

Synovate survey on the Olympic Games... Greatest show on earth or five-ringed circus?

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30 November 2007, HONG KONG – With the countdown clock in Tiananmen Square registering just over 250 days to go, the eyes of the world are swinging towards China and the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games. The Games are arguably one of the most important global events for marketers... and the Beijing Games even more so, as they provide an 'in' to the world's biggest marketplace. But have the world's consumers even registered it's happening yet?

Synovate asked over 9,500 people in the US, Asia Pacific and Europe about all things Olympic Games and found some surprising results.

Where are the Olympics anyway?

Forty five percent of consumers across the world did not know that next year's Olympic Games will be held in Beijing. But a further 45% did know, with Australians being the most aware at 94%, followed by the French at 71% and the Singaporeans with 68%.

Synovate's Jan Hofmeyr, director of innovation for the Brand & Communications practice, says that, in the circumstances, 45% overall awareness is something that Olympic sponsors and marketers should be quite pleased with.

"China's Games are a little different to past efforts in terms of sponsors and their marketing programmes. Many have lower market shares in China and hope the Olympic sponsorship will springboard their efforts in this enormous market. Given this focus, awareness across the rest of the world is icing on the cake."

Sponsorship and money

When asked if they noticed sponsors of the Olympic Games, 63% said yes, with the awareness factor in post-Olympic countries reaching 42% in Australia, 51% in the US and 78% in Germany.

Respondents were evenly divided on the idealism versus cynicism scale - half agreed the Games are all about the money and half disagreed with the statement that 'at the end of the day, the Games are more about making money than a commitment to excellence in sport'. Europeans were more likely to land on the cynical side, with the French (64%), Polish (61%) and Serbians (60%) fairly sure it is all about the mighty dollar. Malaysians also agreed at 58%.

More idealistic – or perhaps more accepting – are the Americans (43%), Australians (39%), Indians (38%) and Dutch (34%).

Hofmeyr comments that the difference between most European countries on the one hand, and the United States on the other, is what most interests him.

"The Europeans are more likely to think 'it's all about money' in something of a backlash against excessive commercialisation. In the US, by contrast, people expect things to be commercially exploited. It's an often-celebrated part of the culture."

Challenges in Beijing

Beijing has been in the press a lot more than usual with the run up to the Games, and of major concern is the city's pollution, so it's not a surprise that 53% of survey respondents rated pollution as one of the main challenges.

Security is also an issue with 49% saying it would be a challenge for China. Language is another barrier for Beijing with 47% naming it as a challenge, followed closely by traffic congestion at 46%. But of the 12 countries surveyed, only 0.1% felt there would be a problem with the food, hygiene and cultural differences.

Are there benefits to hosting the Games?

A resounding 'yes' was the answer from the world's consumers. In fact, only 3% of respondents thought that there would be absolutely no benefits to staging the Games in their country.

Hofmeyr thinks the 82% who foresaw economic benefits for their country hosting the Games was a striking figure. "People seem positively disposed to hosting the Games, no matter what economists might say!"

The Thais felt the strongest about the potential benefits with 91% ready to open their doors to the world.

Another benefit people identified is that their country would be better known to the rest of the world (66% overall). Again, Thailand felt the strongest (90%).

That hosting the Games would bring national pride had a 64% overall tally, with yet again the Thais feeling strongest at 82%. What is also interesting is that the US and Australia - countries who have had experience in hosting the Games - still felt strongly about national pride, at 75% and 74% respectively.

Let's not forget the athletes - 63% felt that if their country hosted the Games it would be a boost for their sportsmen and women.

Who will be on the medal dais?

So are the Games' winners boringly predictable? More than a third of respondents agreed that results were predictable. With many experts expecting China to challenge the States at the top of the medal tally for the first time, this may be an even more of a top-of-mind issue in the lead up to the Beijing Games.

The Synovate study found that respondents from those countries that tend to do well at the Games still think the results are unpredictable, such as the US (82%), Germany (66%) and Australia (63%). Those countries that do not bring home a consistently high medal count did feel that the same countries always win. These included Thailand where 63% said results were predictable, Malaysia (56%) and Singapore (41%).

Hofmeyr calls this 'small country complex'. "These countries are world-class players in many non-sporting fields but do not dominate at events like the Olympics. So they have a sense of the sporting powers as being completely dominant."

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About the survey

Synovate interviewed over 9,500 people across 12 countries about their awareness of, and knowledge about, the Olympic Games. The countries surveyed were a mix of past Olympic hosts and countries that have not yet hosted the Games. It covered Australia, France, Germany, India, Italy, Malaysia, The Netherlands, Poland, Serbia, Singapore, Thailand and the United States.

About Synovate

Synovate, the market research arm of Aegis Group plc, generates consumer insights that drive competitive marketing solutions. The network provides clients with cohesive global support and a comprehensive suite of research solutions. Synovate employs over 5,700 staff in 115 cities across 51 countries.

For more information on Synovate visit www.synovate.com