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COMPARING CONSUMERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD CHINA AND ITS PRODUCT BEFORE AND AFTER THE 2008 BEIJING OLYMPIC GAMES

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ABSTRACT

China spent 42 billion dollars in hosting the Games in Beijing, hoping to use this opportunity to create a new picture of China as a leader in the international community and bring down commonly-held brand images as: 1) the country troubled with human right violations and 2) the country plagued with environmental issues and 3) manufacturer and exporter of cheap and low quality products. To change these views, three themes were used to portray the new brand image of China using the Olympic Games: 1) people's Olympics, 2) green Olympics, and 3) high-tech Olympics (Berkowitz et al, 2007).

This paper aims to measure the effects of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games on the country's image and consumers' evaluations of the country's product. A mall-intercept method was used to administer the face-to-face interviews between September and October, 2008. A total of 227 useable surveys were collected, with 46 rejections, resulting in a 83 percent response rate. The demographic profile of the sample was compared to that of the US national population. The sample represented well the general US population of active shoppers. The majority of respondents were female (52%), were between 18 and 34 years old (64%), were single (60%), had some college (56%), had annual household income between \$30,000 and \$44,999 (22%).

Paired sample t-tests were conducted to determine changes in consumers' attitudes toward the image of China. The results showed that, after the 2008 Beijing Olympics, consumers' perceptions about China pertaining to technology, human right, environment and quality of products from China were improved. However, all absolute post-scores were relatively low (except technology), indicating that consumers were still somewhat uncertain about image of China and the quality of products from China. These results suggested that a country's and its product images cannot be changed overnight. One single effort at nation branding is not sufficient to generate dramatic impact on all desirable outcomes. Rather, nation branding is a long term initiative.

Nevertheless, the results from this study suggested that the effects of branding China are in the right direction. To sustain such effects, China need to 1) continuously measuring global consumer's perceptions; 2) continuously reinforce the images through different nation branding tools (e.g., World Expo, World Cup, International expositions, etc.); and 3) continuously work with relevant Chinese companies/organization (e.g., Lenovo, Tsingtao beer, Haier, and China Mobile) to promote the right images of China and to sell itself as a brand.