

# The contradictions of the Olympic games in times of pandemic

## Abstract

The 2021 Olympic Games were historic for several reasons, the first to be played outside the official cycle, the first to take place during a pandemic and the first to have empty arenas, these issues were also accompanied by ethical discussions about how to interpret these games and the would be the reasons for its realization. This article will work on how media coverage will reflect these contradictions.

**Keywords:** Covid, mega sport events, Tokyo, Olympics games

Volume 6 Issue 3 - 2022

Marco Bettine,<sup>1</sup> Diego Gutierrez<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of EACH, University of São Paulo, Brazil

<sup>2</sup>Department of Physical Education, University of Campinas, Brazil

**Correspondence:** Marco Bettine, Teacher, School of Arts, Sciences and Humanities, university of São Paulo, Brazil, Tel (11)997532013, Email marcobettine@gmail.com

**Received:** February 10, 2022 | **Published:** May 25, 2022

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic stands as one of the most significant events of the 21st century. The global spread of the disease and the government response with the social isolation and various forms of quarantine impacted all aspects of our daily life. Analyze the long term consequences of this process will take an important part of the academic studies in the coming years.

The sport in all its forms was profoundly impacted by this process. For the first time since its inception in the late XIX century there was a complete stop on professional sport. The halt of professional sport due to natural catastrophes or political turmoil's is not unprecedented however for the first time it was a worldwide phenomenon. The WW2 cancelled most of the professional competitions in Europe, including two Olympic Games and two FIFA Football World Cups however this was a restricted phenomenon, whit the competitions in North and South America occurring regularly.

Professional sport, unlike other activities such as schools and restaurants, would not remain halted for long. With the activities suspended, the associations rushed to develop safety protocols and prove to the authorities that it did not present a risk or contributed to the spread of the disease. In Europe, football leagues stopped mostly in the first half of March 2019, returning to activities in the first weeks of June 2019, no longer suffering interruptions.<sup>1</sup>

In the case of the Olympic Games, the opening ceremony was originally scheduled for July 24, 2020. The spread of the pandemic, with the athletes in most countries trapped at home and the cancellation of several qualifiers made it impossible to carry out the event. So on March 24, the organizing committee announced that the Olympics would be postponed starting on August 23, 2021, making it the first ever Olympics to be played outside the official cycle.<sup>2</sup> In the case of the First and Second World Wars, the Olympic Games had been cancelled, returning to the original Olympic cycle after the end of the conflict.

The return of sports competition would raise a number of interesting questions to be discussed that go far beyond the practical implications. What is professional sport real value? Is it right amidst the deaths and pain caused by the pandemic to hold such celebrations? Was the return of professional sports just due commercial reasons or a genuine popular demand?<sup>1</sup>

These issues will be discussed for a long time in the sociology of sport, and extensive studies on the subject have not yet been produced. Thus, seeking to advance the discussions and propose elements that can support deeper discussions in the future, this study analyzes how the six most accessed news outlets in English covered the Tokyo Olympic Games (OJ) with a focus on how they addressed the ethical issues around hosting an event with this characteristics during a global pandemic.

Sports Mega Events (SME) are an interesting opportunity to debate ethical and social issues. From small events attended mainly by Western countries, they have expanded to become global events watched by billions of people. This was accompanied by its commodification, transforming sport into a global economic complex, involving athletes, journalists, sponsors, sporting goods brands, among others.<sup>3,4</sup>

SMEs have also become large-scale cultural events reflecting cultural and social transformations, Sport acts as a leveler as different cultures merge in an environment with equal conditions and similar rules, contributing to an environment where these differences can be studied.<sup>2</sup>

The Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup are the two biggest sporting events in the World but with different characteristic. The football world cup possess a more homogeneous profile being only one sport with a limited set of participating countries. The Olympic are more heterogeneous, being the biggest woman's event by a large margin,<sup>5</sup> featuring various sports and athletes from a variety of backgrounds. These characteristics contributes to a coverage more focused on social and political issues,<sup>6</sup> making the Olympics a more propitious environment to discuss the pandemic than other sport competitions

Changes in the way sport is covered make the JOs an interesting opportunity to discuss different interpretations of the pandemic.<sup>2</sup> Sports journalism has long been considered apolitical, sometimes referred as the "toy department".<sup>7</sup> There was within the newsrooms and part of the audience the notion that the area should focus mainly on sport, seeking to distance itself from political issues as much as possible, even though sport was often an arena for this type of debate.<sup>8</sup>

The situation has changed in recent years with the sport coverage becoming increasingly politicized,<sup>9</sup> the attitude of the athletes themselves contributes to this situation. Politics and sport often

overlaps and this is not a new phenomenon, however social media and generational changes contributed to a growing number of athletes more involved in social causes as the fight against sexual harassment, racism, homophobia. These actions contributed to politicized sport, as for example the kneeling during the national anthem, as a form of protest against racism, initiated by American Football player Colin Kaepernick, source of much discussion in the press and society in general.<sup>10</sup>

The athletes' attitude itself became more relevant with the growth of social networks. Athletes have always been considered public figures expected to be role models inciting positive behaviors. Social media allowed the athletes to produce their own content and be in touch with their fans 24 hours a day, potentially increasing their influence in public affairs.<sup>11</sup>

In the case of the pandemic, progressive sectors in Western countries expected athletes to contribute to encouraging positive behavior on the part of the population, such as social isolation, vaccination and quarantine. This however did not materialize a heterogeneous group each athlete had their own vision about the situation and while some were happy to act as paragons of good behavior others had different views about the pandemic.

As in the case of vaccination, whit many athletes voicing concern about the vaccines divulging Fake News and unproven theories. A phenomenon not restricted to fringe athletes as for example, tennis player Novak Djokovic, one of the greatest names in the sport who positioned himself against the vaccine. A position shared by other tennis players like the Stefanos Tsitsipas, who declared that he did not saw the need to be vaccinated due to his age and good health, a comment rebuked by the Greek government who stressed the need to all young adults to be vaccinated.<sup>1</sup> The fact that the Greek government saw the need to respond the comments of a single tennis player shows how athlete's com influence the public.

### The uncertainties of games in times of pandemic

The first cases of the disease in Whuhan in early 2020 did not generated much repercussion in the West, so while in China drastic measures were taken by the government, life continued undisturbed in most of the world. On February 19, Atalanta hosted Valencia in Milan for UEFA Champions League round of 16 a match that became infamous due the large number of cases associated with it. The city of Bergamo, nearby Milan, and headquarters of Atalanta soon became the epidemic's epicenter in Europe, due in part because of the match.<sup>1</sup>

The match in Milan was one of the last to be played without restrictions in Europe, with the return game played on March 10 without public. The response to the pandemic varied from country to country, in Western Europe most of professional competitions were halted in the middle of March, soon followed by the US, South America and Oceania. In early April for the first time in history almost all sport competitions in the word were paralyzed, with very few exceptions, like the Belarus Football League.

The sport's suspension eventually led to speculation about the postponement of the Olympic Games. There was still no clarity about the duration and severity of the pandemic, but with the suspension of several qualifying tournaments and most athletes, without access to adequate training facilities, the quality and fairness of the event was impaired.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/greek-government-pushes-back-tsitsipas-vaccine-comments-2021-08-19/>  
<https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/greek-government-pushes-back-tsitsipas-vaccine-comments-2021-08-19/>

Initially, the IOC pressed for the games to be held in the scheduled date, however the withdraw of important countries put extra pressure on the IOC that announced on March 24 the postponement of the games, rescheduled to start on June 23, 2021.

The suspension of professional sport incurred in millionaire loses to clubs and sports entities, so as soon as the games stopped these groups began to lobbying governments for their return, developing protocols that, they claimed, would assure the safety of athletes and reduce the risk of contagion. The main European football leagues returned in early June, with testing and empty arenas. The NBA adopted another strategy playing all remaining games in a sanitary bubble created in a resort in Florida, returning on June 30th.

The return of professional sport did not necessarily raise new questions, but exacerbated already existing tensions. The sports entities claimed that professional sport was important to raise the population's morale; stuck at home people could find in sport an escape valve. On the other hand, the progressive sectors criticized the vision of sport beyond life and death, pointing out the financial issues behind the decision and questioning whether professional sport could alters people morale at all.<sup>1</sup>

The critics also noted that the return was restricted. Only the richest leagues could apply the expensive safety protocols, and had the political leverage to lobby regional and national governments. The smaller leagues stopped for a much longer time, including the whole of woman's sport.<sup>3</sup>

Despite criticism, the sport slowly returned, starting with the richest leagues, such as the basketball and American football leagues in the United States, and the top tier of the European football, followed in a second moment by smaller entities, and in a short time much of professional sport had returned.

Even with most of the professional sport returning to the pre-pandemic calendar the Olympic Games presented additional challenges, unlike national and regional competitions the Olympic is a global event with thousands of athletes and staff from more than two hundred countries. Japan, which had been little affected by COVID in 2020, had a daily case record with the peak expected to coincide with the Games, creating additional uncertainties around the feasibility of the games.

Many questions lingered in the chaotic buildup of the games. It would be safe? It would lead to an explosion in the number of infected in Japan? How to do a celebration in such dark times? What was the point of the games? It would bring a glimmer to tiered and depressed population?

### Traditional media as agenda-setters

Social media has changed how news are consumed. Newspapers, television and radio are now a small part of the media landscape, replaced by Whatsapp, Facebook, Youtube and others. The content production also became more democratic, social media blurred the distinction between producer and consumer, whit everyone now capable of writing, producing and modifying content.

During the pandemic, the new environment brought additional challenges, in previous epidemics the media was responsible for publicizing the actions and recommendations approved by the government, serving as a bridge with the public. Now the bulk of news consumptions are done through social networks enhancing the potential of conflictive posts and fake news.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the changes, the mainstream media continues to play an important role in public opinion mainly as Agenda-Setters.<sup>13</sup> The agenda setter theory predates the internet being developed in the 1970s.<sup>14</sup> It argues that newspapers have a big influence on how we discuss the main issues of the day. In this way, media companies, when highlighting a certain topic or approaching the subject in a certain way, end up influencing the way it is discussed by the public.

Despite having lost the monopoly on information the traditional media vehicles maintain their role as agenda setters. They have a large following and their publications continue to be widely shared by readers who now have the freedom to criticize, discuss and reinterpret their content. Thus, the focus that the media gives on a given subject continues to be relevant, guiding the debate and defining the main issues.<sup>8</sup>

## Method

The article uses as method of analysis the Critical Discourse Analysis, developed by Norman Fairclough is focused on power relations. Having the dual function of theory and methodology,<sup>15</sup> the CDA focuses on how power relations within society are reflected in discourse, and how changes in discourse reflect conflicts, prejudices and transformations in society.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the researcher seeks, through discourse analysis, to unravel and analyze conflicts in society more broadly.

The CDA analyze the discourse seeking the central theme of each text, but also discussing the nuances present within the language that reflect social and political positions, socioeconomic interests and disputes within the text that reflect society more broadly.<sup>15</sup> CDA is a suitable method to analyze how the media covered the ethical conflicts involved in organizing an Olympic during a pandemic because it allows to understand how the power conflicts within the language reflects the conflicts in the society as a whole. CDA is often used to analyze social issues through the sports coverage.<sup>16,17</sup>

Information and misinformation played an important role in the COVID pandemic. Large media conglomerates, government communication, social media and the production of fake news were a battleground for different discourses influencing opinion and attitudes.

The different measures adopted by different governments, the validity of the scientific discourse, the issue of individual freedom versus collective rights were important themes within the pandemic, involving often conflicting social and political interests that change within the experience of the pandemic itself. The CDA allows us to analyze how different ideological currents and interests are presented within the discourse of different subjects, as well as expanding this analysis to understand how these discourses end up influencing society.

The CDA was used as a basic method in data collection, seeking to understand how the ethical conflicts of carrying out the Games during the pandemic would be reflected in the media's discourse. The CDA allowed us to understand how discourse is constructed reflecting political positions and how a given discourse ends up becoming hegemonic or, in other cases, how hegemonic discourses are transformed.<sup>18</sup>

Seeking to understand these conflicts, we analyzed the coverage of the Olympic Games by the six most accessed news vehicles<sup>2</sup> in the English language at the beginning of the Olympics CNN, BBC, The New York Times, Daily Mail, The Guardian, Fox News. The production of content in English has worldwide influence, being a

source of information for many non-native speakers, who use these vehicles to obtain information, even though they do not live in English-speaking countries. Thus, the influence of these vehicles goes far beyond their countries and cities of origin.

The large press vehicles are today only a small part of the content produced on the internet, despite this, as we have already discussed, they still have prestige and influence superior to newer vehicles or those restricted to the internet.<sup>8</sup> The discourse used in these vehicles transcends their readers, it is translated and replicated by small vehicles around the world and shared by social media users. It guides the discussion by divulging questions and opinions that can be later debated or discredited by users. Therefore, understanding how this discourse was constructed and what the predominant elements are can contribute to a better understanding of the pandemic and how it has affected public opinion.

The CDA analyzes power relations focusing on language transformations, analyzing nuances and modifications, focusing on a qualitative rather than a quantitative analysis.<sup>6</sup> In this sense, it is important to highlight the characteristics and political positioning of each vehicle. The sample has vehicles from two countries: United States (New York Times, CNN, Fox News) and United Kingdom (BBC, The Guardian and Daily Mail).

Politically we can also highlight the editorial differences between the vehicles, in this sense The Guardian, CNN and The New York Times are self-declared center left generally supporting the Labor party in the UK and the Democratic Party in the United States, The Daily Mail and Fox News position more to the right lined to the Tories in the UK and the Republican Party in the US. The BBC as a public broadcaster, belonging to the UK government cannot officially take a stand on various issues, thus seeking to maintain a precarious impartiality.

The collection of articles began on July 20, 2021, two days before the opening ceremony and ended on August 10, two days after the closing. The researchers selected all articles discussing the impact of the Coronavirus in the Olympics Games. After the first collection, a discussion was held on how newspapers interpreted the phenomenon and a second reading was carried out, now focusing on the defined themes. Thus, three main themes of analysis were defined: (a) the event, (b) the athletes, (c) Japan.

## The event

Newspapers had a varied often contradictory view of event. Contrary to the IOC hopes the pandemic was not over when the athletes began to arrive in Tokyo, on the contrary while in Europe and North America the pandemic seem under control in Japan the cases were growing in alarming numbers.

The vehicles began the coverage discussing the risks associated with the games. Most of them associated with the Olympic Bubble, it could protected the athletes and the Japanese population? The lack of supporters was also an important topic, how it could impact the games? How the athletes would feel competing and celebrating in empty arenas.

The vehicles had a homogeneous assessment of the risks balancing the pros and cons of the event, however as the games progressed each vehicle developed its own views. The most positive assessment came from The Guardian, the English newspaper was in favor of the Olympic from the begin sustaining that the benefits outweighed the risks.

<sup>2</sup><https://www.similarweb.com/top-websites/category/news-and-media/>

The opening ceremony is an important part of the Olympic Games,<sup>6,19</sup> a joyous occasion highlighting the significance of the moment and the host country history. The Tokyo opening ceremony was unique in many aspects staged in an empty stadium it had the task of balancing the party atmosphere with the respect for all the COVID victims. The ceremony was sober, stylish and well executed with the vehicles highlighting the historical significance and the awkwardness of the moment as described by the Daily Mail “Belated and beleaguered, the virus-delayed Tokyo Summer Olympics finally opened Friday night with cascading fireworks and made-for-TV choreography that unfolded in a near-empty stadium, a colorful but strangely subdued ceremony that set a striking tone to match a unique pandemic Games.”<sup>3</sup> The Guardian was the only exception seeing the ceremony as a powerful metaphor of troubling times “Empty seats contained potent symbolism as the sensitive and stylish ceremony focused on hard graft, failing better and trumping the odds”.<sup>4</sup>

The Guardian final balance highlighted the positive aspects of the event, focusing in the athletes inspiring stories. In the newspaper’s view, the games united the world population, bringing relief and joy in somber times, an example of resilience and unity in the face of a global threat, “Tokyo 2020 played out in empty arenas but bound eight billion people together”<sup>5</sup>

At the opposite extreme is The New York Times, being the only one to openly discuss the ethical ramifications of watching the competition “Are You a Bad Person for Watching the Olympics?”<sup>6</sup> In the newspaper’s interpretation, the Olympic Games had problems before Tokyo, the IOC corruption, human rights abuses, environmental degradations and exorbitant costs. The pandemic add one more negative element in an already corrupt and morally dubious event making the indulgent pleasure of watching the sports competition an ethical paradox “I’m Tired of Being Cynical. I’m Watching the Olympics”.<sup>7</sup>

CNN and BBC made a balanced analysis. Perhaps because it is a public entity, the BBC was the vehicle that least discussed the ethical and political ramifications of the event, preferring to point out the risks at the beginning and avoiding a final verdict, highlighting the various possible interpretations.

CNN highlighted the risks of an epidemic within the bubble, being the vehicle that most discussed these aspects. So from the moment it became clear that the protocols were sufficient to control the dissemination of COVID, protecting the athletes and the Japanese population, the television network began to focus on the positive aspects, finally recognizing its value “Holding the Olympics was the right call”.<sup>8</sup>

Fox News and The Daily Mail, the only two conservative news outlets, did a similar analysis of the games, giving little attention to the ethical ramifications and the health risks. The focus of both vehicles was mainly on the crowd’s absence and how the lack of spectators affected the overall quality of the event as put by the Fox News “Without the crowd’s roar, Tokyo Olympians search for spirit”.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-9818569/With-muted-ceremony-stadium-Tokyo-Olympics-begin.html>

<sup>4</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/jul/23/tokyo-olympic-opening-ceremony>

<sup>5</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/aug/08/tokyo-2020-played-out-in-empty-arenas-but-bound-eight-billion-people-together>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/28/opinion/tokyo-olympics-tv-ethics.html?searchResultPosition=38>

<sup>7</sup><https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/22/opinion/tokyo-olympics-2021.html>

<sup>8</sup><https://www.cnn.com/2021/08/12/opinions/tokyo-olympics-right-call-covid-suzuki/index.html>

<sup>9</sup><https://www.foxnews.com/sports/without-the-crowds-roar-tokyo-olympians-search-for-spirit>

The crowd’s absence was a hotly debated topic before the games started, in that sense, with the exception of Fox News and The Daily Mail, the other media didn’t see much of an impact in the absence of an audience. The vehicles preferred to highlight sporting stories and inspiring achievements. Social media has changed the way we consume sport, and media outlets seem to agree that the stadium audience has little influence on the event. Thus, the athlete does not celebrate alone in a stadium, but shares these emotions with millions of spectators interacting with fans in real time through social networks with their smartphones.

## The Athletes

The Olympic Games are the apex of most athletes’ career. Athletes are the central figure of the games, the main participants and those responsible for their realization. As public figures with great appeal, athletes have always had an influence on political and social issues impacting the behavior of the public and their opinions. Social networks have expanded this influence, previously dependent on media coverage, now athletes can interact directly with their followers.<sup>20</sup>

The Athletes’ behavior during the pandemic was intensively covered by the media. There were an expectation in some sector of the media and public opinion that the athletes would act as role models propagating positive behaviors. While this has been partially true, with many athletes embracing enthusiastically this persona other had their own view of the situation, flaunting social distance rules, refusing to vaccinate and propagating fake news.<sup>11</sup>

In preparing for the games, the condition of the athletes was an important issue. The possibility of contracting covid and an outbreak inside the Olympic bubble were possibilities discussed in the press. In addition, the very spirit of the games was questioned. The games are seen as more than a sports dispute, but a festive event where participants have the opportunity to connect and celebrate with their fellows from around the world. A recurrent theme in the press as summarized by CNN “No fans or sex? Tokyo has tough task trying not to be the first ‘no-fun’ Olympics”.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the possibilities of using the athletes’ behavior and opinions to discuss the pandemic, politics and player welfare, the coverage is quite homogeneous and limited to some specific topics. In this sense, restrictions and risks are seen as simply another obstacle that athletes must overcome, as put by the Daily Mail “Empty stands and a year-long wait for the Tokyo Games have done little to dampen enthusiasm among America’s top track and field athletes, who told reporters on Thursday they were adapting to the challenges of competing amid the pandemic.”<sup>11</sup>

It is interesting to note that despite the official position of government and scientific organizations, that COVID is a disease dangerous to all people despite their age and health condition, the vehicles did not dwell in the athletes health, furthermore the risky associated with COVID is the risk of missing the Olympic. The only exception is CNN, the North American television network was the only one to approach COVID as a health hazard to the athletes “Olympic athletes battling long Covid: ‘I’m really struggling to exercise still’”.<sup>12</sup>

The athlete’s behavior is one of the main focuses of the Olympic coverage. In Tokyo however the coverage was limited; there were few

<sup>10</sup><https://www.cnn.com/2021/07/21/sport/japan-olympics-fans-fun-protocols-hnk-intl/index.html>

<sup>11</sup><https://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/reuters/article-9813195/Olympics-Athletics-Whatever-takes-Americans-adapting-unorthodox-Games.html>

<sup>12</sup><https://www.cnn.com/2021/07/21/sport/olympics-athletes-struggling-with-long-covid-spt-intl-cmd/index.html>

cases of unappropriated behavior, like illegal parties or escapes, and few complaining about the conditions. The media also have not invited athletes to discuss the pandemic or their view about the Olympics.

One possibility that arises is that the rules applied to the press as well, which covered most of the event from their hotel rooms. Without contact with the athletes, coverage was limited to interviews and the athlete's social networks, limiting the content available. "It will be a journalistic test for us to figure out how to make things as vivid as possible when we don't have the great access that we're used to or the party atmosphere that makes the Olympics what it is,"<sup>13</sup>

This is an interesting question and one that can influence future coverage of the games, in a world where athletes are in direct contact with fans, often sharing content while competing, how the press and the event itself should deal with this, a behavior which must be encouraged, tolerated or repressed.

## Japan

The host country usually is on the spotlight during the SME, the events are regarded as opportunity to divulge the countries culture and increase their geopolitical power.<sup>21</sup> The Tokyo Olympics was different with journalist confined to the Olympic bubble the traditional coverage was left aside, with few articles discussing Japanese culture, the quality of the arenas and curiosities. Japan appeared in the coverage mainly related with the pandemic.

The press did not fail to notice the isolation of the games. The bubble separated the games from Japan, the experience of the local fans did not differ from that of other countries, following thought the press and social networks, as stated by the NYT "Occasions felt as if they may have been going down virtually wherever — a sports activities corridor in Stockholm, a conference middle in Kansas Metropolis, a gymnasium in Dubai — so few had been the distinguishing markers of place."

Japan was relatively unaffected by the first waves of COVID, but on the eve of the Olympics, while the pandemic seem to recede in Europe and United States the country experienced the worst outbreak yet. So while fans returned to stadiums in Europe, the Japanese government announced that most events would be held without public, and a few days before the opening ceremony a new cancellation was still not ruled out. The vehicles covered the pandemic in Japan from two angles factual one and the Japanese reaction.

The vehicles use an important part of the coverage to discuss the pandemic in Japan, there were regular updates on the number of cases, especially the several records broke during the Olympics, and Japanese government reaction.

On the eve of the opening ceremony, Japanese public opinion, according to the surveys presented by media, was against the games, regarding it as an government imposition. All vehicles, with the exception of the BBC, discussed the decision by Toyota, the main sponsor of the games, not to run Olympic ads in Japan, interpreted as a validation of the Japanese public hostility. Another image highlighted by the vehicles were the protests organized against the games that could be heard inside the stadiums during the opening of the games as described by Fox News "While the Tokyo Games begin inside National Stadium, the lack of raucous fans in the building had some fans watching the opening ceremonies hearing the protests on the streets".<sup>14</sup>

In general, the media portrays Japanese reaction to the games as hostile resignation. The level of hostility portrayed by the press varies according to the vehicle and the moment of the games, showing those who are strongly opposed to the games as well as a portion of the population that resented not being able to see the athletes up close, even breaking the rules imposed by the Japanese government as described by the Daily Mail "Hundreds of Japanese fans huddle together to watch the Olympics from a bridge after being BANNED from stadiums under Covid rules"<sup>15</sup>

The focus on the Japanese population diminishes as it becomes clear that the bubble would guarantee the safety of athletes and prevent games from being a focus of covid within Japan. The host country historic performance also decreased rejection of games as summarized by the Daily Mail "For Japan, medal bonanza could put some shine on tarnished Games".<sup>16</sup>

## Final considerations

The COVID pandemic is a phenomenon with broad social ramifications creating new conflicts and exacerbating issues already present, in this sense the Olympic Games present themselves as an interesting environment to discuss both broader social issues and the role of the games, The 2021 Olympic Games where historical for several reasons, the first to be played outside the official cycle, the first to occur during a pandemic and the first with empty arenas, these issues were also accompanied by ethical discussions about how to interpret these games and what would be the reasons for their realization.

The coverage reflects these contradictions with the newspapers presenting a varied and sometimes conflicting view of the main issues related to the games, questions that will only be better answered with future research. The biggest one is related to the very need to carry out the games, contrary to what one might expect, this is not related to the political positioning of the vehicles, more related to the vehicle's own interpretation of the specific issue. Fox News, Daily Mail, BBC and CNN, despite editorial and political differences, have a balanced view highlighting the various issues related to the games. The Guardian and New York Times have the strongest opinions regarding the games, despite the similarities, they are center left print newspapers, the first British and the second American have diametrically opposed views.

The English are the most favorable to the event, defending its need for the important role it would have at that time, the New Yorkers are against it. In this sense, the NYT is the only one to highlight the previous problems of the games, such as corruption, environmental degradation and disrespect for human rights, so the pandemic would be just one more issue, which would make the games almost unbearable to watch.

The media also addressed important issues for the future of the games, the lack of supporters in the stadiums was a much-discussed topic in preparation for the event. Atmosphere is an important part of the sport, many would consider it essential. The coverage of Tokyo shows that in many ways this turns out to be elusive, with social media and television the athletes are watched by the world and the media had no problem portraying the emotion of winners and losers in front of cameras and cell phone screens. Fox News and Daily Mail were the only vehicles to point out that the absence of an audience took something fundamental out of the games.

<sup>15</sup><https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9848965/Hundreds-fans-watch-BMX-freestyle-final-BRIDGE.html>

<sup>16</sup><https://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/reuters/article-9813819/Olympics-For-Japan-medal-bonanza-shine-tarnished-Games.html>

<sup>13</sup><https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/22/insider/olympics-reporting.html>

<sup>14</sup><https://www.foxnews.com/sports/anti-olympics-protests-opening-ceremonies>

Isolated from Japan, the games took place in a non-place, protected by the bubble, the athletes had no contact with the outside world, communicating only through social networks and the press. The Olympics could be staged in any place without harming the event.

There should not be Olympic games in similar conditions, but the exercise of the Tokyo Games serves to understand many things about how the sport is consumed and experienced. Great emphasis is given to the fans and the host country, considered fundamental elements of an SME, the coverage of Tokyo, however shows that in many aspects these elements are overvalued. The generally positive coverage of the games and in many ways similar to the previous ones shows that these elements are overrated, the press has no problem reporting the emotion of an athlete in an empty stadium, as that emotion is shared with millions of spectators around of the world. So the games could be played anywhere under any conditions as long as they were broadcast to the world.

## Acknowledgments

None.

## Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicting interests declared by the authors.

## Funding

None.

## References

- Moore K. Football is not 'a matter of life and death'. It is far less important than that. Football and the COVID-19 pandemic in England. *Soccer & Society*. 2021;22(1-2):43–57.
- Lee Ludvigsen JA. When 'the show' cannot go on: An investigation into sports mega-events and responses during the pandemic crisis. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*. 2021.
- Rowe D. Subjecting pandemic sport to a sociological procedure. *Journal of sociology*. 2020;56(4):704–713.
- Rowe D. Sport, Culture and the Media: The Unruly Trinity, 2nd edn. Maidenhead, UK and New York: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill Education. 2004.
- Adá Lameiras A, Rodríguez Castro Y. Analysis from a gender perspective of the Olympic games on Twitter. *European Sport Management Quarterly*. 2021:1–17.
- Gutierrez DM, de Almeida MAB, Gutierrez GL, et al. Two Events, two brazils: a critical discourse analysis of the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic games. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 2021:1–17.
- Harrison VS, Boehmer J. Sport for development and peace: framing the global conversation. *Communication & Sport*. 2020;8(3):291–316.
- Oh T Kim, S Love A, Seo WJ. Media framing of the unified Korean olympic women's ice hockey team. *Communication & Sport*. 2020.
- Sadri SR, Buzzelli N, Gentile P, et al. Sports journalism content when no sports occur: framing athletics amidst the COVID-19 International pandemic. *Communication & Sport*. 2021.
- Schmidt SH, Frederick EL, Pegoraro A, et al. An analysis of Colin Kaepernick, Megan Rapinoe, and the national anthem protests. *Communication & sport*. 2019;7(5):653–677.
- Leng HK, Phua YXP. Athletes as role models during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Managing Sport and Leisure*. 2020:1–5.
- van Der Linden, S Roozenbeek J, et al. Inoculating against fake news about COVID-19. *Frontiers in psychology*. 2020;11:2928.
- Bergström A, Jervelycke Belfrage M. News in social media: Incidental consumption and the role of opinion leaders. *Digital Journalism*. 2018;6(5):583–598.
- Scheufele DA, Tewksbury D. Framing, agenda setting, and priming: The evolution of three media effects models. *Journal of communication*. 2006;57(1):9–20.
- Fairclough N. Media discourse. London: Arnold; 1995.
- Hovden J, von der Lippe G. The gendering of media sport in the Nordic countries. *Sport in Society*. 2019;22(4):625–638.
- Shin N, Park D, Peachey JW. Taeguk warriors with blue eyes: a media discourse analysis of the South Korean Men's Olympic Ice Hockey Team and its naturalized athletes. *Communication & Sport*. 2020.
- Fairclough N. Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language. Routledge. 2010.
- Lee J, Yoon H. Narratives of the nation in the Olympic opening ceremonies: comparative analysis of Beijing 2008 and London 2012. *Nations and Nationalism*. 2017;23(4):952–969.
- Smith LR, Sanderson J. I'm going to Instagram it! An analysis of athlete self-presentation on Instagram. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*. 2015;59(2):342–358.
- Koenigstorfer J, Bocarro JN, Byers T, et al. Mapping research on legacy of mega sporting events: Structural changes, consequences, and stakeholder evaluations in empirical studies. *Leisure Studies*. 2019;38(6):729–745.