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The Olympic Movement's New Media Revolution: Monetisation, Open Media and Intellectual Property

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In October 2009, the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) 13th Olympic Congress devoted one of its core discussion themes to the 'digital revolution' – asking how digital technologies could be harnessed more effectively to promote the values of Olympism. Until then, it had not been a major innovator in the area of digital technology or, at least, it had not taken full advantage of the web's possibilities. In contrast, from one Games to the next, the IOC's core media partners have steadily developed media technology and delivery from high definition broadcasting, television on demand to the online streaming of Olympic sports.¹ The explanation for this difference is that the Olympic movement has rarely taken ownership of such innovation, benefiting by association with world-leading media partners rather than developing its own intellectual property around being a media technology innovator.

The 2009 Congress signalled the IOC's intention to occupy a more influential role in the new media world. In this case, the focus was on embracing the internet and mobile-based environments that have emerged over the last five years: what may be termed the Web 2.0 era. This concept emerged through an O'Reilly media technology conference and described the new architecture of web platforms, which placed the acts of rich user experience, online participation, collaboration and data sharing at the centre of its framework.²

The development of such web technologies coincided with the emerging discussions around the notion of changing audiences.³ The birth of Web 2.0 was characterised by the convergence of broadcast media and innovative internet technologies.⁴ However, perhaps more significantly, it described a shift towards 'social media', which was defined by user-generated media content, and a fragmentation of audiences across multimedia platforms.⁵ Through their online interactions with the competitions and wider celebrations, sports audiences were becoming participants rather than just spectators. Each of these dimensions raises questions about what may be defined as the Olympic media in the

future and, indeed, what role professional journalists will have compared with the increasing numbers of active and empowered audience members,⁶ known to some as online,⁷ independent or citizen journalists.⁸ Such individuals are now playing a central role in constituting the landscape of media content that surrounds an Olympic Games, whether it is through their creation of original content – photographs, films, blog entries – or their syndication of others' content. A simple example of this is the popular social media platform Twitter, which is powered by the way in which individuals re-send content produced by others to their own network of 'followers'.

Martin Sorrell's keynote presentation during the IOC Congress highlights some of these preliminary discussions for its future work in this area. The importance of Sorrell's contribution can be read on numerous levels, though its core message was that opening up the IOC's digital assets to new media environments would permit a more effective control of their brand and, notably, it would optimise their financial stability.⁹

In this context, the present chapter addresses aspects of the Olympic movement's new media revolution. It begins with an overview of how the media world of the Olympic Games is situated and already undergoing change. It assesses the online activity and media infrastructures generated by recent Games, which demonstrate the shifting culture of Olympic media reporting. Moreover, in characterising the full landscape of the Olympic media, we consider whether new, alternative, non-professional and online forms of media environment can continue to develop and exist outside of the IOC's purview, or whether they will eventually become part of the IOC's monetisation package negotiated in advance of each Games. Finally, we argue on behalf of a new media infrastructure for the Olympic Games, which draws on the potential of citizen media reporting, as a direct challenge or complement to existing mass media. While much of what we say may have a bearing on how the Paralympic Games operates – and mega-events more generally – the focus here is on the Olympic Games, as this event provides the basis for our empirical work that has informed this theoretical analysis.

The Olympic media: finance, operation and change

It is widely understood that the Olympic infrastructure relies on the financial revenue it generates through the negotiation of broadcast rights and sponsorship from domestic sources and the Olympic Program (TOP).¹⁰ In short, without funding from McDonald's, Coca-Cola and so on, the Olympic movement would not be able to function, and its financial crisis in the 1980s reminds us of this fragility. Indeed, if one examines many cultural activities, the shift towards privately endowed programs, rather than publicly funded ones, explains how the Olympic Games is one of many such cultural endeavours that rely on such relationships.

In each of the funding dimensions, there is a complex set of economic arrangements, which make it difficult to accurately articulate how much financial investment the Games requires. For example, in exchange for a fee paid to the IOC, television broadcasters are given exclusive rights within their territory to broadcast Olympic sports. However, while this figure is significant, it does not include the broadcaster's own operational costs incurred by staffing and managing their Olympic program. Additionally, individual broadcasters may also incur costs on a range of sub-contracts to develop further creative content, including graphics, film, music or any other multimedia format. Consider, for instance that the BBC planned an expenditure of £13.7 million for its full television, radio and online coverage of the Beijing Olympics, but that this figure excluded an additional £2.5 million for 'talent, staff and online coverage approved separately'.¹¹ The National Audit Office (NAO) reports further indicate that the Beijing Games were the biggest outside broadcast the BBC had ever mounted,¹² capturing 80 per cent of the UK population who watched for at least three minutes. Thus, the amount of money invested into media production often far exceeds the rights paid by the broadcasters. Moreover, the symbolic status of the Olympic Games as the biggest show on earth helps explain why it is so appealing to broadcasters, in part, because it is seen as such a great opportunity for companies hoping to advertise their products through the association.

Equally, focusing solely on what official broadcasters do around an Olympic Games does not provide the entire picture of the media work that happens. For example, while the Organizing Committee will create venues and a Media Village for the official media, the notion of what constitutes a media venue extends well beyond these resources. Indeed, defining what constitutes a media organisation has become increasingly difficult if it is based on the top-down characteristics associated with traditional media institutions.¹³

The assumption that all media professionals are exclusively interested in reporting just the sport competitions and the accompanying ceremonies has long passed, as broadcasters create multi-layered Olympic programs that range from documentaries about athletes, political programs about local issues arising from the Games development and broadcasting aspects of the Olympic cultural program. Thus, today, broadcasters invest much more into an Olympic Games than just their sports departments. For example, at the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, the BBC sent its lead news anchor Huw Edwards to undertake the commentary of the Opening Ceremony. This was the first time that the BBC had not used a conventional sports broadcaster for such a role.

Additionally, the Olympic media population is now more diverse, with different needs. At the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympic Games, there were at least six types of media venue in operation during the Games period. Alongside the Main Press Centre (MPC) and the International Broadcast Centre (IBC) – both IOC and OCOG venues – and the city-led British Columbia International

Media Centre, there were three other independent media centres that were established to provide a space for reporting on stories from within Vancouver and the greater British Columbia area. The space each organisation occupied had varying degrees of media production facilities, ranging from physical spaces for debates to existing purely within the online environment, with no physical representation of their institution.

Nevertheless, physical spaces, such as buildings to host production equipment, press conferences, staff or outdoor broadcast equipment stored in large vehicles, are still core forms of media capital within an Olympic city, though understanding the importance of this capital also involves coming to terms with the different roles played by each. In addition to the IOC/OCOG venues, various media environments are organised by the Olympic sponsors for their own purposes, through which they can develop their own broadcast content. For example, the Visa Olympians Reunion Centre at the Athens 2004 Summer Games provided media access to athletes and other VIPs by hosting interviews and press conferences during the Games time. Such an entity is made possible via a range of revenue streams, though only the IBC and MPC are governed by the IOC/OCOG accreditation systems. These latter centres focus on sports coverage and accredited media have exclusive rights to cover the sports.

However, in the same way that not all Olympic athletes stay in the Olympic village, not all accredited media base themselves within the official broadcasting areas. It is also common for journalists to operate out of their own dedicated studios, on a scale that may rival the official facilities. For example, NBC alone, which pays 53 per cent of all broadcast revenue for each Olympics, took over 2000 employees to the Beijing 2008 Olympic Summer Games and had their own media centre overlooking the 'Bird's Nest' Olympic Stadium. Similarly, the Canadian broadcaster CTV constructed a three-studio set overlooking downtown Vancouver, one part of which had a street-facing backdrop, actively encouraging the local audience to gather around their facilities to be captured on screen. In this case, the physical media infrastructure becomes part of the Olympic festival experience in its own right, creating new forms of Olympic venue within the Olympic city. Alternatively, Canada's CBC, which, for the first time in Olympic history, was not the Olympic broadcaster during the 2010 Games – occupied a central location in Vancouver during Games time – directly opposite the Aboriginal Pavilion (a Cultural Olympiad venue). During the Games, CBC was criticised for ambush marketing, when it started distributing Canadian flags to hockey fans on the way to their venue; their logo was on the reverse side of the flag. In this regard, even major broadcasting organisations can find themselves outside the Olympic inner circle. In sum, over the past ten years, the range of provisions for media at an Olympic Games has expanded, along with the numbers of journalists who occupy them. According to the British Olympic Academy's Modern Olympic guide, the

Athens 2004 Summer Games had well over 20,000 media staff from accredited broadcast sources arriving during the course of Games time; this equalled the number of athletes, stakeholders and audience of the first games 100 years previously.¹⁴ This change coincides with more sophisticated practices of place marketing, which cities have cultivated in order to maximise their visibility to Olympic tourists. Notably, since the Sydney 2000 Games, the non-accredited media centre (NAMC) has emerged as a sophisticated media venue within the Olympic city, usually delivered by the host city. Such media centres provide facilities and access to visiting international journalists/bloggers and national journalists without involvement of the IOC media accreditation process.¹⁵ For example, the aforementioned host-city-controlled British Columbia International Media Centre at the Vancouver 2010 Games fits into this category and offered journalists access to story ideas and press releases with a distinct cultural and tourist-orientated perspective. Yet, there are increasing numbers of overlaps between the official Olympic program and the non-accredited media centre program. For example, the day after the Opening Ceremony of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, the star of the ceremony, Australian singer Nikki Webster, gave a press conference at the NAMC. Alternatively, on the days leading up to the Vancouver 2010 Games, torch-bearers would also fill their visit to the city with other political engagements that involved the NAMC. For instance, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger ran with the Olympic torch and then went to the NAMC to give a press conference.

Historically, the journalists at the NAMC have been professional journalists who are not part of the rights-paying community. Yet, the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Winter Games was the first Olympiad to have a substantial and independent *social media* or *online media* representation, with a number of alternative media centres and platforms acknowledged and formalised prior to the event. Indeed, *Olympic Review* cited Vancouver 2010 as 'The First Social Media Olympics'.¹⁶ Yet, while the IOC's articulation of this status focused on the user-generated content from IOC-controlled Facebook, Flickr and Twitter sites, a lot more was happening on the ground in Vancouver that describes a different population of social media contributors. The various new media centres in the city that were mentioned earlier included *W2 Media and Culture House*, a community media centre situated in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, one of Canada's poorest postcodes; *True North Media House (TNMH)*, a fully online media centre, allowing participants to print their own media pass and to publish and distribute information using their own websites and social networks; and the *Vancouver Media Co-operative*, a mostly anti-Olympic campaign which distributed information about protests across the city. Much like the non-accredited media centres, the citizen reporters who registered with these media spaces emerged with the intention of covering alternative messages, which were not just about the Olympic sport, but the broader festival at large. Moreover, the 2010 Games provided an increased focus on digital content generated and

distributed by the interface of informal networks of creative workers and online activists from within the host city, some without the aforementioned physical base and communications conducted via free web platforms.

The Olympic online media – bloggers, for example – and independent social media centres (such as W2 and TNMH) are fast becoming an integral part of the Olympic media landscape. Yet, their messages may not always correspond with those of officialdom, thus presenting a challenge to what may be seen as the Olympic media. Thus, one of the central questions about their work that concerns us here is whether the output of such alternative media is likely to be integrated within the official program. However, perhaps a more radical consideration is whether their existence will jeopardise the financial base of the Olympic movement and its relationship with the media, its core financial stakeholder. After all, if an Olympic fan with a high-specification camera can shoot the same quality of images as a professional photographer in the press section of an opening ceremony, the currency of the latter's work – and thus the incentive to pay for the privileged access – is diminished. In turn, without the right to maintain exclusivity over such reporting opportunities, media organisations will not be incentivised to pay large amounts of money to have such access.

The non-accredited and independent media centres of the Olympic Games arise at a time when the capacity of user-created digital broadcasting and reporting has become a mainstream, mass participation culture.¹⁷ Already, Web 2.0 start-up organisations have become dominant forces in media content distribution, with such web platforms as Facebook, Twitter and Flickr indicating just a few of the major players who've managed to sustain viable business models on the back of user-created content.¹⁸ The low cost of entry to the self-publishing realm of blogging, image and video hosting and short and mobile message sharing has blurred the boundaries between the media producers and the media consumers.¹⁹ As access to content creation, content distribution and content consumption becomes predominantly free to those who have access to the internet, the landscape of media production shifts towards one in which media audiences become part of the entire process, giving rise to a potentially new power relationship between broadcasters, journalists and the audience.²⁰ Although questions remain about whether the new communities of reporters are beginning to occupy the privileged position of traditional media,²¹ our focus returns to scrutinising the IOC's enthusiasm to harness new media communications to promote the ideals of Olympism and, in particular, find a way of monetising the Olympic digital assets.

Monetising digital assets

The concept of monetisation has been a central part of the web since its inception. When the first dot-com bubble burst in 2001, questions arose about the long-term sustainability of e-commerce. Such mergers as AOL with Time

Warner – and their subsequent separation – reinforced the uncertainty of this period. In recent years, monetisation has focused on how it may be possible to translate user-generated content into market knowledge, which could enhance the unit value of products and services. Before explaining the implications of monetisation for the Olympic movement, it is first useful to explain the history of online monetisation. The financial model of successful web ventures is often considered mysterious, though in most cases it relies on two core principles. The first has to do with the generation of marketing data, which may then be sold to third parties to assist with the advertisement of products or services, either within or outside of cyberspace. There are numerous examples of how this works, from Google's Gmail, which develops targeted adverts based on the history of a user's Gmail content, to the popular presentation sharing platform Slideshare, which generates advertising based on the content of presentations that users publish on their site. The second is a more recent principle and relies on creating predominantly free services which engage a large consumer base, complemented by a comparatively small paid subscription for users who want to pay for additional functionality. Wired magazine Editor Chris Anderson describes this as the 'freemium' model, where the funds are generated from specialised and often niche content, which users have been known to pay for, and in turn, develops additional premium services which provide support for the majority of the free web media.²² A good example of this is Google, which utilises data gathered from its search facility to promote tools such as Analytics (a free website statistics program) and sell Ad-words (a 'paid-for' advertising system) to individuals, groups and organisations that are interested in tracking their profile online using Google Analytics, with a view to improving their impact through Google's Ad-word program, which allows for businesses to pay a fee to manipulate their rankings within Google's search database.

There are innumerable other start-ups which have adopted a similar model, from Flickr and YouTube to Facebook and Twitter. Some – like Google Search – provide opportunities for businesses to advertise to their user base using demographically targeted advertising. To give some sense of the magnitude of this foundation, Facebook – which is the largest example of this kind – has over 700 million active users (September 2010), each of whom is reached by target marketing.

Alternatively, the real-time micro-blogging website Twitter has made its profits through promoted tweets and deals with Google and Microsoft – \$20-25 million from each in return for access to Twitter's searchable and real-time trends and news discussion topics. In this case, the monetisation of Twitter mirrors the Google/Microsoft model, where relevant advertising is shown during the search results.

Their model functions on a simple logic where, if the product or service is powerfully innovative, then its adoption by a mass audience will give rise to communities of premium users, which can then permit the software to be

profit-making. Moreover, the open source varieties of such software furnish the developers with a massive community of other developers who will work for free to improve the application.²³ Notably, this system is not so different from the way in which the Olympic Games relies on volunteers who make the delivery of the Games possible. Were it not for such committed individuals who value the Games, the event would not be sustainable.²⁴

Monetisation and the Olympic web

When thinking about digital monetisation in an Olympic context, the primary observation is to note that the IOC's assets stretch beyond the short time frame of each Games or, indeed, beyond merely optimising the audience engagement with the sports competitions. Rather, discussions about Olympic monetisation should operate on two levels – Olympic Games hosts and the Olympic Movement in general. For the former, it is helpful to begin by recognising that the most effective Games legacies will occur by incentivising host communities – and global audiences – early in the period leading up to a Games. This period is often when public support for the Games is at its greatest and when the local community is both incentivised and excited by the prospect of the Olympic festival. In turn, this seven-year period opens up the Olympic brand beyond a short-term mega-event lasting several weeks to an ongoing process of construction, documentation, motivation and delivery, which allows for the telling of stories outwith the frame of sporting competition.

Thus, the monetisation of the Olympic movement's digital assets at large may draw first on the pre-Games legacy period, during which time millions of 'clicks' will occur in search of Olympic content. In turn, the number of clicks generated could become an integral part of the IOC's rights package. However, in order for this to happen, it may first be necessary for the IOC to gain sponsorship from a large online media provider, such as Google (which Sorrell suggested during his recommendations), for it to capitalise fully on this potential. The IOC would need to adapt the freemium concept of Google Ad-Words on a much grander and exclusive scale in order to compete with the existing broadcast models associated with previous games.

These dimensions of the monetisation problem indicate the various ways in which the IOC may be more strategic in its utilisation of Web 2.0. Moreover, before concluding that this model suggests a complete overhaul of the Olympic media model, it is necessary to recognise that traditional rights holders are already adopting such models in their own strategies.

However, the trend towards monetisation also raises a number of difficult ideological questions about the Olympic movement, which we wish to address next. Thus, it is also interesting to consider the consequences of open source media communities in a climate where monetisation leads to the ongoing

retention of power and control, rather than its distribution. There are particular issues that are at stake when this subject is considered in the context of the Olympic movement's values, as opposed to any other sports event or organisation. This has to do with how the Olympic movement expresses its social and humanitarian goals through the Olympic Charter. On one view, the monetisation of digital media may be antithetical to the Olympic movement's constitution and the ethos of digital culture. For example, what would it mean to directly monetise Twitter feeds that are distributing content about the Olympic Games, especially when there are almost infinite ways in which to receive the content for free elsewhere online? Would such practice even compromise the ethics of Twitter, as described in its rules of best practice? To respond, it will be useful to look more closely at the social media platform of Twitter.

The Twitter Olympics: opportunity and compromise

One of the challenges with debates about digital media is how frequently the landscape of digital media changes, which can frustrate any attempt to make claims about what may have lasting implications for online practice. However, as with the development from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0, there are structural shifts in the types of environment that last longer than others and which transform digital environments substantially. Good examples of this include email, which remains one of the most popular communicative devices online. Alternatively, shifts in programming language, from HTML to XML, is another good example of changes that have a lasting impact on the experiences of internet users and on the architecture of the web. Twitter is another example, in part because it has revolutionary potential – perhaps as the platform that will bring an end to the need for email. As was noted earlier, Twitter is a micro-blogging, short-message service, which allows users to post messages of up to 140 characters. Its use has grown quickly over the past five years and it is now an integral part of most major marketing campaigns. Recently, the Library of Congress in the USA announced it would be archiving all tweets, thus reinforcing its role as an archival tool and historical record of what takes place online.

Twitter is a freely available platform, allowing users to post content to others by utilising a system that involves 'following' another's content, rather like a news subscription system. For example, if I am a Twitter user interested in the Olympics, I can search for other users that 'tweet' about the Olympics and follow them so that information I care about is brought to my attention. To this end, another of the remarkable shifts brought about by such platforms as Twitter is from a situation where web surfers would go looking for information, to one where information is brought to them automatically. When examining how online development aligns with periods of Olympic activity, one may conclude that the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Games were the

first Twitter Olympics, as Twitter was used so extensively by a range of people and institutions.

During the Games, official Twitter streams were being advertised through Twitter's own basic mechanism. For example, a Twitter community called 'Olympians on Twitter', which was linked to NBC's Twitter 'list' would appear on a user's Twitter homepage around Games time. As one of the major media partners for the Olympic Movement, NBC's use of Twitter demonstrates the convergence of the traditional (and accredited) media and the notion of community-generated social media, often described by traditional media as 'user generated content'.

Since the emergence of Twitter in 2006, there have been various examples of such institutional tweeting, but returning to our central point, one of the key questions that faces the Olympic movement is whether such institutional tweeting ought to be the core route towards embracing the digital revolution, or whether it contributes to the loss of the meaning of the word 'social' in social media. After all, the core social capital of platforms like Twitter resides in the direct person-to-person contact, without public relations officers or website managers intervening. Arguably, the institutional Twitter account is an affront to this ethos. Indeed, there are a number of examples of institutional tweeting which have offended the Twitter community and, ultimately, diminished the core value of the tweeting organisation. For instance, a widely recognised example within social media communities occurred in June 2009 when one of the UK's leading furniture retailers Habitat (@HabitatUK on Twitter) used Twitter's most popular discussion 'trending' topics to promote a competition for store gift cards. Unfortunately, they were quickly brought to the attention of the Twitter community when some users realised that Habitat UK were hijacking hashtags – short-life keyword terms associated with events, used to add tweets to a category – related to the Iran elections and subsequent protests. The Twitter community were not only angered by Habitat's lack of Twitter etiquette, but also annoyed by the business's refusal to admit they had done wrong in the first place. The offending tweets were deleted and Habitat returned to a corporate PR approach, only tweeting broadcast messages and advertisements, all the while remaining disengaged from the rest of the community. Since then, there has been a surge in the development of public social media policy documents, offering employees, stakeholders and associates advice on using platforms such as Twitter to promote brand awareness – as well as bowing to the pressure for transparency in the conduct of new media procedures. In this context, it is essential that organisations understand the business ethics of social media compared to more traditional media forms. The former tend to involve communication across communities, whereas the latter involve organisations speaking through the media, which will then interpret the news for the community. These are considerably different practices and mis-reading them can

be catastrophic for an organisation, as the Habitat UK example demonstrated. Corporate tweeting or blogging is considered offensive to the Twitter community because it replaces the individual, direct communicator with an inhuman public relations department or agency. Furthermore, the ease in which information (true or otherwise) can be spread through Twitter users' personal networks, through 'retweeting' – the act of forwarding links and statements generated by others, allows for momentum against injustices to gather with speed.²⁵ For example, in 2010 an employee of Vodafone used the company's corporate account to tweet a homophobic remark. Alternatively, an independent artist, also in 2010, accused the stationery company Paperchase of plagiarism.

These examples quickly attract a large cohort of Twitter users who become part of a campaign, by screen-grabbing the offensive material before content is deleted and emphasising that the damage has already been done.

Conclusion: the risk of open media

It would be a mistake to characterise media change as an inherently risky enterprise, not least because it has been taking place on a continual basis for the past 100 years.²⁶ One might even say that change is a defining condition of media culture – or even that structural change rarely occurs, since very often traditional mass media organisations are quickly able to appropriate new environments to maintain their dominant position.²⁷ However, the IOC is undergoing transformations to its management of media content, which may change the way that media organisations operate at an Olympic Games. To this end, it is conceivable that further transformation may jeopardise the present privileged position of the media and the value the Olympic movement accrues from such relationships. After all, there are no precedents from which the IOC may learn to feel assured of continuing their secure position, since there has been no other medium like the internet. Consider one simple principle that distinguishes it from other modes of communication: *user-generated content*. Never before has an individual had such a capacity to destabilise the information hierarchy than is afforded by the Internet – where a dynamic personal website can be more powerful than a static, institutional domain in terms of search recall in an engine like Google. This challenge to institutions is tangible and visible, but it exists regardless of whether an institution opens its media or not. Indeed, it should remind organisations that their audiences are now powerful figures in promoting their brand. In fact, resistance to change is more likely to result in the loss of credibility, as other individuals and organisations compete within the online space for alternative solutions to a brand that has been made more vulnerable for failing to change. This is particularly important in the context of a short-life brand like an Olympic Games, which must endeavour to quickly dominate search-and-find results in a very short time.

However, the more persuasive argument for opening up to an uncontrolled media platform involves taking into account how internet users migrate from one platform to another. Thus, if an institution or organisation is not present in a major social media environment like Facebook, it will reduce its contact time with its internet audience just because that is where the audience is located. This is made apparent when examining the number of user-generated groups about the Olympics that can be found in such environments. The IOC and the OCOGs of Vancouver 2010, London 2012, Sochi 2014 and Rio 2016 have each taken to using Facebook as an official source of information beyond Games time, based on the successful uptake of the Facebook 'pages' interface during the Vancouver Games. Indeed, in 2009, the IOC appointed a Director of Social Media, working directly with its Communications team. Up until the point of the Olympic Congress discussion in 2009, there was nothing of this kind available within Facebook, though there were many pages that appeared to be endorsed by the Olympic movement, including clear breaches of intellectual property rights. Thus, the IOC's transformation is a clear sign of its beginning to adapt to the demands of media change. However, it remains to be seen whether it is capable of monetising intellectual property through these channels. Again, we are seeing the organisation being placed in a position where it must share content as openly and freely as the existing user-generated groups.

This is why it is risky for an organisation to not adapt to the changing digital sphere and develop an approach that permits the early adoption of new media environments. This is not to underestimate the dramatic implications of such a shift for institutions like the IOC. Indeed, for any large, transnational organisation, developing an adoption strategy that does not jeopardise the effectiveness of existing contractual arrangements is risky. However, there are yet further reasons why this is important to pursue. One may argue that, as web-based revenue increases, the Olympic proposition may become less attractive if it fails to come packaged with new media rights benefits. To this end, it may be harder for the IOC to retain global sponsors if it fails to innovate in this area. Arguably, the IOC's realisation of this was evident when deciding to encourage spectators to upload photos of sports competitions to the popular photo-sharing platform Flickr during the Vancouver 2010 Games. This was the first indication that change is afoot.

In the short term, the monetisation of Olympic assets is likely to have value particularly for the non-sporting dimensions of the Games, which currently do not fall within the obligations of media contractors. It is for this reason that the prospect of media change becomes even more complex and interesting, since it indicates a shift from branding just sports to branding cultural and social activity. In such a future, the Olympic Games may no longer be characterised as a media event, but as a media festival, defined by the sharing of creative media content by engaged citizens with diverse political viewpoints.

Notes

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