

Comparison of Communications Support for the Olympics: April, 1908 to July, 2012

In April 1908, television, radio, and internet did not exist. Three of modern days largest media channels had not yet been invented. In order to publicise the Olympic Games, organisers relied heavily on newspapers, magazines, and posters. The only way for members of the public to watch the Olympic Games was to attend the live events. Otherwise, they could read about the events in the newspaper or in magazines. By July 1948, radio and television had been invented. The Olympic Games were broadcasted on the radio to fifty-eight different countries and The British Broadcasting Corporation broadcasted the Olympic Games live on television from London. Five-hundred thousand people watched the July 1948 Olympic Games live on television in the United Kingdom. In July 2012, it was estimated that four billion people would watch the opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games. People living all around the globe would watch the event live on an array of different media channels such as television, radio, and the internet. As new technology and media channels develop, communication support for the Olympic Games changes and expands. (Jackson, 2012)

In the 19th century, newspapers and magazines were the main media channels used to communicate information widely to the public. William Maxwell Aitken (“Lord Beaverbrook”), Rupert Murdoch, and Conrad Black, are a few internationally known publishers that largely influenced media in the 19th century. All three men had a strong influence in the newspaper industry and held positions such as writers, chairmen’s of major newspapers, and publishers. Because printed media was the main media channel used to communicate information to the public at this time, these men controlled a lot of public opinion. (Atkin, 2012)

In the 1930s, radio emerged as a major communications channel that could be used to both publicise information and control public opinion. Politically, radio was used widely to persuade public opinion during war time. For example: the German government used radio in World War II to communicate with the public and to spread propaganda. (Atkin, 2012)

In the 1950s, television emerged as a major media channel used to spread information such as news, advertising, and entertainment. Television is arguably the biggest communications tool for shaping public opinion. Marshall McLuhan endorsed this theory by arguing that television is a “cool” medium. This means that television is easy to follow, highly involving to its viewer, and largely shapes public opinion. McLuhan argued that television was like “cool” jazz. He believed that the low definition and poor quality of the television picture is unstructured, and generated more listener participation than other forms of media. McLuhan argued that radio by contrast is a “hot” medium. It has higher definition (contains more data), requires less listener participation, and is not as highly involving as television. (McIlwraith, 1994). Today, the internet is the most recent communications channel used to spread information widely and may possibly be replacing other media channels such as radio, television and newspaper. Whether magazines, television, radio, or internet are more effective media channels for widely spreading information is still highly debated.

One of the largest communication evolutions throughout the Olympic Games is the mobile phone. During the Atlanta 1996 Olympic Games, the Motorola StarTAC was invented, which allowed spectators at the Games to carry a mobile phone with them. At the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, text messaging was emerging and spectators at the Games could send text messages to their friends and family as updates on the events. At the Beijing 2008 Olympic

Games spectators and viewers at homes could use Wi-Fi to receive updates on the various sporting events. At the 2012 London Olympic Games, people around the world used Siri to gain sports knowledge and Olympic updates from anywhere. (Bidisha, 2013)

Social Media is a major recent evolution in communications and support for the Olympic Games. In comparison to the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, the London 2012 Games used more mobile communications, and social media. For example: when athletes won bronze, silver, and gold medals in the London 2012 Games, the information was immediately shared on social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook. Across the globe, we can now share every memorable moment of the Olympic Games instantly with the internet and social media. When comparing social media of the 2008 and 2012 Olympic Games, smart phone users have more than quadrupled, U.S mobile video users have grown by eight times, Facebook users have grown by nine times, and Twitter users have grown by twenty-three times. During the London 2012 Olympic Games, more than three million people “liked” the Olympic Games on Facebook. Social Media is expanding fast. (Bidisha, 2013)

New technology is emerging rapidly. As new technology emerges, the way information is spread changes, and communication goals are achieved in new ways. At one time, oral traditions such as storytelling, newspapers, radio, and television played fundamental roles in public relations. Within recent years, telecommunications and the internet have provided the public relations practitioner with more communication support, and play arguably a more vital role in disseminating information than oral traditions. Public relations practitioners in modern times rely heavily on the internet and social media to spread information. When promoting events such as the Olympic Games, practitioners can use this new technology to their advantage by spreading

information widely and rapidly across the globe. With more people using the internet, mobile communications, and social media, it is important for public relations practitioners to use these media channels as tools to achieve communications goals. For example: Promoters of the Olympic Games post information about events on Facebook, Tweet gold, silver, and bronze medalists on Twitter, and upload videos of events on YouTube.

During the 1948 London Olympic Games, communication support relied heavily on radio. If you did not attend the games, you could listen to various events on the radio. This new technology provided listeners with the next closest experience to front row seats. They could listen to various events live through radio. During the 2012 London Games, fans not attending the Olympic Games had both a “front row” and “back stage” experience, where fans could watch the events on television, listen to events on the radio, and athletes could speak directly to their fans through social media. The increased use of social media from the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games to the 2012 London Olympic Games provided individual athletes with heightened publicity. Fans of the 2012 London Games could follow athletes on Twitter, and athletes could promote their individual brand through social media. Fans also became more engaged in the games because they could “like”, follow, and comment on the various events. (Humphreys, 2012)

Communication support for the Olympic Games has changed and expanded enormously since the 1908 London Olympic Games. From newspapers to the internet, technology has developed incredibly from the early 1900's to 2013. Because of recent developments in technology, the Olympic Games have been publicised differently and more widely. When comparing the 1908 London Olympic Games to the 2012 London Olympic Games, technology

has had an enormous impact on communication support. During the 1908 Olympic Games, public relations professionals relied solely on newspapers and magazines to publicise the events. During the 2012 Games, public relations professionals were able to use newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and the internet to publicise the events. Furthermore, people in 2012 were able to choose among various media channels for receiving information about the events. At one time, newspapers and magazines were the “go-to” media channels for publicists. Now that the public has many different options for media channels, they are choosing the internet and social media, rather than printed media. New technology provides the public relations practitioner with more communication support, and the public with more media channels than ever before. This expansion in technology changes the way major events such as the Olympic Games are publicised.

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