and values to target audiences. The paper also highlights that hosting major sporting events like the Olympics may help cities establish their identities, promote their images to the globe, and encourage long-term sustainability. The study offers valuable lessons for other cities on how to effectively use the Olympics as a city branding tool and emphasizes the importance of paying attention to tourists' perceptions.

Keywords: City Branding; Olympic Games; Sports Mega-Events; City Image Development

1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, people around the world have become increasingly connected due to rapid globalization. As a result, major metropolitan areas and cities are fiercely competing to gain global attention by implementing city branding strategies. While cities in the 19th and 20th centuries used branding strategies to promote settlement or manufacturing (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005), in this new century, large cities are competing to gain long-term sustainable competitive advantages through city branding (Kasapi & Cela, 2017). For instance, by implementing effective city branding strategies, the host city could attract foreign direct investment, enjoy an increase in the number of global visitors and local job opportunities in the visitor economy, and promote domestic social and economic development. Eshuis and Edelenbos (2009) pointed out that global visitors could be attracted by new city images, iconic buildings or landmarks, appealing natural and cultural environments, etc. Effective city branding strategies could communicate a city's attributes and characteristics to target audiences such as local residents and global visitors. A city must carefully identify its functional and non-functional attributes before developing a city image or identity in the branding process (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005). Functional attributes could be standard of living and quality of life, infrastructure and facilities, transportation and hospitality, etc. Non-functional characteristics may include historical or cultural heritages, iconic architecture, city values and identities, etc. Just like a business, a city must sell and promote its attributes to its target customers, which may include domestic residents, foreign visitors, and investors (Hornskov 2007). Culture is one unique attribute that can effectively raise the interest of a city's target audiences in its branding strategy.

2. The Olympics and City-branding/rebranding

Herstein and Jaffe (2008) systematically previewed previous studies and found that there are mainly six factors that could lead to success in building a city's image by hosting the Olympics. Firstly, urban planners should think "beyond sports". That is, the Olympic Games should not be seen just as a sporting mega-event. Instead, it might be utilized as a marketing tool to transmit the image and values of the city to target audiences using image communication tactics. Second, the host city should prioritize "long-term investment" over short-term gains. According to Chen et al. (2013), host cities may incur economic losses in the short run. However, it is feasible for host communities to profit several years, if not decades, after the sporting mega-events conclude. By drawing worldwide

audiences and tourists, host towns may reap long-term economic benefits such as fast growth in the visitor economy, tourism, and hospitality industries (Kassens-Noor, 2015). It is largely because foreign investors and visitors may hold positive attitudes toward the host city after watching the Olympics. Third, the Olympic Games could also be perceived as an urban redevelopment catalyst. In order to meet the expectation of global visitors, the public and the private sector need to work together to maintain or upgrade the event-related infrastructure and facilities (Kassens-Noor, 2015). And also, by attracting foreign direct investment, the host city could allocate financial resources to support urban redevelopment projects. Fourth, the success of hosting the Olympics could also be subject to residents' loyalty (Chung et al., 2019). All social groups within the city could actively participate in preparing for the Olympic Games. For instance, local residents could work as volunteers and tour guides. Word-of-mouth from locals may have a considerable impact on foreign tourists. The desired city image might be efficiently transmitted to international tourists. Fifth, the Olympic Games provide all key players with a commercial platform. Chung et al. (2019) proposed that the Olympics Games do not just represent sportsmanship or professionalism in sports. It also gives third-party marketers the opportunity to promote their businesses or products. In exchange, the host city might draw greater investment and sponsorship to help with event planning. Finally, early promotion and preparation are vital to the success of the Olympic games (Herstein and Jaffe, 2008). Herstein and Jaffe (2008) pointed out that host cities must start promoting the city's image or identity several years before holding a real sports event. In the 2008 Beijing Olympics, for instance, Beijing Government started to promote the event to a global audience two years earlier. On the event day, it had already accumulated more than 5 billion audiences worldwide (Ramchadani and Wilson).

3. Advantages and disadvantages of comparative case study

Case study analysis has several advantages in the research process, primarily in terms of flexibility. For example, obtaining secondary data on the case studies of Beijing and Sydney from reputable sources like WSROC is simple. Additionally, comparative case analysis allows researchers to gain a deep understanding of the research issue. For instance, in the case study of Beijing, researchers can thoroughly review previous studies on how Beijing communicated its city image to global audiences, identify major differences between the two Olympics in Beijing, and analyze how Beijing effectively reshaped its city image and identity. This allows the researcher to organize the study process more easily and select appropriate resources for examining selected case studies (Yazan, 2015). Finally, by comparing and contrasting differences, the study findings can be better represented for target audiences who may lack a professional background or prior knowledge (Rialp et al., 2005).

However, the comparative case analysis method also has its drawbacks. Firstly, the research findings may not represent a generalized pattern or phenomenon. In this study, the comparative case analysis is limited to Beijing and Sydney, and other host cities are not adequately investigated or discussed. Therefore, the research findings may not be applicable to other cities, and instead, may only provide insights for urban planners in other host cities on how the Olympics could contribute to the city branding process. Secondly, the research process and results may be subject to research biases. For example, the researcher may solely determine the secondary data and research materials, potentially leading to confirmation bias and negatively influencing overall objectivity.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Comparative Analysis between Beijing and Sydney as host cities of Sports Mega-events

The case studies of Beijing and Sydney demonstrate that hosting sports mega-events has tremendous benefits for city branding. According to Berkowitz et al. (2007), events like the Olympics offer host cities an excellent opportunity to develop a city identity and project their city image to the world.

4.1.1 Sports mega-event and city image development

Sports mega-events contribute to the city image development as part of the city branding process mainly in four major areas, including new landmarks of architecture, economic development, social development, and city marketing. Hence, the comparative analysis between Beijing and Sydney in the city image development can be illustrated in Table 6 below.

Table 6 The Olympics Games and City Image Development

Impacts and Changes	Beijing 2008 Games	Beijing 2022 Winter	Sydney 2000
New landmarks of architecture	- National Stadium ("Bird's Nest") - National Aquatics Center ("Water Cube") -Beijing Olympic Green Archery Rield - Olympic Green Hockey Stadium -China Agricultural University Gymnasium - National Convention Center	-National Stadium("Bird's Nest") -National Aquatics Center ("Water Cube") - National Indoor Stadium - Big Air Shougang - Wukesong Sports Center	- Blacktown Olympic Park - Bondi Beach - Centennial Parkland - Sydney Aquatic Leisure Center - Sydney Opera House - Western Sydney Parkland - Ryde Aquatic Leisure Center -Sydney International Regatta Center
Economic development	The Beijing 2008 Summer Olympics generated generates a long-term direct economic income for the Chinese market exceeding USD$2 billion (Huang, 2010).	The Beijing 2022 Winter Games might fail to generate positive economic returns due to the adverse impact of Covid-19. But in the long run, the net Sports Industry may grow into a USD$786 million market (International Economics, 2022).	The Sydney 2000 Summer Olympics increased Australia's GDP by approximately USD 4.8~5.3 billion. It created more than 100,000 job opportunities for local people. The number of tourists increased to 1.6 million per year (IOC, 2016).
Social development	There was a significant mismatch between the intended city image and the perception of local residents. In other words, the "city image" shaped in the city branding was falsified and different from what local residents actually perceived (Zhang and Zhao, 2010).	Beijing government and local authorities did well in marketing the sports events both domestically and internationally. On the various platforms operated by China Media Group (CMG), the games were watched by more than 62.8 million Chinese citizens. The games attracted both Chinese viewers and citizens of Beijing (IOC, 2022). People including both local residents and foreign visitors generally perceive Beijing as a global leader in creating shared values and promoting long-term sustainability for the mankind.	Embracing indigenous culture, for instance: -Multiple Indigenous-theme segments were incorporated in the opening ceremony. -Christine Anu's performance of "My Island Home" was used in the closing ceremony. - Indigenous elements were incorporated in the key visual identities of Sydney 2000
City marketing	- State Media Advertising - Limited internet and social media advertising	Wide-range digital engagement in the world (IOC, 2022). - Two billion audiences watched the Olympic games - 713 billion minutes of coverage consumed by global audiences - 20 billion digital video views across all platforms	- over 3.7 billion audiences from worldwide watched the Olympic Games. - 36 billion viewer hours mainly on TV

Source: (IOC, 2000; IOC, 2008; IOC, 2022)

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