

Olympic Channel: showcasing the Games in the age of digital plenitude

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Abstract

In the age of multiple viewing portals, the Olympic Games are consumed through a whole plethora of platforms on a global scale, from live television broadcasting to social media. Nevertheless, once the action fades out, mainstream media fails to provide a sustained coverage of the Games in the years between the Olympics. The launch of the Olympic Channel, following the Rio 2016 Closing Ceremony, is a strategic attempt to bridge this gap. This article provides a historical overview of the relationship between the Olympic Games and the media and examines the distinctive proposition offered by the Olympic Channel. This platform takes advantage of the multiple technological advances that have tremendously altered the sports-media nexus to maximize users' opportunities to access a broader range of Olympic-themed content. Through three core components (TV, Features and Original Series), the Olympic Channel lends opportunities to transcend the nationalized coverage and the lack of diversity often found in mainstream media. The mix of contemporary and archival footage, the promotion of minority disciplines and the provision of unique angles to international sport has the potential to broaden citizens' knowledge and understanding of the Olympics and its fundamental values.

Keywords

Olympic Channel, media, Olympics, digital plenitude, history, diversity.

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The Olympics are widely regarded as the “world’s largest hypermedia event” (Girginova, 2016, p. 243). As Billings, Angelini and MacArthur (2018, p. 204) highlight, “even if the Olympics is offered infrequently relative to other sports leagues and tours, the amount of content offered and the overall level of viewership exceeds virtually all other cultural media barometers”.

As Angelini, MacArthur, Smith and Billings (2017, p. 780) rightly argue, “the primetime Olympic broadcast remains the crown jewel of all broadcast television products”. That being said, the proliferation of multiple viewing portals (Lotz, 2014; Ramon & Haynes, 2018) means that fans “are able to watch more live Olympic broadcast coverage than ever before and increasingly personalize their interaction with a plenitude of content through interlocking screens” (Hutchins & Sanderson, 2017, p. 9). New technologies have created ‘digital plenitude’ “where once there was comparative scarcity in terms of quality content and channels of communication” (Hutchins & Rowe, 2009, p. 356). The Games are now consumed through a whole plethora of platforms on a global scale, from live television broadcasting to social media (Fernández-Peña, 2016). As Horne and Whannel (2011, p. 153) remind us: “around the world, for two brief weeks, television screens, newspaper pages, internet sites, blogs and twittering focus upon the Olympic Games. The Olympic site is briefly the centre of the world”.

Nevertheless, once the action fades out, mainstream media fails to provide a sustained coverage of the Games in the years between the Olympics. As Price (2016, p. 42) argues, “traditionally, after the homecomings, reflections and extinguishing of the Olympic flame, the period after a Games sees many athletes fade from public consciousness”. The launch of the Olympic Channel in 21 August 2016, following the Rio Closing Ceremony, is a strategic attempt to bridge this gap. The central aim of the channel is to “provide a platform for the continuous exposure of Olympic sports and athletes beyond the Olympic Games period and help create anticipation while providing opportunities to ‘re-live the experience’ after the Games” (Olympic Channel Services, 2016). The channel operates under the subtitle “Where the Games Never End” and is available on any device, including laptops, tablets, mobile phones and Smart TVs.

This article provides a historical overview of the relationship between the Olympic Games and the media and examines the distinctive proposition offered by the Olympic Channel. The platform builds

upon the technological evolution has tremendously altered the nature of media sport content economy (Hutchins, 2014) to maximize users' opportunities to access a broader range of Olympic-themed content. The Olympic Channel lends opportunities to transcend the nationalized coverage and the lack of diversity often found in mainstream media, thus representing a genuine vehicle to promote the core values associated with Olympism.

The Olympics and the media: from print newspapers to the digital era

As Moragas (1992a, p.9) points out, “nowadays the Olympic Games cannot be understood without the influence of mass media”. Media reporting on the modern Olympics has been decisive for their development and for their configuration as global significant events (Marshall, Walker, & Russo, 2010). The concept of Olympic media, however, “has been in a constant stage of evolution” (Billings, Angelini & MacArthur, 2018, p. 46).

The first modern Olympic Games, celebrated in Athens in 1896, were born in a context characterized by the beginning of the development of a modern system of mass communication (Horne & Whannel, 2011). At the end of the nineteenth century, print media contributed to the increasing popularity of sports and in turn this promoted an increase in newspaper circulation (Boyle, 2006). In the specific case of the Olympics, the support of newspapers was crucial in the organization and success of the first Olympic congress, held at La Sorbonne University in 1894. At that time, Pierre de Coubertin established an alliance with the journalists, who supported his plans to revive the Olympic Games (Coubertin, 1894).

Despite this emerging interest in sport, the first Olympic Games received little attention from the European press (Horne & Whannel, 2011). In fact, “only eleven journalists ventured to attend the Games and reported the revival of Olympic tradition” (Girginov & Parry, 2005, p. 83). Nevertheless, attention from the media began to progressively increase. At Stockholm 1912, the total number of accredited journalists was over 500 (Moragas, 1992b, p. 133).

Radio was introduced at Paris 1924. During Amsterdam 1928 and Los Angeles 1932, radio broadcasting of the Olympics was characterized by technical and economic restrictions. First, the nonexistence of transoceanic cable for the radio broadcasting,

as well as the lack of a technology to enable the long-distance air delivery of the signals, complicated the development of radio. Second, the economic issues that contributed to blocking the radio expansion were the press lobby in Amsterdam and, in the case of the Los Angeles, the crusade of the Hollywood film studios against radio (Llinés & Moreno, 1999). By Berlin 1936, “extensive coverage became normalized and became a regular feature of radio broadcasting” (Marshall, Walker, & Russo, 2010, p. 266).

The first television broadcasting through CCTV (72 hours of footage) took place at Berlin 1936 and the images from the stadium were broadcast to 21 auditoriums located in Berlin, Potsdam and Leipzig (Fernández Peña & Ramajo, 2014). This pioneer delivery of Olympic sporting coverage was made with only three cameras. Despite that the technology still had to be vastly improved, the history of the fruitful alliance between the Olympics and television started in Berlin.

London 1948 “marked the next major advancement in Olympic television as the Games were transmitted live with the primary intent of reaching private home audiences” (Billings, Angelini, & MacArthur, 2018, p.24). The coverage consisted of nearly 64 hours of live broadcasting by the BBC, as well as regular information in the news bulletins. Despite the technical difficulties, London 1948 showed “the power of sports broadcasting to bring communities together, even under severe economic and social conditions” (Haynes, 2010, p. 1043).

Even though it had already operated at Berlin 1936, London 1948 and Melbourne 1956, television became more important from Rome 1960, when the first live international television transmission of the Games was made. Eighteen European countries received live images of the Games and citizens from the US, Canada and Japan could watch the Games only hours later. The distribution of the signal in Europe was assured by the Eurovision network, while recorded tapes were flown to the US and Japan. Since then, television “has been the dominant medium at the Olympic Games for many years, in both financial and cultural terms” (Miah & García, 2012, p. 124). Some of the television milestones that substantially helped the globalization of the Olympic Games include the introduction of significant technological advances: satellite broadcasting and slow-motion replay (Tokyo 1964); colour coverage (Mexico 1968); video (Munich 1972), super slow motion and enhanced graphics (Los Angeles 1984); the new technologies of information and

HDTV (Barcelona 1992); and full digital television coverage and the introduction of 3D broadcasting (London 2012).

In recent years, the Internet has also become a powerful medium for transmitting the Games. Despite the fact that the first Internet video experience showing the Olympics was released at Athens 2004, it wasn't until Beijing 2008 that the use of the Internet as a platform to transmit footage and as a video library (Chen & Colapinto, 2010) was consolidated. Since Vancouver 2010, the Olympic Games have also been transmitted through blogs and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012).

The last two editions of the Summer Olympics clearly illustrate the current scenario of 'digital plenitude' in which the Games are distributed and consumed. The estimated global audience of London 2012, taking into consideration the broadcasting media, the traditional media and the online and mobile platforms was 4.8 billion people around the world (IOC, 2012). The emergence of Instagram in the Olympic media landscape and the creation of the Olympic Athletes' Hub were remarkable milestones during the event (Fernández Peña, Ramajo & Arauz, 2014). The Rio 2016 Olympics were broadcasted in 220 countries, with a global audience reach of 3.2 billion people on television, 1.3 billion unique users on digital platforms, and 7.2 billion video views on social media (IOC, 2018, p. 21). NBC scheduled 6,775 hours of Olympic coverage through its myriad platforms (Billings, Angelini, & MacArthur, 2018, p. 15). During the event, "187 million tweets and 1.5 billion Facebook interactions about the Olympics were made" (Tang & Cooper, 2018, p. 309). Coinciding with the Rio 2016 Closing Ceremony, the Olympic media ecosystem received a new entrant: the Olympic Channel.

Objective and method

In order to trace the expansion of the Olympic Channel, this article examines the output generated by the platform and explores the distinctive value that it delivers through the provision of "live, catch-up and/or supplementary coverage" (Hutchins & Sanderson, 2017) connected to the Games. For this investigation, quantitative and qualitative content analysis (Bryman, 2016) have been performed on the channel's website (<https://www.olympicchannel.com>) and mobile app from August 2016 to May 2018 (22 months). The qualitative method was mainly chosen

to conduct this exploratory research as it offered a great deal of flexibility in the design and in the collection of data. To obtain a richer insight, this qualitative analysis has been supplemented by numerical data that illustrates the evolution in the content provided by salient sections of the Olympic Channel, such as the “Original Series”.

Complementarily, to identify how the Olympic Channel used the Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Games to drive fans to the platform, a quantitative analysis was performed on the Twitter, Facebook and Instagram handles of the Olympic Channel during the six-month run-up to the Games (8 August 2017 – 8 February 2018) and during the actual event (9 February – 25 February 2018). This examination was carried out by using three specialized tools (Twitonomy, Netvizz and FanpageKarma) that have been recently employed in scholarly research (Larsson, 2017; López & Kettner-Høeberg, 2017).

Results

Research reveals that the Olympic Channel has been a platform for a diverse sporting menu. The channel tries to get recognition towards the different Olympic sports, even to traditionally lesser-covered disciplines which remain off the radar in mainstream media. Beyond showcasing popular sports such as swimming or athletics, the Olympic Channel incorporates content from 62 sports, shedding light on many disciplines, including Nordic combined, luge, curling, fencing, trampoline or badminton. As Yiannis Exarchos, Executive Director of Olympic Channel Services points out: “with the exception of very few sports, most do not enjoy today a worldwide coverage, and the channel can offer them this [...] we can show competitions that otherwise would not make it on to people’s screens” (Nelson, 2017). Beyond incorporating sections dedicated to news and agenda, the website is built around three core axes that provide distinctive value.

TV: A celebration of live sport

First, the “TV” section of the Olympic Channel provides users with live sports coverage produced in collaboration with International Federations (IFs). By October 2016, the Olympic Channel had already signed an agreement with 33 International Federations

(Price, 2016). In 2017, the number of agreements had risen to 54, including collaboration “on more than 500 live events” (Olympic Channel, 2017). This window “has the mutually beneficial effect of giving IFs greater traction for their events through an alternate broadcast stream which, in turn, can then drive followers of that sport to the Olympic Channel App, website or social media pages” (Price, 2016, p. 44).

Through this section, sports fans have recently had the chance to watch events such as the ISF World Schools Championship (Cross-country); the UIAA Ice Climbing World Cup; the FIE EPEE Grand Prix in Budapest (Fencing); and the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games, to list a few. Live coverage of those events helps to raise the profile of men and women’s competitions across the board.

Features: creating continuity between past, present and future Olympics

Second, “Features” includes a selection of the best Olympic content, relating the past, the present, and the future of the Olympic Games. As well as providing highlights and behind-the-scenes content from Rio 2016, some features engage with users in the run-up to the forthcoming Summer, Winter and Youth Olympic Games. There are features devoted to the build-up of Tokyo 2020, Paris 2024 and Los Angeles 2028, as well as to the preparation of the Buenos Aires 2018 Youth Olympic Games.

Other features incorporate “from the vault” content to look back on past Olympics, such as Beijing, London or Sochi. Another salient example is a feature launched to revisit the 25th anniversary of Barcelona 1992 Olympics. The feature includes “a selection of iconic moments from the Barcelona Games as Video on Demand (VOD) for the first time ever online, including the Opening and Closing Ceremonies, full competition replays and highlights of some of the Games’ most memorable moments”. One of the latest features premiered at the Olympic Channel is “The Nagano Tapes”, which presents the “inspiring story of how the Czech Republic shocked the world in Nagano, capturing gold at the first Olympic ice hockey tournament to feature professionals from the National Hockey League (NHL)”.

It should be noted that throughout its features, the Olympic Channel has also reflected on declined disciplines such as Ski Ballet or Speed Skiing, which were demonstration sports in Calgary 1988 and Albertville 1992. By selecting and amplifying

the history of many well-known and forgotten Olympic sports, events and heroes, the features on the Olympic Channel have become “cultural artefacts that facilitate nostalgia as a way of feeling and thinking” (Pickering & Keightley, 2006, p. 930) about the Olympics, contributing to preserve, revisit and reimagine the memory of the Games.

Original Series: showing athletes “in a new light”

The third essential component of the Olympic Channel, “Original Series”, gives access to more than 700 episodes from 54 original programmes. As widely known, in the recent years major players such as Netflix, Amazon and Hulu have significantly altered the logics of content production, distribution and consumption (Wayne, 2017). These companies have also invested large amount of resource in creating original series to nourish their portfolios and enhance their positioning. In the same vein, leading sports organizations such as the IOC have also invested in original productions that “embody the spirit of Olympism and allow for a more thorough understanding of the athlete” (Billings, Angelini & MacArthur, 2018, p. 226).

In that regard, the original series created by the Olympic Channel pursue to show athletes “in a new light”. The Olympic Channel lends priority to inspiring stories from athletes across the globe who have overcome struggles to achieve their goals. As Greg Groggel (2016, p. 28), Senior Commissioning Editor of the Olympic Channel states, human-interest stories are focused “more on the blood, sweat and tears of victories big and small that occur in the years in between Games”. Content also focuses on a wide range of issues behind the play, including technology, training, nutrition and lifestyle.

Salient examples here include: *Legends Live On* (which explores where are 15 Olympic heroes now and how are they inspiring future generations); *Day Jobs* (which reveals how many world-class athletes work to fund their Olympic dream); *The Tech Race* (which focuses on technology and science as applied to Olympic sports and athletes); or *Identify* (which delves into the journey of five transgender athletes and how sport helped them find their true identity). Another revealing example is *Camps to Champs*, focused on investigating “how sport can positively change lives by visiting refugee camps and areas housing people who have been displaced” (Olympic Review, 2017, p. 14).

The following table reflects the remarkable increase in the range of original series and the total number of episodes available throughout the last months. While in December 2017 the Olympic Channel offered 36 series (with a total of 432 episodes), in May 2018 the number of original series had raised to 54, featuring a total of 709 episodes.

Table 1. Evolution of the original series delivered by the Olympic Channel (1/2)

Original Series	10/12/17	10/3/18	10/5/18
A Game for Two	8	8	8
Africa Cycling Revolution	6	6	6
Against All Odds	6	6	7
Anatomy Of	6	8	12
Before They Were Superstars	40	40	40
Burning Questions	0	10	10
Cambodia's Search for Glory	1	1	1
Camps to Champs	4	4	4
Classic Finals	0	16	20
Coming of Age: China After Beijing 2008	10	10	10
Day Jobs	15	15	15
Design Focus: The Olympic Games	0	0	12
Far From Home	0	6	6
Fashion Behind the Games	6	6	6
Feed the Flame	5	5	5
Five Lines	0	5	5
Flag and Family	0	13	14
Flame Catchers	5	5	5
Flame Catchers: Winter Games	0	15	15
Flow Mode	4	5	6
Foul Play	1	1	1
Game Breakers	0	2	6
Gamers VS	12	12	12
Generation Rise: Middle East and North Africa	14	14	14
Global Games	8	8	8
Global Games 2	0	0	8
Gold Medal Entourage	12	12	12
Groupies	4	4	4

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Table 1. Evolution of the original series delivered by the Olympic Channel (2/2)

Original Series	10/12/17	10/3/18	10/5/18
Heroes of the Future	0	16	16
Hitting the Wall	12	12	12
Identify	5	5	5
Impossible Moments	0	30	30
Kids Call	29	29	29
Legends Live On	24	30	30
My Olympic Moment	8	8	8
Olympians' Tips	57	57	57
On the Line	9	9	9
On the Line: Alpine Skiing	0	6	6
Patagonia Dreaming	10	10	10
Perspectives	0	0	6
Pyeongchang 2018: Stories to Watch	0	15	15
Pyeongchang 2018: Take the Mic	0	0	10
Road to Glory	6	6	6
Sports Swap	6	7	12
Stranger Moments	0	29	29
Synchro Sisters	4	4	4
The Beautiful Games	1	1	1
The Olympics on the Record	35	50	50
The Tech Race	34	34	34
The Z Team	8	8	8
Transform My Meal	16	16	16
Trending Gold	0	7	7
Vinicius and Tom	0	26	26
Viva	1	1	1
Total	432	653	709

Discussion

With these three core axes (TV, Features and Original Series), the Olympic Channel offers many opportunities to transcend the nationalized coverage and the lack of diversity often found in mainstream media (Angelini, MacArthur, Smith & Billings, 2017; Ramon & Rojas-Torrijos, 2018). The mix of contemporary and archival footage, the promotion of minority disciplines and

the provision of unique angles to international sport through the Olympic Channel has the potential to broaden citizens' knowledge and understanding of the Olympics.

As academic literature has extensively revealed, media have tended to focus primarily on their national heroes. Media only tends to amplify the stories of their own sportsmen and sportswomen and have primarily tailored their agenda "towards nationally constituted and regional/local readerships" (Rowe, 2013, p.166). The problem is that there are many occasions in which the coverage downplays "significant accomplishments of foreign athletes" (Angelini, MacArthur, Smith, & Billings, 2017, p. 794). In contrast, the Olympic Channel represents a unique opportunity to promote global stories and transcend the national sports fan market.

According to Mark Parkman, Olympic Channel General Manager, in the first year of existence, the platform included "more than 6,000 pieces of content representing all Olympic sports disciplines and 206 countries" (IOC, 2017). Given the fact that "Olympic media becomes a potentially flawed yet undeniably impactful means for influencing perceptions of human identity in many facets of modern life" (Billings & Kim, 2014, p. 184-185), the wider lens offered by the Olympic Channel can promote internationalism rather than reinforcing patriotic and nationalistic attitudes. The availability of the channel in 11 languages (Arab, Deutsche, English, Spanish, French, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian and Chinese) can also reinforce the value of multiculturalism.

Traditionally, mediasport has also been constructed as a masculine territory, where gender inequalities have not only been legitimized but also accentuated (Tulloch & Ramon, 2017). Despite that the coverage carried out in the recent Olympics by organizations such as the NBC has proved to be much more egalitarian (Billings, Angelini, MacArthur, Bissell, & Smith, 2014), women's sports still "receive little media attention beyond Olympic competition" (Coche & Tuggle, 2017, p. 1). In that regard, the Olympic Channel can be considered a genuine site to enhance equality beyond the two-week periods when the Games are celebrated.

As the bye-law to Rule 48 of the Olympic Charter points out, "it is an objective of the Olympic Movement that, through its contents, the media coverage of the Olympic Games should spread and promote the principles and values of Olympism" (IOC, 2015, p.

92). By promoting “truly unusual stories that may not necessarily translate to the medal stand” (Billings, Angelini & MacArthur, 2018, p. 226), the Olympic Channel contributes to disseminate many values associated to Olympism, including equality, antidiscrimination, friendship, solidarity, justice, multiculturalism, peace and fair play (Parry, 2006). This clearly connects with the ideas put forward in the Olympic Agenda 2020, which states the following: “We must give our athletes and sports the worldwide media exposure they deserve also between Olympic Games. We must give our many actions in the humanitarian, cultural and social field the attention they deserve. We must give the youth better access to athletes, sport, Olympic History, Olympic Culture and Olympic Values” (IOC, 2014, p. 5).

The Olympic Channel and the Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympics

To boost its appeal and reach further followers during the Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Games, the Olympic Channel “offered a comprehensive coverage of the event, with a wide range of news, daily highlights, video and audio coverage, original programming and other features, including interactive games”. This approach helped users to connect with a broader range of disciplines such as alpine skiing, biathlon, bobsleigh, cross country skiing, figure skating or skeleton.

Table 2. Publication and engagement statistics on Twitter. Data retrieved on 26 February 2018 with Twitonomy.

Handle	Run-up to Pyeongchang	Pyeongchang 2018
Timeframe	08/08/17 - 08/02/18	09/02/18 - 25/02/18
Tweets published	2110	912
Tweets per day	11.41	53.65
Retweets	290	43
% of tweets being retweets	13.74	4.71
Replies	177	41
% of tweets being replies	8.39	4.5
Links	789	542
Links per tweet	0.37	0.59
Hashtags	1853	2190
Hashtags per tweet	0.88	2.4
Tweets retweeted	1692	859
% of tweets being retweeted	80.19	94.19
Total number of retweets	111561	492091
Tweets favorited	1775	866
% of tweets being favorited	84.12	94.96
Total number of favorites	224380	637591
Favorites per favorited tweet	126.41	736.25

In addition, the Olympic Channel intensively used its different social media handles to “drive fans to content, and as a key strategy for the growth of the brand” (Price, 2016). In Twitter, the global handle of the Olympic Channel published more than 900 posts during the Winter Games, supplemented with specific content provided by its Spanish and Portuguese versions. As it can be seen in Table 2, the channel boosted its pace of publication (53.65 tweets per day, in contrast to the 11.41 tweets posted per day in the run-up period to the Winter Olympics). This content generated notable engagement, being nearly 95% of the published tweets either retweeted or favoured. The same trend could be observed in Facebook, where 19.3 posts per day were published (see Table 3). In Instagram, the pace of publication (6.6 posts per day) and the engagement figures (likes and comments) were also noteworthy (see Table 4).

Table 3. Publication and engagement statistics on Facebook. Data retrieved on 26 February 2018 with Netvizz.

Period	Posts	Posts/day	Likes	Comments	Shares
Run-up to Pyeongchang 2018	185	1.0	1,018,826	49,164	246,604
Pyeongchang 2018	309	19.3	674,450	41,250	115,041

Table 4. Publication and engagement statistics on Instagram. Data retrieved on 26 February 2018 with Fanpage Karma.

Period	Posts	Posts/day	Video	Picture	Likes	Comments
Run-up to Pyeongchang 2018	291	1.6	84	207	430,633	2,485
Pyeongchang 2018	113	6.6	32	81	283,868	1,569

This intensive task in social media was crucial to drive more fans to the Olympic Channel. As it can be seen in Table 5, the number of the Olympic Channel followers on social media increased remarkably throughout the run-up to Pyeongchang 2018 and during the actual event. In Twitter, 29,698 followers were obtained during the Olympics, while in Facebook, 130,948 new fans joined the Olympic Channel.

Table 5. Increase of the Olympic Channel fans on Twitter and Facebook. Data retrieved on 26 February 2018 with Twitonomy and Netvizz. Note: Instagram data was not available.

Date	Twitter	Facebook
8 August 2017	301,417	2,490,141
9 February 2018 (Start of Pyeongchang 2018)	326,470	2,769,842
25 February 2018 (End of Pyeongchang 2018)	356,168	2,900,790
Growth during Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympics	29,698	130,948

The current challenge for the Olympic Channel is to capitalize on this growth to continue producing attractive content to relive the best moments of the Games, generate engagement in the build-up to the forthcoming events and motivate the consumption of original content.

Conclusion

The Olympic Channel represents a way of reaffirming the strong position of the IOC as content producer and carrier in the age of digital plenitude. The Olympic Channel takes advantage of the multiple technological advances that have not only altered the sports-media nexus but that have also influenced the evolution of the Olympic Games (audio, video, Internet, mobile devices, social media) to offer a robust destination aimed at the continuous exposure of the Olympic sports, events and athletes, regardless of their gender, nationality or specific sporting practices. Despite that television “remains a powerful mediator of live sports” (Boyle, 2014, p. 746) and that “Olympic telecasts still represent the juggernaut of all media offerings” (Billings, Brown, & Devlin, 2017, p. 12), the Olympic Channel aims to complement, rather than displace, the way in which Olympic content is consumed between the Games being played.

The platform, however, is not without limitations. Remarkably, the bulk of content is focused on the sporting competition and does not generally delve into the larger framework of the Olympics (issues of social, economic, political, environmental and cultural nature surrounding the Games). Given that the channel is promoted by the IOC and co-founded by TOP partners Bridgestone and Toyota, critical stories are largely avoided. Therefore, the Olympic Channel conforms to the “festive zeitgeist” (Boykoff, 2014, p. 94) and it presents an almost exclusive positive narrative of the Olympics. Up until now, only *Foul Play* series seeks to explore controversial issues with regard to the Olympics and sports history. Beyond this, while most live events can be streamed regardless of where users are located, regional restrictions due to rights agreements still apply for certain competitions. Arguably, this prevents the Olympic Channel from acting as a truly global showcase.

Further opportunities to enhance the potential of the Olympic Channel include:

1) Establish more partnerships with Rights-Holding Broadcasters (RHBs), National Organizing Committees (NOCs) and International Federations (IFs) across the globe. This will help to expand the Olympic Channel menu to other sports and maximize the profile of those disciplines that have been added to the Olympic programme for Tokyo 2020 (Baseball / Softball, Karate, Skateboarding, Sport Climbing and Surfing).

2) Create more localized versions of the channel. In 2017, the Olympic Channel established partnerships with major broadcasting players to create specific versions of the channel: NBC (USA), Eurosport (Europe) and beIN (Middle East and North Africa). More markets across the globe could be subsequently targeted.

3) Keep up with innovative social media strategies and enhance the use of newer platforms such as Snapchat, bearing in mind that “more than 77% of the audience engaging with Olympic Channel content on its social media platforms is below the age of 35” (Olympic Channel, 2017, p.40).

4) Enhance collaboration with the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) to increase the content related to Paralympic Games. Given the sparse coverage received by Paralympic athletes in mainstream media (Thompson, 2013), this could be a great opportunity in terms of diversity. First steps were taken in Pyeongchang 2018. More than 300 hours of coverage were available on streaming live on Paralympic.org using an Olympic Channel player (IPC, 2018).

To capture an even greater idea of the value provided by the Olympic Channel, further work should be carried out. Future research must track and thoroughly examine the evolution of the platform and its content. Content analysis could be supplemented by in-depth interviews with decision-makers of the Olympic Channel to allow for an in-depth examination of their values, the culture in which they operate and their creation processes. Ethnographic data regarding users' reception would also help to discern their expectations about the Olympic Channel. Now that media events are becoming more personalized (Lotz, 2014), this will also enable researchers to know more about the users' experience as consumers and the ways in which they engage with this platform.

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