

## What Returns Can *Brand China* Expect from The Olympics?

The party is over. And what a party it was. 16 days later, the curtain finally came down on Sunday night to a spectacle of unrivalled proportions. For both admirers and critics alike, it was a summer Olympics like no other before it.

Activists have every reason to give it the thumbs-down and say “I told you so”. 77 protesters were denied their applications to have their say even at the designated protest venues. Some visitors were deported and a few locals have reportedly been sent off to labour camps. But even the most vocal champions of human rights and freedom of expression will agree that this was the first time that the Chinese people engaged with the people of the world and that in itself is a step in the right direction. To expect the world’s most powerful authoritarian state to become a darling of Amnesty International overnight would be naive. Most importantly, new dialogues have opened at various levels and the pressure needs to be maintained, positively.

But to the billions of viewers glued to their TV sets around the world, the messages sent out by Brand China were inescapable. This was no mere coming-out party, it was an immaculately orchestrated demonstration of the country’s presence on the world stage. Anybody anywhere who had not recognised the fact that we now live in a post-American world will have had a rude awakening. Whichever way you look at it, but particularly from a business or management perspective, there was little to ridicule and much to be inspired by.

Managed to near perfection China’s athletes, supporters, officials and volunteers all put up a show that will have humbled their adversaries and dazzled their fans. In a relatively short span of time, an also-ran of yesteryear dominated the medal-tally with 51 golds from across the entire spectrum of sports. What got them there was their determination to claim their place under the sun and now pride will keep them there. The American athletes took off the air-pollution face masks they had arrived with, both literally and metaphorically.

What about return on investment? Critics will point to the 40 billion dollars spent on the event, the 100 million dollars spent on the opening and closing ceremonies. Much could indeed have been achieved with those funds for China’s millions living in abject poverty. In reality, most of those dollars went into building assets that will be used by people for years to come. But to put those costs in perspective, Procter & Gamble spend around 10 billion dollars a year on advertising alone, an investment that builds its brands and reassures its consumers and shareholders alike. ExxonMobil made some 15 billion dollars in profits in the second quarter of this year, topping the 10 billion dollars in the first quarter. Nobody expects them to hand them out to the starved children of Africa any time soon.

For decades, the West has transferred not only its low-paying jobs but also its pollution to China, now the ‘factory to the world.’ The Beijing Olympics were a graphic representation of what the country has evolved into, an unstoppable dynamo managing every aspect of their brand with great dexterity. A look behind the scenes will prove that it has not been shy to corral expertise from around the world, while keeping a firm hand on the till all the time, regardless of the earthquakes and the floods that preceded 080808.

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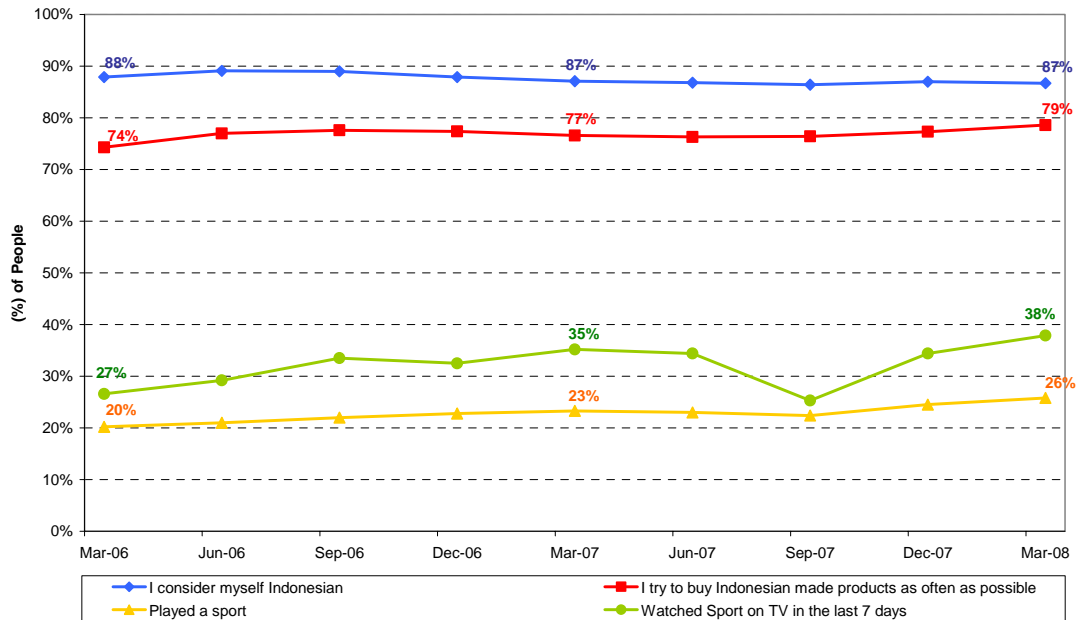
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INGREDIENTS FOR BUILDING "BRAND INDONESIA"



The result is universal respect, an ethereal ingredient so essential to commercial success. For Indonesia, there are some obvious lessons to embrace. Once again, the top five nations seemed to reflect their standing on the world stage, not just the winners' podium. The challengers were Australia and South Korea, sixth and seventh respectively, punching way beyond their weight. But it is a Jamaica that is so much easier to emulate.

A fiercely proud people, Indonesians can collectively get behind a select band of athletes for at least the next four years to improve the haul in London 2012. Here is an opportunity that is worth its weight in gold. Marketers can be the catalyst, working with a sponsored athlete of their choice and engaging their loyal consumers to rally around the chosen ones, to mutual gain. Unfortunately, excellence in sports does cost money. Aspiring athletes need a salary if not a job, a coach and a venue. How daunting can that really be for Indonesia's major advertisers for a handful of aspiring contestants? What the mission really needs is a little imagination, some effort and a lot of dedication.

87 per cent of the population consider themselves "Indonesian", not Javanese or anything else. Almost 80 per cent of them "always try to buy products made in Indonesia". 38 per cent watch sports on television. 26 per cent actually play a sport. How much of a challenge can it be to connect the dots?

These conclusions are based on Roy Morgan Single Source, the country's largest syndicated survey with over 27,000 Indonesian respondents annually, projected to reflect almost 90% of the population over the age of 14.

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