The image impact of the 2012 Olympic Games: a preliminary examination of the total pre-Games data

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The image impact of the 2012 Olympic Games: A preliminary examination of the total pre-Games data
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**Introduction**
In 2012 the city of London will host the XX Olympiad Games. The city is competing against other developed and developing countries alike, the competition to host the Olympic Games, and other mega-events, is becoming increasingly fierce (Shoval, 2002). Aside from hosting an international event that may bring perceived benefits, mega-events are considered to be ‘valuable promotional opportunities for places to showcase their attractions to global audiences’ (Horne, 2007, p. 83). In a domestic context, mega-events are considered key in the development of a positive place image; that is, ‘places […] aim to modify their image and obtain some positive associations from hosting mega events’ (Bodet & Lacassagne, 2012). Additionally, successful and well run events can serve to legitimise project and government leaders to domestic audiences (Tominson, 2010). For this reason, London is already considered to be a leading global city (e.g. Knight Frank Global Cities Index, 2011), a key objective for those involved in the development and delivery of the 2012 Olympic Games is to manage the image of London and to improve the image nationally and internationally, and to address any potential negative image formation (DCMS, 2008).

**Methods**
UK citizens (n=610) completed a mixed-methods questionnaire one year to six months prior to the Games. This was comprised of questions measuring personal characteristics, demographic information, sport participation, national pride, and level of engagement in the Games. In this preliminary analysis, data were collated from this pre-Games stage. The aim of this study, underpinned by theoretical-methodological social representation theory (Moscovici, 1984), is to evaluate the image impact of hosting the 2012 Olympics, pre and post Games, for the city of London. It will seek to determine, compare and present the images generated by UK citizens concerning London as a city (i.e. its place brand), the Olympics as a mega-event (i.e. brand ‘Olympic’) and the 2012 Games as a one-off spectacle, and whether there is any transfer of image elements between these entities before and after the Olympics has taken place.

**Results**
Overall, the results tend to show that the three entities (London, the Olympic Games, 2012) are well perceived, and that the people of the UK are excited about the upcoming Olympic Games. This can be seen, for example, in the fact that the 2012 Olympics are already a characteristic of London’s image; and that excitement features as a core element of the 2012 Olympic Games. However, London presents some negative characteristics which may not be improved by hosting the 2012 Olympics (i.e. busy, expensive, traffic/congestion); elements which may, in fact, be exacerbated by the Games. Indeed, busy and expensive also make up the social representation of the Olympic Games generally, but might be considered a peripheral element, rather than a core element as with the 2012 Games.

**Conclusion**
The results presented here provide specific knowledge on how each entity is perceived, and provide a good basis for longitudinal analysis. Further analysis, at the pre-Games stage, will involve re-examining the categories looking at the strength of connections between phrases, and segmentation based on relevant quantitative variables.

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**References**
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport (forthcoming). Before, during and after: making the most of the London 2012 Games. London: Department for Culture, Media and Sport.