

Legacy Marketing: How Olympic Family Collaborates to Promote Olympic Value on Social Media

Daum Kim
Masters Programme Year 1,
Graduate School of Media and Governance, Keio University

After the cheer in the stands of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, the closing ceremony curtain comes down, and what is left after 7 years of preparation is legacy. The Games legacy leaves long-lasting benefits and outcomes to the host city and to the Olympic movement. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has been manifesting the establishment of “Olympic legacy”. As more Games are held, and the size of the Olympic family expands, the scale of legacy grows, which increases its complexity and interconnectedness (Leopkey et al. 2012). Now the legacy is at the core of one of the most significant brands, Olympics, in the history of mankind.

Since the first modern Olympic Games in Athens, IOC has been continuously adapting new types of information systems to realise this vision with the audience at large. From radio broadcasting to social media, the adoption of information systems facilitated Olympic communication and engagement with the younger generation and the wider audience, making the Olympics the largest and the most successful sporting event of all times. Indeed, IOC not only is reaching sports fans, but getting people with little interest in sports to be part of the Olympic journey. Today, with digital technology and information systems, social media marketing has become essential to enhance the relationship between users and the Olympic family, which comprises National Olympic Committees (NOCs), the International Sports Federations (IFs), athletes, the Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (OCOGs), TOP partners, broadcast partners and United Nations agencies (IOC). We can interpret this as the enhancement of legacy marketing through the use of social media. The interconnectivity of social media has enabled accounts to directly communicate and reach out to new audiences. Each Olympic family members holds one or more social media accounts to engage with and promote their own targets, while direct communications, such as commenting and sharing, have strengthened interconnectivity between Olympic family members – enabling them to collaboratively market for the upcoming Games. In this collaborative marketing, different brands with yet different targets come together for one common goal – to invite as many people as feasible to spectate at the upcoming Olympic Games and to spread the Olympic value. Each account brings their unique element to complement the upcoming Games.

The interconnectedness of social media is adding another layer to Olympic legacy in the form of inherited data. With social media, the impact of the legacy remains in the accounts of the Olympic Family and is thereby passed on to the next hosting city. The next hosting city can then leverage on the accumulated legacy Olympic family accounts hold to promote their own Games. At the same time, the host city adds a new value and new aspects to the Olympic family, thus contributing in spreading the Olympic movement through legacy. This “legacy marketing” is expected to play a vital role in increasing the number of spectators in the upcoming Games.

Despite its importance, little is known on how social media empowers Olympic legacy in sharing its values. This paper, within the framework of “Legacy Marketing”, conceptualises the impact of a hosting city’s social media contents and collaborative marketing on spectator numbers in Olympic and Paralympic Games. We define legacy marketing as collaborative marketing that leverages on the long-term impact of legacies. We report preliminary results from early stage research on the subject using data from ongoing social media activities surrounding the upcoming the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2020. We have started experimental research on the Tokyo 2020 social media accounts. Various types of contents are being created on the accounts. Alongside, we analyse (1) social media engagements, reach and number of followers, (2) traffic to the official website, and (3) traffic to the ticketing sites. Tokyo 2020’s social media engagement activities with other accounts is also being qualitatively examined.

Given the impact of a strategy based on collaborative marketing of Olympic family values, this study aims to place the Olympic legacy model in social media into a theoretical framework. We aim to understand how social media platforms and created contents affect engagement with the hosting city and empowers Olympic legacy, and discuss whether the hosting city can pass on legacy to the next Games with more social media users becoming actual spectators of the Olympic journey. In the end, legacy marketing empowered by social media is expected to attract more people to embrace global harmony through the Olympic Movement.

How does it relate to the CCRC's research themes?

Theme 1: The Implications of Connectivity on Civilization, Society, and the Self

The success of Olympic and Paralympic Games lies not only in their peace-oriented vision, but in their adaptation of information systems and digital technologies to engage with more partners, continue communication and education with the younger generation and reach out to the wider audience by showcasing how a brand should communicate. Brands associated with Olympics and Paralympics, varying from worldwide sponsor Coca-Cola to the Taekwondo federation, are rather disconnected. However, these individual brands with different purposes come together under Olympics – each having its own line. And through the digital media, these lines are becoming intertwined. Thus, it is important to identify how the Olympic and Paralympic model, which is the Olympics movement within the framework of legacy, works in today's most widely used information system, social media. This is thus relevant to the first theme of Cyber Civilization Research Center, of how key technological advancement results in connected society. The interconnectivity of social media is re-shaping the ways the brand communities are formed and are establishing more non-geographic communities consisting of both local and global audiences. Also, the scale of social media enables brands to collectively market together to result in win-win marketing outcomes by leveraging on each other's social media channels. This study enriches past understanding of Olympic legacy by measuring its growing impact through collaborative marketing on social media. It is important to capture how different brands with different purposes collaboratively market together under a single brand. We can say that it is social media that empowered the interconnectivity of the elements of Olympic legacy.

Ultimately, we are hoping to contribute in getting more people to take part in the Olympic Movement. As legacy continues, each hosting city has unique power to attract users with no interest in sports by familiarising them with host city attractions, such as found in culture and scenery. Naturally, Olympic family marketing invites its supporters to cherish the unique value brought to them by the hosting city. From IOC's perspective, it is also important to maintain new spectators as continuing spectators at the next Games. This phenomenon is seen as an indication of passing on the legacy in this paper. Also, volunteer hire offers important opportunities to invite the younger generation to experience the Games. Thus, how to manage disappointed volunteer applicants and/or ticket buyers is another important source of helping to gain and keep spectators. These data need to be tracked on a personal level. Here, our study aims to help the Olympic Games, and possibly other brands conducting collaborative marketing, to achieve their goals through the interconnectivity of social media.