Tjandra, N., Rihova, I., Snell, S., den Hertog, C. and Theodoraki, E.

"Mega-events brand meaning co-creation: the Olympic case", *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, DOI: 10.1108/JPBM-08-2019-2539

Abstract

Purpose: This study explores a multi-stakeholder perspective on brand meaning co-creation in the context of the Olympic Games as a unique mega sports event brand with a strong brand identity, in order to understand how the brand manager may integrate such co-created meanings in a negotiated brand identity.

Design/methodology/approach: Utilizing a qualitative methodology, the paper provides a tentative framework of co-created Olympic brand meanings by exploring the narratives of stakeholders' brand experiences of the brand. 16 semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of Olympic stakeholders were conducted and analysed to identify key meanings associated with the Olympic brand.

Findings: Through their transformational and social experiences of the Olympic brand, stakeholders co-create brand meanings based on Olympic values of Excellence, Friendship and Respect. However, at the same time they offer their own interpretations and narratives related to competing meanings of Spectacle, Exclusion and Deceit. Alternative brand

touchpoints were identified, including blogs, fan and sports community forums, educational and academic sources, and historical sources and literature.

Practical implications: The brand manager must become a brand negotiator, facilitating multi-stakeholder co-creation experiences on a variety of online and offline engagement platforms, and exploring how alternative brand touchpoints can be utilised to access co-created brand meanings.

Originality/value: The study contributes to tourism branding literature by providing exploratory evidence of how brand meanings are co-created in the relatively under-researched multi-stakeholder sports mega-event context.

Keywords: Olympic brand, sports mega-events, brand meaning co-creation, tourism branding.

1. Introduction

Brand meaning co-creation represents an area of research that has been slowly gaining traction among marketing scholars (Gyrd-Jones and Kornum, 2013; Preece and Kerrigan, 2015; Vallaster and von Wallpach, 2013). The notion of co-creating brands stems from the recognition of customers' changing roles from passive participants into active players in the development of brands (Merz *et al.*, 2009). This represents a shift in organizational thinking towards collaborative processes where "organizations and stakeholders together generate and develop value, meaning, and opportunities" (Tjandra *et al.*, 2019, p.2). Co-created brand meaning emerges as stakeholders of a brand reflect on their experiences with various brand touch points (Iglesias and Bonet, 2012) and in so doing, "create relations, emotions and communities around brands" (Kornberger, 2010, p.248). However, the notion of brand meaning co-creation is still something of "a fuzzy concept" (France *et al.*, 2015, p.851), with more empirical research needed to explore this phenomenon in more depth.

The concept of brand meaning co-creation has increasingly been viewed as a crucial concept by tourism and hospitality researchers. As Buhalis and Inversini (2014) point out, tourism and hospitality deal with experiential products and services, and many brands are increasingly utilizing Web 2.0 platforms to facilitate co-creative practices. Nyangwe and Buhalis (2018), for instance, explore the case of Marriott hotel group incorporating real-time interactions of brand communities, brand stories and influencers in the co-creation of their brand narrative. Other tourism studies have explored the role of social media platforms as an enabler of customer-to-customer brand meaning co-creation (Neuhofer *et al.*, 2014), or as tools to build the image and brand of tourism destinations (Hays *et al.*, 2013; Oliveira and Panyik, 2014). While these studies provide important insights into the concept in the context of tourism and hospitality, additional research is needed.

Earlier conceptualizations of co-creation in the context of branding literature focus on company-consumer interactions (Ballantyne and Varey, 2006) or co-creative practices and experiences within brand communities (Black and Veloutsou, 2017; Muniz Jr and O'Guinn, 2001; Schembri, 2009). More recent branding perspectives acknowledge that the meaning and identity of brands are collaboratively determined through the co-creation of a number of stakeholders, including suppliers, sponsors, local communities, and others (Black and Veloutsou, 2017; Gyrd-Jones and Kornum, 2013; Iglesias et al., 2013; Sarkar and Banerjee, 2019; Vallaster and von Wallpach, 2013; Woisetschläger and Michaelis, 2012). This has important implications for tourism branding research, which tends to primarily explore dyadic encounters between the brand owner and its customers (or customer communities) in the context of tourism product/service or destination brands.

Events, and sports event experiences in particular, differ from tourism products and services in that they typically involve collective stakeholder participation (Berridge, 2007; Masterman and Wood, 2006; Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder, 2011). It is therefore likely that brand meaning in such contexts needs to be negotiated by many actors. While a small number of studies look at the co-creation of event destination brands (e.g., Gibson et al., 2008; Knott et al., 2015), the co-creation of sports event brand meanings has received limited attention (Woratschek *et al.*, 2014). This exploratory study therefore seeks to contribute to the current body of literature on branding (and sports event tourism branding more specifically) by providing insights into co-created Olympic brand meanings.

The Olympic brand has been chosen as the focus of the research as it represents one of world's most successful sports event brands (O'Reilly and Séguin, 2008). The example of the Olympic Games, typically categorized as a product of sports event tourism (Weed, 2008), also links several themes relevant to tourism marketing and branding research, including notions around the impact of sports tourism on destination development, participant and fan

community engagement and opportunities for national marketing through sponsorship and commercialization of events.

The Olympic Games (OG) come together in the production and consumption processes of a complex network of participants and stakeholders, including government agencies, non-governmental organizations, athletes, sports associations, media participants, volunteers, sport event tourists and fans, and local communities (Palmer in Theodoraki, 2007). As Ferrand *et al.* (2012) suggest, the Olympic brand stems from the interaction between these various stakeholders and the reciprocal relationships created by the Olympic stakeholder networks.

The aim of this study is to establish a tentative framework of co-created Olympic brand meanings through an exploration of multiple stakeholders' narratives of their Olympic brand experiences. Related issues are also discussed, including the role of experiences in the co-creation of brand meaning and the identification of relevant brand touchpoints. In so doing, the research goes some way toward understanding how the brand manager (in this case the International Olympic Committee – IOC) may integrate such co-created meanings in the Olympic brand identity. At the same time, the study answers calls for empirical research that helps to further conceptualize the phenomenon of brand meaning co-creation by multiple stakeholders in a variety of empirical contexts (Gyrd-Jones, 2019; Ind and Schmidt, 2019).

2. Theoretical overview

2.1 Emerging perspectives on co-created brand meaning

Branding literature has traditionally adopted a managerial perspective on brands, positing that it is the manager who creates and communicates the meaning and unique identity of the brand to customers. Srivastava (2011, p.340) states that brand identity "is the unique set of brand associations that the brand strategist aspires to create or maintain […], [which] imply a

promise to customers from the organization". The brand manager's role is to engage in a long-term brand building process that emphasizes durability and a relative consistency of brands (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000; Beverland *et al.*, 2007; Kapferer, 2013). Thus, organizations as brand owners typically aim to control brand identity as a mixture of different elements that are communicated to customers and external stakeholders, while the brand's targets perceive the brand through brand image (Kapferer, 2013).

More recent product and service branding studies point out that a brand as managers want it to be and as it actually is tends to 'intermingle' and is prone to environmental changes (Ind *et al.*, 2012; da Silveira *et al.*, 2013). The 'stakeholder perspective' (Merz *et al.*, 2009) appears in response to the managerialist view in branding literature. Its proponents argue that while brands still originate among brand managers, their meaning emerges through a dynamic, continuous social process that involves stakeholder negotiations (Csaba and Bengtsson, 2006; Jolibert *et al.*, 2012; da Silveira *et al.*, 2013). Specifically, brand identity is conceptualized in terms of socially constructed meanings that emerge through consensus among stakeholders (Preece and Kerrigan, 2015; Vallaster and von Wallpach, 2013; Veloutsou and Black, In Press).

Brand meaning is defined as "a reflection of internal and external stakeholders' mindset about a brand" (Ind and Schmidt, 2019, p.18). This mindset is built through an accumulation of experiences co-created as stakeholders interact with brand touch points (Iglesias and Bonet, 2012). Vallaster and von Wallpach (2013) note that brand managers cannot control brand meaning; as one of many stakeholders in the brand co-creation network, they merely shape brand meaning through the resources available to them. Defining a clear brand identity internally is still crucial as it is merely the starting point of stimulating brand meaning co-creation, but brand identity from the co-creative perspective is constantly negotiated and re-interpreted (Iglesias *et al.*, 2013).

Iglesias and Bonet (2012) argue that a more meaning-based focus is needed in brand research. They suggest experiential and phenomenological approaches to explore the socially constructed meanings that emerge through the use of language, drawing on symbolic interactionism as a lens through which meanings and their influence on actions and human interaction are studied. It is therefore through experiences of a brand that brand meaning emerges (Schembri *et al.*, 2010). The next section takes a closer look at how brand meanings are co-created by different stakeholders through brand experiences.

2.2 Brand meaning co-creation through experiences

A number of authors provide insights into the nature and process of brand meaning co-creation by looking at consumer-brand experience contexts (e.g., Schembri *et al.*, 2010). Brand experiences occur directly through consumption and are created "when customers use the brand; talk to others about the brand; seek out brand information, promotions, and events, and so on" (Ambler *et al.*, 2002, p.15). Brand experiences can also occur indirectly when consumers come into contact with advertising and marketing communications (Schmitt *et al.*, 2015).

Literature focusing on consumer and brand communities (Black and Veloutsou, 2017; Muniz Jr and O'Guinn, 2001; Schembri, 2009) documents well the co-creation of brand meanings through brand experiences. Brand communities allow the sharing of common brand experiences through direct and indirect interactions (Berthon *et al.*, 2009) and contribute to the co-created brand meaning (Veloutsou and Black, In Press). Thus in their role as co-creators of brand meanings, brand communities can even be seen by brand managers as a threat (Gebauer *et al.*, 2013; Muniz Jr and O'Guinn, 2001).

In multi-stakeholder contexts, brand experiences may involve a number of alternative interfaces and brand touchpoints, such as the brand's symbols, physical manifestations and

other representations of the brand in different contexts (Iglesias *et al.*, 2013). However, as brand meanings are subjective, dynamic and multidimensional (Berthon *et al.*, 2009), understanding what and how meanings occur during stakeholders' experiences with the brand is difficult.

As brand meanings are to some extent based on narratives that incorporate the brand (Escalas, 2004), when asked about their brand engagements stakeholders may generate meanings that are not initially proposed by brand managers. In other words, brand meaning that stems from such engagements is often built outside the brand manager's control in a space where multiple stakeholders interact and negotiate with each other on their own terms (Vallaster and von Wallpach, 2013). As Ind and Schmidt (2019, p.54) note, a brand manager may propose a core brand identity, but "it is the way consumers and other stakeholders use the brand and share their experiences online, and in conversation, that defines the meaning for each individual."

The notion of multi-stakeholder brand meaning co-creation is particularly applicable to branding in the context of sport and sports events. Brand meanings in such contexts often represent associations with communities of athletes, professional sport groups, local volunteer groups and sports fans and enthusiasts, which have potentially differing experiences and perceptions of the brand. As such, brand managers' control may be negated, for example, by the manner in which team performance affects brand perceptions by fans (Heere and James, 2007). The concept of basking in the reflected glory (BIRG) of one's sports team from Cialdini *et al.*'s (1976) seminal paper helps to offer some insight into this phenomenon, as sports fans associate more with a team after a successful event than after an unsuccessful one (End *et al.*, 2002; Jensen *et al.*, 2016). This has important implications for sports event brand managers; as Suomi *et al.* (2020) suggest, stakeholder involvement in co-

creating brand meaning may increase and strengthen their identification with the brand and its values.

While the concept of BIRGing is generally associated with the team/athlete, this can translate to the overall event brand itself. Abreu, Novais and Arcodia (2013, p.310) state that "when a brand becomes linked with the external entity [in this case the event], some of the attribute and attitude associations the consumer [event participant] has, may be transferred". It is fair to assume that this emotional attachment exhibited towards sports teams has the power to dominate the brand meaning perception (at least from the fans' perspective) and the ability to change the manner in which fans perceive and interact with the overall sport brand itself. Much in the same way as the fan would bask and celebrate in the reflected glory of the successful team, the event participant or resident would experience the same positive social impact when an event is successful. This is demonstrated for instance through collective community pride associated with a successful staging of the Games (Kim et al., 2015). It is this emotional attachment that managers seek to control and that impacts on the manner in which the sports event is marketed, and the brand is understood by its stakeholders (Underwood *et al.*, 2001).

Therefore, whilst brand managers can load the brand with intended messages and associations, the reception of the messages is variable, as meanings may be co-created by stakeholders independently through their brand experiences. However, while more co-creation perspectives are slowly emerging in branding research, there is still a dearth of empirical studies that adopt a multi-stakeholder perspective, as opposed to focusing on customer communities or only a small number of key stakeholders.

While a small number of studies address the nature of the brand meaning co-creation process and the roles of stakeholders and stakeholder communities from a collaborative perspective (e.g., Vallaster and von Wallpach, 2013; Veloutsou and Black, In Press), additional research

7

is needed to explicitly illustrate how individual phenomenological narratives of multiple stakeholders' brand experiences could become a platform on which co-created meanings of major sport events brands, such as the Olympic brand, can be explored. The next section provides a brief overview of literature related to brand identity and co-created meanings specifically in the context of the Olympic brand.

2.3 Olympic brand identity and contested meanings

The Olympic brand enjoys an average assisted recognition of 94 per cent (Ferrand *et al.*, 2012). It is partly due to the brand's success that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has been treating it as a closely guarded asset (Toohey and Veal, 2007). Television aids the brand's global reach; for example, the IOC (2014a) reported that the Sochi Olympics produced more than 1,300 hours of coverage broadcast in over 200 countries. The Beijing Olympic Opening Ceremony was watched by 1.4 billion people worldwide, making it the "largest media event in history" (Miah and Garcia, 2012, p.124). The appeal of the event and its ever-broadening media appeal promotes it to global audiences and ensures that the OG are seen as "global mass entertainment" (Milton-Smith, 2002, p.134).

Central to the Olympic brand is de Coubertin's Olympic symbol of five interlaced rings that represent the five continents of the world and "evoke strong emotional connections with people around the world" (Ferrand *et al.*, 2012, p.55). The Olympic brand identity is underpinned by a strong Olympic philosophy that places sport at the service of humankind, and the IOC's mission is to maintain the quality and relevance of the OG and to further enhance the experience of its stakeholders (IOC, 2010). This philosophy, also known as Olympism, is projected into three core values: Friendship, Excellence and Respect (IOC, 2013). While each Winter and Summer Olympic event create their own unique brand

identity, this is based on the key values and informed by the main Olympic brand (Kenyon *et al.*, 2018).

The IOC communicates the core brand identity through its brand campaigns. For example, "The Best of Us" campaign (IOC, 2009) illustrated a powerful idea of personal achievement that goes beyond cultures and borders and aimed to motivate young people to participate in sport. In the recent "Becomes the Light" (IOC, 2017) campaign the IOC used the theme of 'light' as a symbolic representation of the Olympic values and illustrated how athletes' inspirational achievements and the Olympic spirit can motivate people globally to act as beacons of positivity. Key messages featuring Olympic values are also apparent in promotional campaigns of the OG's official sponsors, including Coca-Cola, Samsung, Visa, GE and Procter & Gamble, and research shows that association with the OG has its merits (e.g., Mazodier and Merunka, 2012; Stipp and Schiavone, 1996).

Although Olympism tends to evoke strong positive emotional connections with people throughout the world (O'Reilly and Séguin, 2008), the Olympic brand has at times been associated with negative themes, including doping, commercialization, cronyism, corruption, and developed nations taking advantage of minority groups within the host community (e.g., Milton-Smith, 2002; Minnaert, 2012). Criticisms have also been leveled at the IOC's organizational processes (Tavares, 2006), failure of the Olympic movement's peace-making achievements (Spaaij, 2012), and commercialization and commodification of the OG through advertising (Maguire *et al.*, 2008). More recently, concerns raised around the treatment of Olympic stakeholders, particularly athletes and host community residents, have emerged in a growing body of literature relating to human rights issues (Davidson and McDonald, 2017; McGillivray et al., 2019; Snell, 2020; Talbot and Carter, 2018). These criticisms have resulted in fewer applicant cities and instances of competing host cities withdrawing Olympic bids (e.g., McGillivray et al., 2019). While there has been a concerted effort by the IOC to

improve its ethical standing, as evidenced by the IOC's response to the public-led campaign around the Sochi 2014 winter Olympics (Davidson and McDonald, 2017), it is clear that the Olympic brand meaning is increasingly contested.

A small number of studies have looked at the disparity between the brand personality designed by brand managers (the IOC and host Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games) and the images evoked for a range of OG stakeholders. These meanings are not necessarily negative; for example, Kenyon *et al.* (2018) explored the cognitive and effective pre- and post-London 2012 brand image associations, as well as conducting thematic analysis of the same in British media. The authors highlight 'inspiration' and 'inclusivity' as the main themes running through the London 2012 brand (Kenyon *et al.*, 2018). In a similar vein, Caslavova and Petrackova (2011) note the Olympic brand personality can be associated with traits such as 'sincerity', 'authenticity', 'self-confidence', 'uniqueness' and 'team spirt', as well as notions of the OG being 'family-oriented', 'hardworking' and 'successful'. Additionally, Majid *et al.* (2007) highlight 'hope' as a key theme that a number of OG producers and academic and industry experts associate with the rise in popularity of Winter OG.

On the other hand, previous research reveals that there is often a high level of incongruence between the Olympic brand identity and how it is perceived by fans and different audience types. For instance, Le Clinche *et al.* (2017) identify a disparity between the Olympic brand and images perceived by French Olympic audiences. Kenyon *et al.* (2018) discover an inconsistency between the 'official' brand personality promoted by London 2012 Organizing Committee and the perceptions of the OG as reported by domestic fans and in the media, with themes cited including 'sport', 'medals/prizes', 'costly/expensive' but also 'enjoyable', 'wonderful' and 'national pride'. The work is consistent with earlier research that also looked

at the mismatch between different local Olympic brands and their perceptions by residents (Karadakis *et al.*, 2016) and international tourists (Bodet and Lacassagne, 2012).

Seguin *et al.* (2008) note that while there is an understanding of the intended core Olympic brand identity, the lack of control over the brand by the brand manager (i.e. the IOC) and the impact of sometimes negative external factors can lead to a mismatch in brand meanings perceived by a range of stakeholders. As Wassong (2009) notes, although Olympic values are important, a modern interpretation is necessary to ensure their relevance.

In an attempt to address some of the ongoing criticisms, the IOC calls for reform as part of the Agenda 2020 initiative. Changes include a more transparent explanation of the OG's business model; the need to better communicate the benefits to stakeholders; a more appealing and flexible bidding process; the strengthening of the OG's unique characteristics; and, the embedding of a positive legacy for host cities (IOC, 2014b). However, although Agenda 2020 may have been formulated following discussions between some stakeholders (IOC, 2014b), whether or not it can serve to alleviate potential disparities between how the brand is understood by these different stakeholders remains to be seen.

As Ind and Schmidt (2019) argue, it is important to see brands as a somewhat 'messy' connected network of interests which can be guided by the brand manager, while other actors in the network play an equal role in influencing each other and the brand organization. Therefore, this paper seeks to provide a tentative framework of the co-created brand meanings that emerge from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders (as opposed to focusing only on a specific stakeholder group, such as customers, fans or host country audiences), in order to better understand how the Olympic brand manager (i.e., the IOC) may draw on these co-created meanings to better align the ever-evolving brand identity. This study therefore addresses the following questions: What is the role of stakeholders' experiences in co-creating Olympic brand meanings? Are key Olympic values represented in stakeholders'

meanings or are they contested? And what represents the brand touchpoints that play a key role in stakeholders experiences of the Olympic brand? The next section outlines the methodology adopted in this research.

3. Research methods

Social constructionism is adopted as a philosophical framework that underpins the methodological design in this research. This is in line with the view that brands are negotiated by various stakeholders and co-created meanings emerge in a social context guided by mutual societal beliefs and values (Merz *et al.*, 2009; Muniz Jr and O'Guinn, 2001). Social constructionists hold that common conceptions of reality and, by extension, conceptions of what brands signify, can be developed from shared and negotiated meanings (Muniz Jr and O'Guinn, 2001). The focus is therefore not on the 'actual' brand as an objective entity, but rather, stakeholders' narratives of their brand experiences and the ways in which they relate to the brand.

Individuals use narratives to make sense of the world and themselves, interpreting actions, objects and behaviors through interaction within and interpretations of the social world (Shankar *et al.*, 2001). An interpretive approach is therefore adopted to investigate stakeholders' co-created Olympic brand meanings. In line with Schembri *et al.*'s (2010) approach, the present study seeks to describe and interpret stakeholders' brand experiences. For that reason, a qualitative methodology with an interview-based method is selected.

This exploratory study seeks to provide tentative insights into the co-created meanings associated with the Olympic brand as a truly global brand that generates extensive media interest and attracts vast sums of money. The case of the Olympic brand illustrates the studied phenomenon well; every OG involve multiple stakeholders, and as such the study of meanings co-created through multiple stakeholders' experiences with the Olympic brand can

aid in understanding of how such meanings may differ from the sport event brand identity conceived of by the brand manager.

Palmer (in Theodoraki, 2007) divides Olympic stakeholders into the following categories: governments (public officials and organizing committees); communities (residents and local community groups); sports (international sport federations and national governing bodies); nations and regions (citizens and devolved assemblies); the media; contributors (suppliers, sponsors, volunteers); internal (Organizing Committees staff, consultants) and other stakeholders (special interest groups, lobbyists, academics). This taxonomy was used as a starting point for a snowball sampling approach to recruit a total of sixteen interviewees.

Snowball sampling is usually adopted when it is difficult to identify possible participants and relies on interviewees recommending subsequent potential study participants (Kvale, 2007). Stakeholders' active interest in the organization (Donaldson and Preston, 1995) was also an important sampling criterion, crucial for the purpose of the research. This means that the sample also includes Olympic fans who passively experienced the event as TV spectators and/or actively participated as sport event tourists.

While by no means exhaustive and representative of all possible OG stakeholder groups, the final sample allows for exploration of a range of different brand experiences. The 16 participants encompassed 7 different nationalities and included OG athletes (current and former); academic specialists from host communities; OG tourists and spectators (both live sport tourists and TV spectators in host countries); Olympic scholars and educators; representatives of host country National Olympic Committee; suppliers to the Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (OCOG); and others (see Table 1). As many of the participants performed multiple roles during one or various OG, they were asked to reflect from their different perspectives. While the resulting interviewee sample is relatively disparate from the point of view of their cultural experiences with the Olympic brand, this

serves to address the limitations of previous studies that only focused on specific stakeholder groups, or on meanings associated with a particular OG edition (Bodet and Lacassagne, 2012; Karadakis *et al.*, 2016; Kenyon *et al.*, 2018).

*Insert Table 1 here

The semi-structured interviews were conducted in English over a period of six months, and the average interview duration was just over one hour. Interviews took place face-to-face, over the phone and via Skype and were all audio-recorded and transcribed. Research participants were not provided with information about any specific OG, in order to facilitate narratives of personal experiences and interactions with the Olympic brand that were most relevant to them.

The interviews opened with a question that elicited descriptions of the stakeholders' Olympic experience (*Q: "Could you please describe your Olympic experience to me?"*); other questions focused on brand meanings and perceptions (*Q: "How do you perceive the Olympic brand?" "What do the Olympic Games mean to you?"*).

The verbatim interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) within QSR's NVivo software. NVivo assists in the organization, coding, and analysis of large amounts of data, for primarily qualitative purposes and allows the users to identify and define the codes (known as nodes within NVivo) into emergent categories. A data driven coding approach was adopted, encouraging themes to emerge from the data in a more holistic manner where findings present the appropriate coding structure throughout the coding process (Poland, 2003). Members of the research team independently undertook the first data coding task and subsequently compared and discussed emergent categories to ensure that these reflect the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The initial themes identified in the first coding round related to the participants' OG experiences and Olympic brand perceptions. Once identified within NVivo (as noted above) the emergent themes where revisited and a second round of 'concept driven coding' was undertaken with a view to further applying these themes to academic discussions on the subject (Poland, 2003).

The following section reports on findings related to the co-creation of Olympic brand meanings identified in the interviews. Stakeholders' Olympic brand experiences are highlighted as a platform and context in which the themes of Excellence, Friendship, and Respect reflect the key Olympic values, but other alternatives themes also emerge (Spectacle, Exclusion and Deceit) which contest these meanings. In line with the interpretive research approach, it is assumed that the findings are context-dependent (Yin, 2014) and the results are a description of the concepts and processes under investigation in the context of the Olympic brand.

4. Findings

4.1 The role of experiences in co-creating brand meaning

It was evident from the interviews that the study participants derived Olympic brand meaning from their personal experiences with the OG. They recognised that these personal experiences made the Games special to them; as one of the interviewees stated, "My opinion of the Olympic Games has been shaped by my own experience. I've been lucky enough to experience the Games three times now." (P5). Several stakeholders described the transformational nature of their OG experiences. P13, a former Olympic athlete explained how her disappointing performance gave way to a desire to pursue further education. Another athlete, P4, stated that she had "grown through her experiences" and sharing her personal Olympic stories with schoolchildren in Brazil had prompted her to establish a new sport

foundation. In a similar vein, P5, OG event administrator, described how working on the event changed her attitude and work ethos, "because it is expected of an athlete, thus also of the other people who are all in it together". This personal transformation also illustrated the powerful impact of brand meaning derived from their experiences with the Olympic brand at personal level.

Another important theme that emerged in the findings was the strong social element present in stakeholders' meaning making. Their stories of OG brand experiences influenced others, and reciprocally, stakeholders themselves were influenced by OG-related stories told by others in their networks. For example, P16, who was involved in the local organization of the OG, draws on stories told by colleagues to learn from and advance the ways in which future Games would be managed, "I am personally more about stories from colleagues who have experiences the OG and who encountered a particular situation that we encounter again during a new OG but in a new way, those are all unique stories."

P5 talked about sharing her Olympic experiences using a blog, which others in her network read when unable to attend the OG in person,

> "When I was in Vancouver, I wrote a blog, as well as in London, and people said that they really enjoyed reading that background information because it gives that little extra compared to what you see on television. For example, I was at the ceremony for Mark Tuitert [Dutch Olympic speed skater], who in the morning was at my desk in his pajamas. And I was talking to a friend the other day and she remembered that part of my blog as well, and she thought it was such a remarkable experience."

P5 relayed her live Olympic experiences focusing on encounters with athletes as real people, which meant that the meanings communicated in the blog were likely to influence others' perceptions and meanings associated with the Olympics. In a similar vein, P7 used her personal OG experiences in her teaching, with the OG acting as an important object of

knowledge transmission that brought the experience of the OG closer to her students, while serving as a tool that reinforces her authority as a teacher: "When I was talking about my experiences of the Olympics in Barcelona, I've noticed with my students, they get very excited about the Olympics from me telling them how excited I was".

The above excerpts show that there are several ways in which stakeholders create and co-create brand meanings through their Olympic experiences, which are shared and circulated within their networks. In this way, their often transformational and social Olympic experiences serve as a platform and context in which Olympic brand touchpoints are encountered and more importantly, where Olympic brand meanings are co-created. The following section discusses in more detail the specific Olympic brand meanings co-created in stakeholders' experiences.

4.2 Co-created brand meanings

The majority of the participants described the experience of the Olympic brand in terms of meanings that were broadly in line with its core identity and reflect the key values of Excellence, Friendship and Respect. However, the stakeholders also expressed their Olympic experiences in terms of more negatively valenced ideas that were positioned as broadly opposed to the key OG values, including Spectacle, Exclusion and Deceit. These ideas are summarized below under the themes of Excellence – Spectacle, Friendship – Exclusion, and Respect – Deceit. More detailed example quotes from participants are presented in Table 2.

4.2.1 Excellence - Spectacle

Excellence is defined by the IOC in terms of "giving one's best, on the field of play or in life, without measuring oneself with others, but above all aiming at reaching one's personal objectives with determination in the effort" (IOC, 2013, p.3). Striving for excellence as one of the key Olympic values was, perhaps, unsurprisingly evident in the narratives of athlete

stakeholders, for whom the Olympic Games represented an opportunity to demonstrate their prowess at highest level of sports. Interviewees highlighted how they experienced the value of excellence through their interaction with the Olympic brand, as the OG were often seen as "the pinnacle of sports" (P2) or "the ultimate goal" (P4). The value of excellence recognizes that one should commit their life to such a goal, as illustrated by two athletes who explained training towards an Olympic moment meant that their lives were geared around the OG. These athletes were determined to give their best effort and keep the athletic level high for their specific Olympic moment. The value of excellence also emphasizes the notion of reaching one's personal goals, and P4 noted that when she won an Olympic medal it became her "personal victory". Furthermore, a few participants mentioned that an athlete's attitude of determination, endurance, focus, and being able to perform was aspirational and motivational (P3, P4, P5 and P13). Consequently, people "look up to athletes" (P2).

Olympism is not only about sport, it represents a philosophy of life embodied in various activities related to the event. As P5 noted,

> "You get swept up the atmosphere, your adrenaline level is high, and all organizations contributing to the Games are expected to outdo themselves, not only athletes are expected to shine. So, you want to show the best you can yourself as well, because it is expected of you. So, you keep on going and you don't complain. So, I think that brings out the best of you."

For people who are generally not interested in sports, the Olympic atmosphere can be inspiring and engaging. P7 stated that "you want to be part of the support, you want to feel like you know you are part of that, either success, or failure, or whatever it is". It is not only success, but also the element of participation that is experienced by the athletes and the audiences of the OG and associated with the Olympic brand which is evident in the study.

Spectacle - The core value of Excellence was contested in the notions of spectacle, competitiveness, the OG's increasing commercialization, and the pressure and failure that is associated with the presentation of the OG in the media. Due to its global scale, the OG was described by several interviewees as "a fascinating mega-event" (P2), "a huge spectacle" (P14) and a "celebration" (P5). While the majority of stakeholders associated the OG with a high level of prestige, this was not necessarily the case for every sport. Some participants (P4, P5, P6 and P14) noted that in some of the disciplines (e.g., golf, football/soccer or tennis) the OG did not represent the most prestigious tournaments. As such, the notion of the OG representing the pinnacle of sport, and thus a more attractive broadcasting opportunity, may be misaligned in stakeholders' brand perceptions. On a personal level, the spectacle of the Olympics as presented in the media could also represent a double-edged sword. For instance, one of the interviewed athletes (P13) explained that because of her Olympian status the media did not hesitate to "invade [her] personal life to get a good story".

Various participants also mentioned the increasing commercialization of the Games. P1 argued that although the increasing commercialization brought in a lot of money and attention, it had also brought "a slightly negative zing" to it. However, P9 also suggested that if commercialization was realigned to promote Olympic values, it could be beneficial for the OG. For example, the OG compete with other popular TV programs and sporting competitions. As P2 suggested, "if people are more interested to watch [another program] instead of [the Olympic Games], the whole thing collapses, because there will be no TV-rights, there will be no sponsors".

Lastly, some participants highlighted that the high level of competition, and the athletes' triumph, or more often their collapse, were the main spectacle that attracted the many spectators and made the event more exciting. Nonetheless, P4, a former athlete, also described her competition day as "an emotional rollercoaster". She highlighted that the high

level of performance, the likelihood of failure, and the large scale of the event brought with it high levels of pressure for the athletes themselves, the event organization, host countries, and sport federations, often putting unbearable emotional toll on the various stakeholders.

4.2.2 Friendship – Exclusion

Another key Olympic value is **Friendship**, as expressed through the notions of solidarity, team spirit, joy, and optimism in sport, both within teams and between opponents. These ideas are seen to contribute to the "building [of] a peaceful and better world" (IOC, 2013, p.3). Through this value the OG's strive to "inspire humanity to overcome political, economic, gender, racial or religious differences and forge friendships in spite of those differences" (ibid).

In the interviews, participants mentioned associations that could be related to the value of Friendship, such as "inclusion", "bringing together supporters and different nations", "breaking down barriers", "solidarity" and "promoting multicultural understanding". Friendship was apparent in the relationships between athletes, as well as the interactions among the supporters and general audiences. Furthermore, P16 noted that sharing important moments with people created tight bonds, while P7 noted that the Olympics' importance in many stakeholders' lives was that they brought disparate groups of stakeholders together.

Friendship was also apparent in the relationships between athletes, as well as the interactions among the supporters and general audiences. P16 noted that among athletes, sharing of the experience and of "the important moments" created very tight bonds between participants. Friendship was expressed as a sense of support that stakeholders offered to the athletes, regardless of their emotional involvement in the particular discipline. P5 explained, "I realized that it's not just a victory for the athlete, but for all the people around it that have contributed to that victory".

Other participants provided examples of the unification of different countries and cultures, and the intercultural understanding and bonds that this facilitates. They highlighted that the OG provided the opportunity to learn about and meet other countries and cultures. Additionally, there was evidence of athletes from participating countries breaking down intercultural boundaries and displaying a strong sense of solidarity with opponents. For instance, P12 remembered how one athlete, who was the last to finish in the Marathon discipline, entered the crowded stadium (filled with supporters, because it was right before the closing ceremony) and was applauded and cheered on by all the spectators, regardless of their national affiliations.

Exclusion - Whilst the value of friendship encourages mutual understanding, solidarity and optimism, some of the participants perceived the OG to be excluding and self-serving in both the achievement-oriented nature of many of the disciplines, and in the misrepresentation of the interests of certain stakeholder groups at the bidding, consultation and planning phases of the OG.

Furthermore, although the value of friendship promotes the sharing of Olympism across different cultural boundaries, many participants associated the OG with somewhat negative forms of nationalism that might exclude others. Several participants (P2, P5, P13 and P15) talked of being "fiercely passionate", feeling more connected to, and remembering the performance of the athletes of the same nationality. P13 referred to the "national sentiment [of] cheering for your country's athletes". P5 indicated the infectious nature of such nationalist feelings: "I was very motivated by athletes of my own country performing well. It's infectious". P7 also commented "It's such a powerful feeling and it gets everybody on board, because you can be proud of the achievements that your country has made". The high degree of nationalism appeared to be exclusive to some extent, in that cheering for one's own team potentially meant a lack of solidarity with other participating teams and nations.

Exclusion and exclusivity, rather than inclusion and an all-encompassing sense of solidarity, often figured in participants' narratives. Many participants believed that the OG were only accessible to an elite group of spectators. In a similar vein, P5 commented on the exclusive nature of accommodation and ticket prices which often are inaccessible to a range of stakeholders. A degree of exclusion was also associated with the Games' organizational principles. P6 illustrated that rich and developed countries had an unfair advantage over others, because some countries could not afford to pay athletes' salaries when they were struggling to provide their citizens with necessities. P11 further noted that the way IOC members were selected resembled an initiation into an exclusive club.

P16 talked about the corrective, and sometimes controlling, function of the IOC in relation to a host OCOG, to guarantee their long-term relations with other stakeholders. P11 summarized this by stating the IOC had "a self-serving interest" and P7 commented that "the IOC only cares about its reputation and the reputation of the Games". P7 also believed that, to protect their reputation, the IOC quietly tolerated China's failure to conform to a number of agreements in relation to addressing human rights during the organization of the Beijing OG.

4.2.3 Respect - Deceit

Respect, as the last key Olympic value, is embodied in the Olympic principles of fair play and 'clean' sport, including the avoidance of doping. Respect is "the ethical principle that should inspire all who participate in the Olympic programs. It includes respect for oneself and one's body, respect for one another, for rules and for the environment" (IOC, 2013, p.3). Examples of fair play were evident in the data; for example, P16 talked of the OG encouraging "respect [for] other athletes whether you win or lose. To appreciate that, because of that other athlete, you have to work harder". P12 described the support of a struggling athlete received from stadium spectators at the 2004 Athens OG, which stemmed from respect: "People had respect for her achievement and 'finishing a race' was the achievement".

P16 also highlighted how OCOG showed respect by making sure that when a host country is interested in specific sports that this is considered when setting up the competition schedules.

Deceit - The value of respect is associated with ethical behavior. Nevertheless, many participants also associated the OG with corruption, deception, the breaking of promises, and a lack of respect for local communities and environment. Corruption was the commonly cited aspect contradicting the respect value that led participants (P6 and P11) to perceive the Olympic brand in a negative light. Some participants (P7, P11 and P12) suggested that there should be stricter consequences for corruption – for example, by excluding people and countries from participating in the OG. This was perceived as difficult, however, as sometimes corruption occurred on an individual level and it would be unfair to "punish a whole nation" (P6). Others highlighted doping, happened at some past OG, describing this as "such a big scandal" (P2, P14) and something that was very much at odds with the Olympic fair play principles.

Some of the interviewees discussed a lack of respect for local communities and the somewhat blurred promises made by OCOGs with respect to proposed OG legacy outcomes. P7 noted that residents living near some of the Olympic venues did not have any influence in the decision-making process regarding the development of the local area. Housing schemes associated with the OG were considered to have a gentrification effect, with some participants (P2, P7 and P12) viewing the Olympic physical legacy outcomes as "a front" for local political and gentrification agendas. P7 illustrated that objects and sights not aligning with the pristine Olympic image were removed or blocked from view, by, for example, erecting walls near Olympic sites or relocating night shelters for vulnerable women out of the Olympic area.

P16 suggested that bid committees often made promises to the IOC and their own nation about potential legacy to win the bid for the OG over other countries, but sometimes it was

difficult "to make good" on these promises. P2 added "There's no positive legacy [of the OG], in my opinion". Furthermore, referring to recent media debates, several interviewees remarked that the benefits of the OG were not as extensive as was claimed by various agencies.

*Insert Table 2 here

5. Discussion

Section 4.1 illustrates how stakeholders create and co-create brand meanings through their Olympic experiences, which they share and circulate within their networks. Our findings provide evidence that brand meanings are indeed co-created through stakeholders' experiences with the Olympic brand touch points (Iglesias and Bonet, 2012; Escalas, 2004). The brand meanings derived from their Olympic experiences are sometimes so powerful that they become the catalyst of stakeholders' personal transformation. As brand managers are unable to control these brand meanings (Vallaster and von Wallpach, 2013), it is imperative that brand managers are aware of these meanings and evaluate the implications of these meanings on their proposed brand identity.

As noted in section 4.2, the key Olympic values of Excellence, Friendship and Respect were indeed reflected in participants' narratives of their Olympic brand experiences. In this respect, the findings are perhaps less surprising; athletes typically view the Olympic brand as associated with perseverance and goal achievement – characteristics which are deeply embedded in athletes' culture and represent what it means to be an athlete (Rojek, 2006). Bertling and Wassong (2016) identify the pursuit of athletic excellence, prominent since ancient times, as fundamental to Olympic values. Similarly, spectators basking in the reflected glory of athletes and national teams' performances, as illustrated in the data, is a familiar and a well-established concept in the sport event literature (Cialdini *et al.*, 1976; End

et al., 2002; Jensen *et al.*, 2016) and reflects the notions of national pride discussed by other authors (Caslavova and Petrackova, 2011; Kenyon et al., 2018).

The interviewees recognized that the Olympics promoted the value of Friendship by bringing together various stakeholders, community, and nations. This is aligned with the Olympic movement's intention to celebrate human progress and international understanding and peace, overcome prejudice and ignorance, broaden knowledge of other cultures and peoples, and promote international understanding and global human solidarity (Spaaij, 2012).

Kenyon *et al.*'s (2018) study of London 2012 OG showed that the Games served to inspire others and sought to represent the inclusive nature of many community-based sports. The findings indicate that athletes and national teams play an important role; as symbolic role models they inspire individuals and present them with "templates to possible selves" (Hendricks, 1992, p.2). Athletes' mentalities then appear to be transferred into the practices and work ethic of stakeholders who bring the Olympic brand meanings into their life contexts and this has also been observed by Majid *et al.* (2007).

The sense of fair play, associated with compliance with rules, respect for officials and their decisions, and respect for other competitors (IOC, 2013), was clearly seen and experienced by a number of participants. The emotional connotations found in stakeholders' references to the support and the meanings associated with Respect point to the way in which the audience experiences a sense of community. This has also been previously described in the literature; as Zagnoli and Radicchi (2010) observe, spectators at sport events often create a 'fan community' that becomes a salient stakeholder in a process of co-creating value. In the context of Olympic brand research, meanings linked to 'team spirit' (Caslavova and Petrackova, 2011; Majid et al., 2007) are shown to extend to ethical behaviors and the pro-peace messages of 'hope' that many choose to associate with the Olympic movement.

Conversely, the findings illustrate how participants contest Olympic key values through the somewhat contrasting associations with Spectacle, Exclusion and Deceit. For example, when considering the relationship between the OG and the media, and the potential for negative consequences for the host, the IOC and for the sponsors, one can see why there is great importance placed on portraying a positive image of the Games (Snell, 2020). The media and advertising from Olympic sponsors no doubt play a crucial role in how the Olympic brand is perceived (Maguire *et al.*, 2008). However, as the findings indicate, notions of the Games as a media Spectacle and an increasingly commercialized entity were more often than not viewed in a negative light by interviewees. Smart (2018) notes that the increasing embrace of commercialism has led critics to believe that the OG are about elites making money and have little to do with the actual sports competitions, with commercial interests tarnishing the Olympic values, a point also noted by some interviewees.

Additionally, some of the participants perceived the Olympics as excluding certain stakeholders in their pursuit of success. Research on the London 2012 Olympics undertaken by Snell (2016) demonstrates a level of prestige, excitement and optimism felt by host communities as a result of the OG's association with their home city. While the present study goes some way toward confirming that such meaning associations are indeed made by community stakeholders, the findings also highlight the exclusive and often inaccessible nature of the OG, with many examples of local communities being disadvantaged.

OG critics argue that there is not enough evidence to suggest the Olympic movement has been successful in promoting peace within society (Spaaij, 2012). However, skepticism about their peace-promoting ability is related to longstanding issues reported by some authors, such as excessive nationalism, commercialization, masculinity, racism, elitism, technological intensification, spectatorship and government repression (Martin, 1996; Milton-Smith, 2002; Minnaert, 2012). Whilst the participants in the study relate the key value of Respect with

ethical behavior, they would just as easily associate the Olympic brand with Deception and echo some critics' notions of corruption and ethical malpractice.

Olympic brand meanings are therefore co-created by multiple stakeholders in the context of their Olympic experiences (see Figure 1). Through their often transformational Olympic experiences, stakeholders re-interpret the brand and share and transmit their own meaning of the brand into their network (Berthon *et al.*, 2009). Olympic brand experiences serve to reaffirm brand meanings, as well as representing a platform for 'new' co-created brand meanings. The findings confirm previous research in that, in their brand experiences, stakeholders engage with the brand via various traditional and alternative touchpoints (Iglesias *et al.*, 2013). Official IOC's and NOCs' (National Olympic Committee) and local OCOG's intangible and tangible branding, advertising and communication represent important brand touchpoints. However, more commonly, the interviewees in this study appeared to come into contact with the brand in other, less obvious contexts, such as online fan and sports community forums and blogs, workplaces, educational and academic sources, and historical sources and literature. Stakeholders' narratives revealed physical and symbolic representations of the brand as encountered in the media and popular culture, but also those passed on through social networks and personal experiences. These are personified primarily in the figure of the athletes as the heroes and adversaries in stakeholders' personal narratives of their self-identity; and as reflected in stakeholders' social relationships in the context of their everyday lives.

*Insert Figure 1 here

6. Conclusions

This study set out to investigate how brand meanings in the Olympic context are co-created in the narratives of multiple Olympic stakeholders' brand experiences. Tentative evidence is

provided of the inherent complexity of the Olympic brand in that its meanings are fluid, dynamic, contested, discursively constituted, and decentralized from the brand identity, as suggested in recent branding literature (Gyrd-Jones, 2019; Vallaster and von Wallpach, 2013). The findings illustrate how stakeholders' brand experiences can serve as a transformational and social context and platform in which brand meanings emerge. It is highlighted that whilst the Olympic brand identity is loaded with messages of Excellence, Friendship and Respect, stakeholders also co-create the meanings of Spectacle, Exclusion and Deceit.

6.1 Theoretical implications

Previous tourism brand co-creation studies tended to focus on a limited number of stakeholders (Nyangwe and Buhalis, 2018; Vallaster and von Wallpach, 2013) or on the brand-customer relationship (Hays et al., 2013; Oliveira and Panyik, 2014), with only a dearth of studies looking specifically at the context of sports events (Woratschek *et al.*, 2014). As such, this paper contributes to tourism brand co-creation literature by empirically exploring how brand meaning is co-created in multi-stakeholder sports event contexts. Specifically, new insights are revealed into the co-creation of the Olympic brand meaning, as opposed to the more traditionally researched mega-sport event destination branding contexts (e.g., Gibson *et al.*, 2008).

More importantly, this paper enhances theoretical discussions of the stakeholder perspective on branding by focusing on the active role of multiple stakeholders in co-creating brand meaning (e.g., Gyrd-Jones, 2019; Ind et al., 2013; Vallaster and von Wallpach, 2013). As highlighted in the literature, brand managers can 'load' the brand with key messages. The Olympic brand is indeed a classic example of a brand that has a very strong identity, portrayed through the Olympic values of Excellence, Friendship and Respect, and embodied in the IOC's activities and branding campaigns. However, the reception of the messages

transmitted by the brand manager is not guaranteed. While previous studies of brand images, or brand personality in the case of specific OG, have found similar incongruency between the core Olympic brand identity and the received meanings (Le Clinche et al., 2017; e.g., Kenyon et al., 2018; Majid et al., 2007; Milton-Smith, 2002), this study is novel in that it brings together the perspectives of a number of different stakeholders and focuses on the Olympic brand more generally as opposed to a specific OG context.

The narratives of Olympic stakeholders' brand experiences reveal that different meanings emerge as stakeholders encounter both tangible and intangible brand touchpoints. The study notes that athletes act as a key representation of the brand, in that the 'heroes' and 'adversaries' as perceived by the different stakeholders bring the brand to life and are imbued with significant personal associations that are meaningful to each individual (Majid *et al.*, 2007; Rojek, 2006). The study therefore goes toward further illuminating the role of social and transformational brand experiences as a platform for brand meaning co-creation, and shows that phenomenological, discursive, and narrative approaches to the study of brand meaning co-creation are a viable research avenue.

6.2 Managerial implications

The study confirms that a new conceptualization of the brand managers' role is required; when embracing co-creation, the role of a brand manager is likely to shift towards becoming a brand negotiator (Vallaster and von Wallpach, 2013). Stakeholders are powerful co-creators of dynamic, multidimensional and subjective meanings (Ind and Schmidt, 2019) and understanding these could lead to tangible results for the brand manager. As brand experiences are likely to take place both on an individual and on community levels, it is important that the brand manager adopts a systematic view of how these experiences emerge. This could include identifying key brand touchpoints as presented in this study (i.e. intangible and tangible branding, signage, advertising, and communication channels but also social

networks, community forums, workplaces educational and academic sources, and historical information sources about the brand).

In the context of the Olympic brand, the IOC as the brand manager can no longer rely on the established key Olympic values as the only possible interpretation and meaning of the brand (Wassong, 2009b). Exclusion and Deceit represent themes that echo Olympic brand criticisms and are emblematic of the tensions between the intended brand identity and the brand meanings amongst stakeholders. In some cases, this tension may lead to the impression of hypocrisy and, thereby, 'deflate the Olympic bubble' (Milton-Smith, 2002). Olympic brand managers should therefore be mindful of the potentially outdated criticisms which still exist within the stakeholder network and acknowledge the potential for these to persist, despite ongoing work undertaken by the IOC to remedy this.

To remain relevant and desirable, the IOC needs to encourage participation from inside and outside of the organization, facilitating and exploring stakeholders' co-creation experiences that go beyond marketing communications. One advantage of such an approach is that brands negotiated by stakeholders are more likely to be supported by them (Gregory, 2007; Suomi et al., 2020). Brand managers should not focus only on meanings conveyed by only one group of stakeholders (e.g. fans, local communities), as each stakeholder may relate to the brand differently. Instead, they should assume the role of 'network orchestrators' (Iglesias et al., 2013), while facilitating a variety of offline and online platforms on which the narratives of stakeholders' experiences of the brand can be played out (Muniz Jr and O'Guinn, 2001).

In the context of the Olympic brand, this would involve encouraging online (e.g. in forums and on social media) and off-line (e.g. at conferences and in workshops) extended conversations and collaboration between customers, suppliers, distributors, sponsors, competitors, fans, government and sport organizations and bodies, research institutions, the media and countless others. The Agenda 2020 project could therefore use such approaches to

consider the multiple meanings generated by stakeholders in co-creative spaces and begin to address issues identified through their contested meanings.

Research suggests that brand experiences that involve positive feelings are stronger than those which do not (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000), which is important for the continuation of the event. The presence of positive feelings and associations can turn to loyalty (Brakus *et al.*, 2009) and encourage evangelism (Iglesias and Bonet, 2012), thus helping to spread a more positive Olympic message. This could once again be linked to the personification of the athlete-as-hero figure and the positive emotions linked to team and national self-identification. Some of the co-created meanings can highlight the negative aspects of the brand (the notions of media Spectacle and community Exclusion in particular) and so compromise the positive values inherent in it. The figure of the athlete should therefore be used carefully in advertising and 'official' brand representations by the IOC.

6.3 Limitations and future research

This research explores issues related to the broader notion of the Olympic brand as experienced in the narratives of a number or selected Olympic stakeholders, as opposed to focusing on meanings related to a specific OG case situated in a particular geographic and historical context. As such, the findings offer tentative insights into the topic at hand. To extend the applicability and transferability of the research findings or to elicit further insights into alternative stakeholder network models and dynamics would be inappropriate. Future research should therefore be undertaken in the context of a specific OG case study, another sport event brand such as FIFA World Cup or other experiential and multi-stakeholder event, tourism, and hospitality brands.

Additionally, the purposive sampling approach used allows for a relatively limited range of stakeholders' views to be included. It is possible that the demographic profile of the

interviewees (interviewees nationalities and educational backgrounds in particular) may lead to predominantly Western perspectives on the OG brand to be represented here and any potential cultural differences that could be provided by stakeholders from other cultural backgrounds to be obscured. Future research should therefore seek to incorporate multiple participants from a greater variety of demographic, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds to enable the elicitation of additional brand experiences and gain a more varied image of the co-created brand meaning.

While the interview method utilized in this study offers snapshots of co-created brand meanings, it does not allow for systematic and longitudinal recording of the dynamic interactions amongst stakeholders and a brand or stakeholder community collaboration, as seen previously in brand community co-creation research. Neither does it illuminate the nature of the process of co-creating brand meanings in experiences and the actors and their roles. It is not the intention of this study to capture these processes, as they have been addressed elsewhere (e.g., Vallaster and von Wallpach, 2013; Veloutsou and Black, In Press). Nevertheless, to aid further conceptualisation, future research may explore the various online and offline conversational spaces that facilitate different types of brand experiences for a variety of stakeholders, particularly within the context of tourism, hospitality, and sport events. As noted above, a number of collaborative spaces have emerged around the Agenda 2020 initiative, which aims to bring together OG stakeholders in order to carve a sustainable future for the Games (IOC, 2014c). Further research could systematically analyze this initiative to explore how meanings are transferred and negotiated to co-create a new brand meaning for the OG.

References

Aaker, D.A. and Joachimsthaler, E. (2000), *Brand Leadership*, Free Press, New York, NY.

Abreu Novais, M. and Arcodia, C. (2013), "Measuring the Effects of Event Sponsorship:
Theoretical Frameworks and Image Transfer Models", *Journal of Travel and Tourism
Marketing*, Vol. 30 No. 4, pp. 308–334.

Ambler, T., Bhattacharya, C.B., Edell, J., Keller, K.L., Lemon, K.N. and Mittal, V. (2002),
"Relating brand and customer perspectives on marketing management", *Journal of
Service Research*, Vol. 5 No. 1, pp. 13–25.

Ballantyne, D. and Varey, R.J. (2006), "Creating value-in-use through marketing interaction:
The exchange logic of relating, communicating and knowing", *Marketing Theory*, Vol. 6
No. 3, pp. 335–348.

Berridge, G. (2007), *Events Design and Experience*, Elsevier, Oxford.

Berthon, P., Pitt, L.F. and Campbell, C. (2009), "Does brand meaning exist in similarity or
singularity?", *Journal of Business Research*, Elsevier Inc., Vol. 62 No. 3, pp. 356–361.

Bertling, C. and Wassong, S. (2016), "Striving for Athletic Excellence: A Core Value and
Challenge for the Profile of the Ancient and Modern Olympic Games", *The
International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 33 No. 4, pp. 434–450.

Beverland, M., Napoli, J. and Yakimova, R. (2007), "Branding the business marketing offer:
Exploring brand attributes in business markets", *Journal of Business & Industrial
Marketing*, Vol. 22 No. 6, pp. 394–399.

Black, I. and Veloutsou, C. (2017), "Working consumers: Co-creation of brand identity,
consumer identity and brand community identity", *Journal of Business Research*,
Elsevier, Vol. 70, pp. 416–429.

Bodet, G. and Lacassagne, M.-F. (2012), "International place branding through sporting

events: a British perspective of the 2008 Beijing Olympics", *European Sport Management Quarterly*, Vol. 12 No. 4, pp. 357–374.

Brakus, J.J., Schmitt, B.H. and Zarantonello, L. (2009), "Brand experience: what is it? How is it measured? Does it affect loyalty?", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 73 No. 3, pp. 52–68.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006), "Using thematic analysis in psychology", *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 77–101.

Buhalis, D. and Inversini, A. (2014), "Tourism Branding, Identity, Reputation Co-creation, and Word-of-Mouth in the Age of Social Media", in Mariani, M.M., Baggio, R., Buhalis, D. and Longhi, C. (Eds.), *Tourism Management, Marketing, and Development*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, NJ, pp. 15–40.

Caslavova, E. and Petrackova, J. (2011), "The brand personality of large sport events", *Kinesiology*, Vol. 4 No. 1, pp. 91–106.

Cialdini, R.B., Borden, R.J., Thorne, A., Walker, M.R., Freeman, S. and Sloan, L.R. (1976), "Basking in reflected glory: Three (football) field studies.", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 34 No. 3, pp. 366–375.

Le Clinche, S., Chanavat, N. and Desbordes, M. (2017), "Olympic brand image and values: A mix of marketing and philosophy", in Zhang, J. and Pitts, B. (Eds.), *Contemporary Sport Marketing*, Routledge, London, pp. 23–41.

Csaba, F.F. and Bengtsson, A. (2006), "Rethinking identity in brand management", in Schroeder, J.E. and Salzer-Mörling, M. (Eds.), *Brand Culture*, Routledge, Oxon, UK, pp. 118–136.

Davidson, J. and McDonald, M.G. (2017), "Rethinking human rights: the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, LGBT protections and the linmits of cosmopolitanism", *Leisure Studies*, Vol. 37 No. 1, pp. 64–76.

Donaldson, T. and Preston, L. (1995), "The stakeholder theory of the corporation: concepts,

evidence and implementation", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 20 No. 1, pp. 55–91.

End, C.M., Dietz-Uhler, B., Harrick, E.A. and Jacquemotte, L. (2002), "Identifying With Winners: A Reexamination of Sport Fans' Tendency to BIRG", *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, Vol. 32 No. 5, pp. 1017–1030.

Escalas, J.E. (2004), "Narrative Processing: Building Consumer Connections to Brands", *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, Vol. 14 No. 1–2, pp. 168–180.

Ferrand, A., Chappelet, J.L. and Séguin, B. (2012), *Olympic Marketing*, Routledge, Abingdon.

France, C., Merrilees, B. and Miller, D. (2015), "Customer brand co-creation: A conceptual model", *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, Vol. 33 No. 6, pp. 848–864.

Gebauer, J., Füller, J. and Pezzei, R. (2013), "The dark and the bright side of co-creation: Triggers of member behavior in online innovation communities", *Journal of Business Research*, Elsevier Inc., Vol. 66 No. 9, pp. 1516–1527.

Gibson, H.J., Xuequing Qi, C. and Zhang, J.J. (2008), "Destination Image and Intent to Visit China and the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games", *Journal of Sport Management*, Vol. 22 No. 4, pp. 427–450.

Gregory, A. (2007), "Involving Stakeholders in Developing Corporate Brands: the Communication Dimension", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 23 No. 1–2, pp. 59–73.

Gyrd-Jones, R. (2019), "Co-creative brand storytelling: from persuasion to identification", in Ind, N. and Schmidt, H.J. (Eds.), *Co-Creating Brands: Brand Management from a Co-Creative Perspective*, Bloomsbury, London, pp. 202–208.

Gyrd-Jones, R.I. and Kornum, N. (2013), "Managing the co-created brand: Value and cultural complementarity in online and offline multi-stakeholder ecosystems", *Journal of*

Business Research, Vol. 66 No. 9, pp. 1484–1493.

Hays, S., Page, S.J. and Buhalis, D. (2013), "Social media as a destination marketing tool: its use by national tourism organisations", *Current Issues in Tourism*, Routledge , Vol. 16 No. 3, pp. 211–239.

Heere, B. and James, J.D. (2007), "Sports teams and their communities: Examining the influence of external group identities on team identity", *Journal of Sport Management*, Vol. 21, pp. 319–337.

Hendricks, J. (1992), "Learning to act old: Heroes, villains, or old fools", *Journal of Aging Studies*, Vol. 6 No. 1, pp. 1–11.

Iglesias, O. and Bonet, E. (2012), "Persuasive brand management", *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, Vol. 25 No. 2, pp. 251–264.

Iglesias, O., Ind, N. and Alfaro, M. (2013), "The organic view of the brand: A brand value co-creation model", *Journal of Brand Management*, Nature Publishing Group, Vol. 20 No. 8, pp. 670–688.

Ind, N., Fuller, C. and Trevail, C. (2012), *Brand Together: How Co-Creation Generates Innovation and Re-Energizes Brands*, Kogan Page, London.

Ind, N., Iglesias, O. and Schultz, M. (2013), "Building brands together: Emergence and outcomes of co-creation", *California Management Review*, Vol. 55 No. 3, pp. 5–26.

Ind, N. and Schmidt, H.J. (2019), *Co-Creating Brands: Brand Management from a Co-Creative Perspective*, Bloomsbury, London.

IOC. (2009), "The IOC Launches Latest Element of 'The Best of Us' Campaign", available at: https://www.olympic.org/news/the-ioc-launches-latest-element-of-the-best-of-us-campaign (accessed 2 February 2020).

IOC. (2010), *Shaping the Future. IOC Interim Report 2009 – 2010*, International Olympic Committee, Lausanne, Switzerland, available at:

http://www.olympic.org/Documents/Reports/EN/IOC-Interim-Report-2009-2010.pdf.

IOC. (2013), "Olympic Values", The Olympic Museum Educational and cultural services, Lausanne, Switzerland.

IOC. (2014a), "IOC Marketing: Media Guide Sochi 2014", edited by IOC, International Olympic Commitee, Lausanne, Switzerland, available at: http://www.olympic.org/Documents/IOC_Marketing/Sochi_2014/IOC_MEDIA_GUIDE _2014.pdf.

IOC. (2014b), "Olympic Agenda 2020: Context and Background", edited by IOC, International Olympic Commitee, Lausanne, Switzerland, available at: http://www.olympic.org/documents/olympic_agenda_2020/olympic_agenda_2020-context_and_background-eng.pdf.

IOC. (2014c), "Olympic Agenda 2020", available at: http://www.olympic.org/documents/olympic_agenda_2020/olympic_agenda_2020-context_and_background-eng.pdf (accessed 3 June 2017).

IOC. (2017), "IOC launches Olympic brand campaign 'Become The Light'", available at: https://www.olympic.org/light (accessed 2 February 2020).

Jensen, J.A., Turner, B.A., James, J., Delia, E., Greenwell, T.C., McEvoy, C., Ross, S., et al. (2016), "Forty Years of BIRGing: New Perspectives on Cialdini's Seminal Studies", *Journal of Sport Management*, Vol. 30, pp. 149–161.

Jolibert, A., Mühlbacher, H., Flores, L. and Dubois, P.-L. (2012), *Marketing Management: A Value-Creation Process*, 2nd ed., Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke; New York.

Kapferer, J.-N. (2013), *The New Strategic Brand Management: Advanced Insights & Strategic Thinking*, 5th ed., Kogan Page, London.

Karadakis, K., Kaplanidou, K. and Karlis, G. (2016), "Resident awareness and perceptions of legacies for the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympic Games", *Society and Leisure*, Vol. 39

No. 2, pp. 195–209.

Kenyon, J.A., Manoli, A.E. and Bodet, G. (2018), "Brand consistency and coherency at the London 2012 Olympic Games", *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, London.

Kim, W., Jun, H.M., Walker, M. and Drane, D. (2015), "Evaluating the perceived social impacts of hosting large-scale sport tourism events: Scale development and validation", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 48, pp. 21–32.

Knott, B., Fyall, A. and Jones, I. (2015), "The nation branding opportunities provided by a sport mega-event: South Africa and the 2010 FIFA World Cup", *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, Vol. 4 No. 1, pp. 46–56.

Kornberger, M. (2010), *Brand Society: How Brands Transform Management and Lifestyle*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Kvale, S. (2007), *Doing Interviews*, Sage Publications, London.

Maguire, J., Butler, K., Barnard, S. and Golding, P. (2008), "Olympism and Consumption: An Analysis of Advertising in the British Media Coverage of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games", *Sociology of Sport Journal*, Vol. 25, pp. 167–186.

Majid, K., Chandra, R. and Joy, A. (2007), "Exploring the Growing Interest in the Olympic Winter Games", *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, Vol. 16 No. 1, pp. 25–35.

Martin, B. (1996), "Ten reasons to oppose all Olympic Games", *Freedom*, Vol. 57 No. 15, p. 7.

Masterman, G. and Wood, E. (2006), *Innovative Marketing Communications: Strategies for the Events Industry*, Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford.

Mazodier, M. and Merunka, D. (2012), "Achieving brand loyalty through sponsorship: the role of fit and self-congruity", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 40 No. 6, pp. 807–820.

McGillivray, D., Turner, D. and Lauermann, J. (2019), "Event bidding: A research agenda for

Major and Mega Sporting Events", in Armbrecht, J., Lundberg, E. and Andersson, T. (Eds.), *A Research Agenda for Event Management*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, pp. 35–47.

Merz, M.A., He, Y. and Vargo, S.L. (2009), "The evolving brand logic: A service-dominant logic perspective", *Journal of the Academy Marketing Science*, Vol. 37 No. 3, pp. 328–344.

Miah, A. and Garcia, B. (2012), *The Olympics: The Basics*, Routledge, Abingdon.

Milton-Smith, J. (2002), "Ethics, the Olympics and the search for global values", *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 35 No. 2, pp. 131–142.

Minnaert, L. (2012), "An Olympic legacy for all? The non-infrastructural outcomes of the Olympic Games for socially excluded groups (Atlanta 1996–Beijing 2008)", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 33 No. 2, pp. 361–370.

Muniz Jr, A.M. and O'Guinn, T.C. (2001), "Brand community", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 27 No. 4, pp. 412–432.

Neuhofer, B., Buhalis, D. and Ladkin, A. (2014), "A Typology of Technology-Enhanced Tourism Experiences", *International Journal of Tourism Research*, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, Vol. 16 No. 4, pp. 340–350.

Nyangwe, S. and Buhalis, D. (2018), "Branding Transformation Through Social Media and Co-creation: Lessons from Marriott International", in Stangl, B. and Pesonen, J. (Eds.), *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism: Proceedings of the ENTER International Conference in Jönköping, Sweden, January 24-26, 2018*, Springer, New York, NY, pp. 257–269.

O'Reilly, N. and Séguin, B. (2008), *Sport Marketing: A Canadian Perspective*, Nelson Education, Toronto.

Oliveira, E. and Panyik, E. (2014), "Content, context and co-creation: Digital challenges in

destination branding with references to Portugal as a tourist destination", *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, SAGE Publications Ltd, Vol. 21 No. 1, pp. 53–74.

Poland, B.D. (2003), "Transcription Quality", in Holistein, J. and Gubrium, J. (Eds.), *Inside Interviewing: New Lenses, New Concerns*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Pongsakornrungsilp, S. and Schroeder, J.E. (2011), "Understanding value co-creation in a co-consuming brand community", *Marketing Theory*, Vol. 11 No. 3, pp. 303–324.

Preece, C. and Kerrigan, F. (2015), "Multi-stakeholder brand narratives: an analysis of the construction of artistic brands", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 31 No. 11–12, pp. 1207–1230.

Robert B., C., Richard J., B., Avril, T., Marcus Randall, W., Stephen, F. and Lloyd Reynolds, S. (1976), "Basking in reflected glory: Three (football) field studies.", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 34 No. 3, pp. 366–375.

Rojek, C. (2006), "Sports celebrity and the civilizing process", *Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics*, Vol. 9 No. 4, pp. 674–690.

Sarkar, S. and Banerjee, S. (2019), "Brand co-creation through triadic stakeholder participation: A conceptual framework based on literature review", *European Business Review*, Vol. 31 No. 5, pp. 585–609.

Schembri, S. (2009), "Reframing brand experience: The experiential meaning of Harley-Davidson", *Journal of Business Research*, Elsevier Inc., Vol. 62 No. 12, pp. 1299–1310.

Schembri, S., Merrilees, B. and Kristiansen, S. (2010), "Brand consumption and narrative of the self", *Psychology & Marketing*, Vol. 27 No. 6, pp. 623–638.

Schmitt, B., Joško Brakus, J. and Zarantonello, L. (2015), "From experiential psychology to consumer experience", *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, Vol. 25 No. 1, pp. 166–171.

Seguin, B., Richelieu, A. and O'Reilly, N. (2008), "Leveraging the Olympic brand through the reconciliation of corporate and consumers' brand perceptions", *International Journal*

of Sport Management and Marketing, Vol. 3 No. 1/2, p. 3.

Shankar, A., Elliot, R. and Goulding, C. (2001), "Understanding Consumption: Contributions from a Narrative Perspective", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 17 No. 3–4, pp. 429–453.

da Silveira, C., Lages, C. and Simões, C. (2013), "Reconceptualizing brand identity in a dynamic environment", *Journal of Business Research*, Elsevier Inc., Vol. 66 No. 1, pp. 28–36.

Smart, B. (2018), "Consuming Olympism: Consumer culture, sport star sponsorship and the commercialisation of the Olympics", *Journal of Consumer Culture*, Vol. 18 No. 2, pp. 241–260.

Snell, S. (2016), "Citizen Participation within Mega Event Planning: the Case of the London 2012 Olympic Games", Edinburgh Napier University, Edinburgh.

Snell, S. (2020), "Human Rights, Events and the Media: A Neglected Relationship", in Page, S.J. and Connell, J. (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Events*, 2nd ed., Routledge, Abingdon.

Spaaij, R. (2012), "Olympic rings of peace? The Olympic movement, peacemaking and intercultural understanding", *Sport in Society*, Vol. 15 No. 6, pp. 761–774.

Srivastava, R.K. (2011), "Understanding brand identity confusion", *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, Vol. 29 No. 4, pp. 340–352.

Stipp, H. and Schiavone, N.P. (1996), "Modeling the impact of Olympic sponsorship on corporate image", *Journal of Advertising Research*, Vol. 36 No. 4, pp. 22–28.

Suomi, K., Luonila, M. and Tähtinen, J. (2020), "Ironic festival brand co-creation", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 106, pp. 201–220.

Talbot, A. and Carter, T. (2018), "Human rights abuses at the Rio 2016 Olympics: Activism and the media", *Leisure Studies*, Vol. 37 No. 1, pp. 77–88.

Tavares, O. (2006), "Olympic Values in the 21st Century: Between Continuity and Change", Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Olympic Studies Centre (CEO-UAB), Bellattera, Spain, available at: http://ceo.uab.cat/lec/pdf/tavares.pdf.

Theodoraki, E. (2007), *Olympic Event Organization*, Buttherworth-Heinemann, Oxford.

Tjandra, N.C., Ensor, J. and Thomson, J.R. (2019), "Co-Creating with Intermediaries: Understanding Their Power and Interest", *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing*, Vol. 26 No. 3–4, pp. 319–339.

Toohey, K. and Veal, A.J. (2007), *The Olympic Games: A Social Science Perspective*, 2nd ed., CABI, Sydney, Australia.

Underwood, R., Bond, E. and Baer, R. (2001), "Building Service Brands Via Social Identity: Lessons from the Sports Marketplace", *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 1–13.

Vallaster, C. and von Wallpach, S. (2013), "An online discursive inquiry into the social dynamics of multi-stakeholder brand meaning co-creation", *Journal of Business Research*, Elsevier Inc., Vol. 66 No. 9, pp. 1505–1515.

Veloutsou, C. and Black, I. (In Press). "Creating and managing participative brand communities: The roles members perform", *Journal of Business Research*, available at:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.06.032.

Wassong, S. (2009a), "Challenges and opportunities for the Olympic Movement in future decades: an educational and historical-educational perspective", *IOC's Postgraduate Commission*, available at: https://library.olympic.org/Default/doc/SYRACUSE/161840/challenges-and-opportunities-for-the-olympic-movement-in-future-decades-an-educational-and-historica (accessed 25 August 2019).

Wassong, S. (2009b), "Challenges and opportunities for the Olympic Movement in future

decades: an educational and historical-educational perspective", *IOC's Postgraduate Commission*.

Woisetschläger, D.M. and Michaelis, M. (2012), "Sponsorship congruence and brand image", *European Journal of Marketing*, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, Vol. 46 No. 3/4, pp. 509–523.

Woratschek, H., Horbel, C. and Popp, B. (2014), "The sport value framework – a new fundamental logic for analyses in sport management", *European Sport Management Quarterly*, Vol. 14 No. 1, pp. 6–24.

Yin, R.K. (2014), *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 5th ed., Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Zagnoli, P. and Radicchi, E. (2010), "The football fan community as a determinant stakeholder in value co-creation", *Physical Culture and Sport Studies and Research*, Vol. 50, pp. 79–99.