

The Reality of Rio

Was this really #Apocolympics Now?

Gailynn Nicks and Leah McTiernan



Or were the Games the catalyst for a fresh look and a new tone to the link between sponsors, organisers, audience and athletes that reflects the participative nature of brands and citizenship in the connected world?

#Apocolympics has certainly been one of the trending hashtags over the Games, with its allusion to all the problems of the Olympics. In *Apocalypse Now* a mad man (Kurtz) creates his own renegade army, a movie based loosely on Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" and using many of the themes from T.S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men".

A lot has happened since London 2012. Economic concerns about Brazil and the cost of the Games have kept the sponsor's approach muted while the Zika virus meant some athletic stars stayed at home. Nearly 1.3 million tickets

remained unsold just prior to the opening ceremonies, with many venues remaining empty throughout. Doping scandals have meant audiences have booed medal ceremonies – taking on the role they felt the IOC should have played; sponsors have felt obliged to speak out when they would typically stay quiet. Furthermore, there was a Twitter storm over commentators' pejorative reporting on female athletes despite this being the most successful Games ever in terms of female participation. One way or another people have spoken and the power of their voices has been felt.

Global and local sponsors and advertisers have been having to face up to these new realities. After selling more than US \$1.2 Billion in advertising, NBC Universal faced lower than expected ratings throughout the games with several reports suggesting "make goods" would be required.

The shift was evident with the significant backlash after their Opening Ceremonies coverage. NBCU argued it's because of viewers' predilection for binge-watching. NBC Sports stated, "As we did for London, we inserted a few more commercials earlier in the show so that we can afford time later in the show to present as much of the ceremony as we can...given that the commercial load was very similar to London, we believe that consumption habits such as binge-watching and 'marathoning' have changed perceptions among the viewing audience regarding commercials."

It is a post Hulu/Netflix/video streaming world for all. With change and adversity comes opportunity, and there are some great examples of how Olympic sponsors have embraced what will be an ongoing challenge.

Think Experience

Branded entertainment, content and brand experiences open up the opportunity to engage and enrapture audiences as well as to create shared and earned media.

- Omega, the official timekeeper of the Games, opened Omega House on Ipanema Beach and has posted stories online, like "Timekeeping at Rio 2016"
- Samsung's 85 hours of Virtual Reality programming in the USA together with NBC
- McDonald's "Embody Spirit of Friendship" campaign which brought 100+ children from 18 countries to Rio to participate in the Opening Ceremonies
- Hershey, a Team USA sponsor, hosted a National S'mores Day Party at the Olympic Park on August 10

- Qantas, the official airline of the Australian Olympic Team, filmed a safety video that includes various Team Australia athletes



Use Social to Engage

Many of the large global sponsors have made use of Facebook and YouTube for several games. This time the physical presence of both McDonald's and Coke in Rio was low key in comparison to London as their global TV advertising campaigns were less widespread and the focus moved to social media.

Beyond posting numerous videos on YouTube, other options have included more focus on the athletes, including Facebook Live interviews, social media takeovers by athletes, social polls and Snapchat filters.

Think Broadcast, but be creative!

Despite it all, broadcast media still has the highest overall reach. For events such as the Olympics, where people want to know what is happening in 'real-time', it is the go-to media choice. However, it is not enough to just show up (even as an "official sponsor"). Without top quality creative that plays to the core values of the Games, you still risk low recall and limited response, especially since more and more consumers are complaining about the overload of commercials interrupting their enjoyment of live events.



Stir ALL emotions, not just positive emotions

Empathy, executed appropriately, is a powerful emotion to capture attention and engage. As our facial coding analysis demonstrates, tapping into the full spectrum of emotions can have a far greater impact. Perhaps in response to societal sentiment, the global sponsors have taken note.

- P&G's campaigns tap into the darker side of everyday training to make it to the top
- Samsung and Visa have supported the formation of a team of refugee athletes at Rio, respectfully showcasing their stories in their campaigns
- The latest edition in Powerade's "Just a Kid" campaign follows Shakur Stevenson from a tough neighbourhood in Newark, NJ all the way to Rio

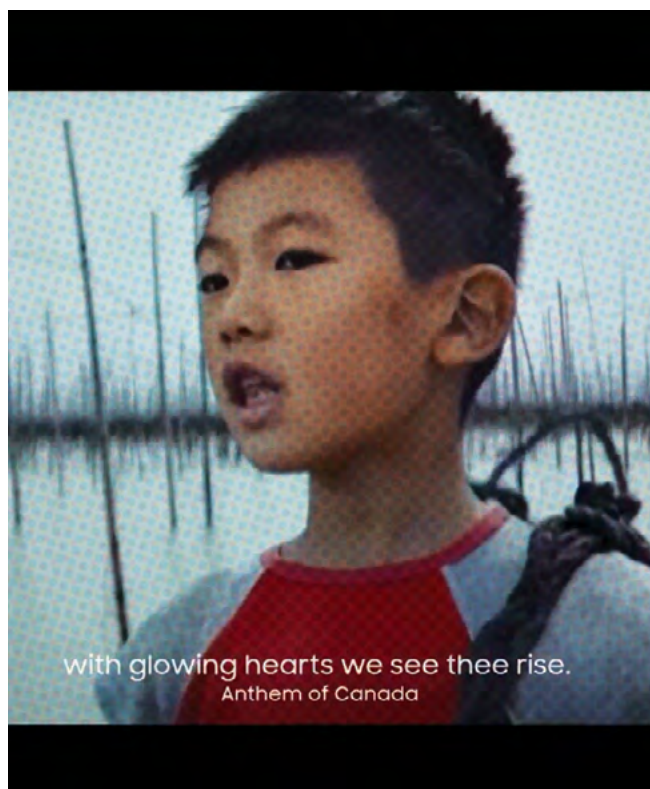
Of course, the Olympics should be about happiness and joy, which is why Britain's Channel 4 "We are the Superhumans" focuses on celebration.

Consider socio-cultural trends

Leading thinkers like Malcolm Gladwell have suggested that the idea of hosting an Olympic event in a new city each year is outdated. The Olympics are simply a microcosm of global culture that advertisers and sponsors cannot ignore. A large proportion of Brazilians are still opposed to the Rio Games and, as acknowledgement of the country's sentiment, sponsors were more muted in their host-country coverage during the run up to the events. As a global sponsor attempting to help build a global community, Visa is promoting acceptance, not just of its card, but of everyone regardless of their roots.

Use the Olympic Theme in a way that Resonates with your Brand

Most have learned this lesson by now, but it is about how you make the Olympic theme (or any theme) distinctly your own. Samsung's "The Anthem" showcases how mobile technology can bring the world together in a show of global unity.



Remember to keep it simple

Viewers' attention is still on the athletes and the competition at hand. Their incredible feats and dedication continue to inspire and lift us all from the day-to-day. For sponsors who focus on themes that can manage these aching insights and stay simple and true to their brands, there are rewards. P&G has done this so well with "Thank You Mom".

With the flame in Rio about to be extinguished, it will be interesting to see how advertising and the sponsorship role evolve in the four years leading up to the Opening Ceremonies in Tokyo 2020. It is worth remembering some of the lines of T.S. Eliot's poem:

“ Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow
For Thine is the Kingdom

” Between the conception
And the creation
Between the emotion
And the response
Falls the Shadow
Life is long

Getting it right is a balancing act, but one well worth achieving for sponsors and the public alike.

Let the anticipation begin!

- i. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-olympics-rio-tickets-idUSKCN10E21H>
- ii. <http://adage.com/article/special-report-the-olympics//305429/>
- iii. <http://www.cnn.com/videos/tv/2016/08/05/exp-gps-gladwell-clip-olympics.cnn>