

# THE CONTINENTAL DIVIDE

Examining the effects of the framing of snowboarding and its culture by major sports media organizations on audiences who do not follow snowboarding.

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Master's Report





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## **Abstract**

As the popularity of professional snowboarding increases, snowboarding events are receiving continuously more nationally televised coverage on major sport broadcast networks such as ESPN and NBC. This paper expanded on previous research on sports broadcasting's impact on snowboarding by examining if and how the framing of snowboarding and its culture by these major sports media organizations effects the preconceived perceptions that individuals who do not actively seek out or consume snowboarding content have. Three separate focus groups were held, two representing non-active snowboarding media consumers (defined in this study as *passive audiences*) and one representing snowboarders and those who actively seek out and consume snowboarding-related media content (defined in this study as *active audiences*). It was identified that *passive audiences*' perceptions of snowboarding were directly influenced by what they saw on the Winter Olympics and the Winter X Games, but only if they had never traveled to a place where they were exposed to snowboarding and its culture. Along those lines, it was identified that the snowboarders and *active audiences* believe snowboarding's culture is not accurately portrayed by these major sports media organizations, but some are more accurate than others.

**Keywords:** active audiences, passive audiences, sports broadcast media, sports media, culture

## **Background**

Every winter, millions gather around their televisions and computers to watch and marvel at the aerial acrobatics of professional snowboarders competing at the Winter X Games.

Arguably the biggest event of the year for the snowboarding community, the Winter X Games provides millions with action-packed entertainment that only snowboarding can offer, as well as giving its athletes a chance to propel themselves to superstar status. However, snowboarding has not always been glitz and glamour.

Snowboarding's humble beginnings led to a massive disruption in the ski industry, formulating resistance and rejection by skiers, resulting in a rebellious image and stigma associated with snowboarding (Heino, 2000). However, in the 1990s, when snowboarding arguably hit its stride, the rebellious and anarchical nature of the sport caught the attention of media outlets seeking for a way to attract younger audiences to its mediums. In 1997, ESPN hosted the inaugural Winter X Games at Big Bear Lake, California as a way to expand the incredibly-popular X Games event to include winter sports (Burd, 2014). The inaugural Winter X Games featured freestyle snowboarding, snowmobile and boardercross. While the event was not televised, it drew in a crowd of 38,000 attendees (Pedersen & Kelly, 2000).

The 2002 Winter X Games were the first X Games to be nationally televised. Hosted in Aspen, Colorado (where it continues to be hosted to today), the event added the disciplines of slopestyle and superpipe for both snowboarders and skiers, while keeping the disciplines of boardercross, skiercross, snowmobile racing and snowmobile freestyle. The event brought in 63 million viewers across the world. Of these viewers, the median age was 20 years old (ESPN Event Media, n.d.).

The massive success of snowboarding in the Winter X Games, combined with the decline of youth viewership of the Olympic Games, prompted the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to recognize snowboarding as an Olympic sport (Bialik, 2002). While this inclusion was a way for the IOC to increase viewership (and profitability of the Olympics), it also led to outrage from the prominent figures of the snowboarding community, most notably Terje Håkonsen, a professional halfpipe snowboarder who had won many gold medals and championships in his professional career, claiming the IOC did not understand snowboarding's history and consideration for the athletes' needs (Mellgren, 1998). This led to a divide in the snowboarding community between the ones who supported snowboarding's inclusion into the Olympics and those who despised it.

Despite the naysayers, snowboarding would continue to be included in the Olympics, including more freestyle disciplines as the years went on to attract more younger audiences. However, many in the snowboarding community believed that snowboarding was being incorrectly framed as a glamour sport, designed solely for the purpose of entertainment, instead of its actual, true, down-to-earth roots (Heino, 2000). Does sports media incorrectly frame snowboarding and its culture?

While many studies focus on the effects framing, incorporation and mainstreaming have on the sport of snowboarding and the culture itself, there is little to no mention or reference to what these effects have on the perceptions of those who only watch snowboarding during major events like the Winter X Games and the Winter Olympics and those who do not watch snowboarding at all. This study seeks to identify those perceptions in an effort to examine how sports media, defined in this study as broadcast networks such as FOX Sports, NBC Sports and ESPN, frames snowboarding to the masses.



## **Literature Review**

### **Framing**

Framing refers to the suggestion that how something is presented to an audience influences how people perceive the information provided to them (Goffman, 1974). Framing is an extension of the agenda-setting theory, which refers to the ability of the media, more specifically the news media, to influence the salience and perception of topics on the public agenda (McCombs & Reynolds, 2002). The nature of framing allows for an issue or topic to be viewed from different perspectives, which can then have implications, whether they be positive or negative, for a multitude of values, thoughts, ideologies and considerations (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Traditionally, studies on the effects of framing and agenda-setting focused more on political media and news media. However, in the past three decades, the growth of sports media allowed for an opportunity for researchers to study how framing plays a part in the development of sports through the lens of the media.

Framing in sports media operates in a slightly different medium than traditional framing. Sports media framing walks a very thin line between entertainment and politics. In order to do this, sports media divides itself into two categories: journalistic integrity through promoting and reinforcing values associated with capitalism, nationalism, patriarchy and racism, and media production through emphasis on spectacle, drama and personalization (Stead, 2010). The most effective way to keep journalistic integrity and media production true to their values is to frame sporting events in the form of hype (Duncan & Messner, 1998). In order for sports networks to bring in viewers to watch a sporting event, the event is framed in the form of hyping up weeks, even sometimes months, in advance to get audience's attention (Duncan & Messner, 1998).

For example, when world-renowned championship boxers Floyd Mayweather and Manny Pacquiao agreed to fight for the welterweight championship in early-2015, social media went ablaze with discussion, criticism and excitement. The highly-anticipated fight, which stemmed from six years of failed negotiations between the two boxers, became the topic of discussion for the months between the announcement and the fight, which would take place on May 2, 2015 in Las Vegas, Nevada. It was regarded by ESPN to be one of the biggest sporting events in history (Rafael, 2015). The event's announcement would cause two of boxing's biggest broadcast partners, HBO Boxing and Showtime Sports (which are direct competitors for broadcasting rights to pay-per-view boxing matches), to partner together for sole broadcasting rights and co-broadcast the fight, only the second time in the history of the sport that has happened (Rafael, 2015). For the months between the announcement and the fight, the two fighters would go on a media blitz, constantly being interviewed, documented and reported on in an effort to hype the fight. The fight would go on to become the highest-grossing pay-per-view event of all time, bringing in \$400 million in revenue with 2.48 million individual purchases (Ellingson, 2015), despite criticism from many that the fight itself was not entertaining at all (Goff, 2015).

Given snowboarding's past history as being rebellious, dangerous and anarchical, sports media outlets realized they could capitalize on the rebellious, youthful attitude snowboarding was known for in an effort to repair the dwindling viewership of the youth and young adult demographics (Heino, 2000). It worked, as the incorporation of snowboarding into ESPN's Winter X Games in 1997 brought in a crowd of 38,000, which would only grow to where, in 2002, 63 million people would tune in to ESPN to watch the 2002 Winter X Games (Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011). Yet, how snowboarding was framed would begin to change when the sport was incorporated into the 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan. When the International Olympic

Committee voted to incorporate snowboarding as an Olympic sport, it was placed under the governance of the International Ski Federation (FIS), much to the dismay of snowboarding's opinion leaders (Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011). Snowboarding would soon become framed as a spectator sport where snowboarders would become millionaires, celebrities and status symbols, which began a cultural divide among the snowboarding community (Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011), which will be explained further in this study.

***RQ1:*** *How do sports media play a role in audiences' perceptions of snowboarding's culture?*

This question is important to ask because as snowboarding's popularity growth created a largely disproportional ratio between spectators who only watch snowboarding purely for entertainment and the actual participants of snowboarding, do sports media play a role in how passive audiences, defined for the purposes of this study as audiences who do not actively consume, participate or seek out snowboarding-related media content, if at all, perceive snowboarding as a culture? This question is also important to ask for the active audiences, defined for the purposes of this study as audiences who actively seek out and consume snowboarding-related media content and who participate in snowboarding, whether it be recreationally or competitively, as it provides a perspective from within the subculture as to how those audiences feel they are framed.

## **Social Cognitive Theory**

*Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)* refers to the notion that learning occurs within a social context with reciprocal interaction of personal factors, environmental factors and behavior (Bandura, Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory, 1986). *SCT* is an expansion of Bandura's *Social Learning Theory (SLT)*, which suggests that learning is a

cognitive process that can occur purely through observation, direct instruction and vicarious reinforcement (Bandura, 1963). *Social Cognitive Theory* expands on the *Social Learning Theory* by taking into consideration the social environments individuals perform behaviors, as well as taking into account past experiences, which influences present-day behaviors and the motives as to why those behaviors take place.

In terms of the media, *SCT* refers to the media's ability to influence perceptions. As people's reliance on the media to define their standards of reality increases, the greater the social impact the media has on influencing and shaping those perceptions (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). For many people who passively participate in snowboarding and/or who do not actively seek out snowboarding-related content, their attitudes and behaviors to how they perceive snowboarding may be influenced by their own past experiences with the sport and the culture. For example, back in the 1990s, when snowboarding was in its prime, the subculture's core participants labeled those who casually participated in snowboarding (i.e. going on one or two trips a year to simply snowboard on a purely social and leisurely basis) as “posers” and “wannabes” in an effort to create a barrier-of-entry into the subculture (Donnelly, 2006). Due to the labeling and exclusion these individuals experienced from the subculture, these casual participants developed a negative attitude and perception of snowboarders and how they act at the core of the culture, which they still hold true to this day (Donnelly, 2006).

***RQ<sub>2</sub>:*** *Does modern-day broadcast media portrayal of snowboarding as a sport positively change the previously-held biases of recreational and non-core snowboarders?*

For the passive audiences who have previously participated in snowboarding before who became marginalized and exiled due to how they choose to snowboard and for the passive

audiences who have never participated in snowboarding before who are cautious to start due to the potential threat of being marginalized, it is important to discover if broadcast sports media enhance these fears or if they inspire those who were marginalized to begin participating again.

### **The Impact of Media Influence on Cultural Politics and Identity**

It is no secret that the media has the power to influence subcultures and the political climates included in them. Mass media (defined as television, newspapers, press, etc.) has the ability to define and place labels on subcultures, which is typically argued by those who make up the subculture that the media is falsely perceptualizing and framing it (Thornton, 1995). A subset of the mass media, defined as specialist niche media, “plays a central role in the creation and evolution of subcultures” and is considered a critical part of the definition and distribution of cultural knowledge, but also plays a critical role in the commercialization process that defines the authenticity and image of the subculture (Thornton, 1995). In the realm of the snowboarding culture, both the mass media and the specialist niche media greatly contributed to the structuralizing, institutionalization, commodification, and commercialization of snowboarding, which created a great divide in a once united culture.

During a time where snowboarding was beginning to rapidly diffuse into the ski industry, the ski culture had found its identity. Skiing had become a recreational sport that required time, substantial income and a strict cultural capital, which includes lifestyle expectations, dress, language and behavior (Bourdieu, 1991). Skiing was very proper and orderly, while snowboarding was lewd, disorderly, unorganized and anti-establishment. Snowboarding developed its own lingo and entry requirements to be accepted into the culture. Eventually,

snowboarding became everything skiing did not want to be, which helped snowboarding find its identity and, ironically, become established (Heino, 2000).

This new identity snowboarding had embodied caused it to explode in popularity, consequently attracting media to incorporate it. In turn, the media greatly contributed in the transformation of snowboarding from, “an expressive sport (driven by the participant) to spectacle sport (driven by rewards) (Rinehart, 1994).” Rinehart (1994) defines expressive sport as a sport that is practiced by individuals for personal fulfillment and defines spectacle sport as a sport performed for others, driven by rewards and accolades. Typically, spectacle sport is the result of a new sport undergoing mediation and is packaged and presented for “consumer entertainment rather than for the sport for its own sake (Smith, 1998).”

The effects of snowboarding becoming a spectacle sport began to tear the culture apart. The popularity of snowboarding in sports media caused the IOC to recognize snowboarding as an Olympic sport, forcing the sport to become governed, structured and professionalized, something that the culture of snowboarding was known for being against (Heino, 2000). As the popularity and media coverage of snowboarding grew, the sport started to suffer from cultural fragmentation (Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011). The core snowboarders, who are defined in this case as the group whose attitudes and ideologies align with the ideologies the culture originally stood for, thought that snowboarding would become a tool for nationalization and snowboarders would become “uniform-wearing, flag-bearing, walking logos” (Mellgren, 1998). Other core snowboarders felt that snowboarding would become too serious and would forget its roots (Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011). On the other end of the spectrum, the snowboarders who favored the inclusion into the Olympics and supported the governance of snowboarding claimed that this

new structuration would legitimize snowboarding as a true, athletic sport, rather than being a spectator sport (Richards & E, 2003).

Looking specifically at how the active audiences and core participants of snowboarding perceive snowboarding culture on television and other forms of media leads to this study's first hypothesis:

***H<sub>1</sub>:** Active audiences who consume snowboarding content via sports media are more likely to argue sports media incorrectly frames snowboarding culture.*

As these audiences are engaged in snowboarding, the culture, lifestyle and consumption of snowboarding-related media content, they see the environment from inside the culture. This allows them to have knowledge and understanding of snowboarding at its roots and allows them to determine if snowboarding culture is incorrectly framed in sports media.

### Mainstreaming

The culture continued to become fragmented as snowboarding's popularity, largely in part of the media, became commodified. Heino (2000) notes that "with the development of new sports in this mediated age, there is often only a short period of time before the sport is marketed and commodified and turned into sports entertainment." The impacts of commodification have a significant impact on the symbolic potency of the culture and development of the sport (Heino, 2000). Incorporation of the snowboarding subculture led to the conversion of the symbolism and ideologies of it into mass-produced objects (Hebdige, 1979). Because of snowboarding's symbolic representation of resistance, advertisers began to use it as a tool to market products to the youth demographic. Multi-national corporations began to sponsor snowboarding events, use professional snowboarders in their advertisements and incorporate aspects of snowboarding

fashion and lifestyle into their products (Heino, 2000). Consequently, snowboarding began to lose its identity as the mainstreaming and sport-for-entertainment focus continued to divide the culture.

Because audiences and spectators sought excitement and drama, snowboarding became sensationalized with the creation of new disciplines that were designed around excitement, drama and danger (Heino, 2000). Snowboarding's most favored and watched disciplines today are a result of this. Sports media's mainstreaming of snowboarding transformed the sport from a noncompetitive, recreational activity to action-packed entertainment for the masses.

*H<sub>2</sub>: Passive audiences who consume snowboarding content solely via sports media are more likely to perceive snowboarding culture as spectacle and glam.*

*H<sub>3</sub>: How broadcast sports media portrays snowboarding to passive audiences directly influences their preconceived notions, attitudes and behaviors to their perceptions of snowboarding and its subculture.*

These audiences only know about snowboarding from what they see about it on media, since they do not actively seek out information or engage in the culture. Given how snowboarding has gone from a rebellious counter-culture to a sport that has become a commercialized, highly-marketable platform to provide entertainment and thrills, allowing its athletes to become superstars, passive audiences are more likely to believe that snowboarding is about spectacle, fame and skill down to its roots. Depending on how this is portrayed, it could either continue to push away those who suffered from marginalization from wanting to participate in snowboarding again or inspire them to begin participating again.



## **Methods**

In order to obtain the best data, multiple qualitative methods were used in the collection of data. These methods were selected to ensure quality responses from the appropriate samples from a diverse pool of participants.

### **Focus Groups**

#### **Participants**

Participants for this study were chosen from two populations: *passive audiences* and *active audiences*, as defined in the previous section. Participants were chosen through a purposive sampling method. Participants from the *passive audiences* pool were selected based on their location and knowledge of snowboarding. Participants from the *active audiences* pool were selected based on their snowboarding experience, previous location of residence, frequency of snowboarding participation, snowboarding knowledge and/or frequency of consumption of snowboarding-related media. Two *passive audiences* focus groups were held and one *active audiences* focus group was held.

Participants in the first *passive audiences* focus group, or in terms of this study, *FG1*, were selected on a volunteer basis from a population of 214 individuals. Out of these 214 individuals, 24 of them volunteered to participate, but due to the limitations of the size of the facility the focus group was conducted in, only 16 could participate. These participants volunteered in exchange for extra credit on an exam of their choosing for their class. The participants' ages ranged from 18-22. Out of the 16 participants, 10 were female and 6 were male. All participants in this focus group met the criteria as defined for a passive audience.

Participants in the second *passive audiences* focus group, or in terms of this study, *FG2*, were selected on a volunteer basis from a population of 13 individuals. Out of this population, four individuals were selected based on the criteria defined for a passive audience consumer in exchange for extra credit to an eligible course of their choosing and a \$10 Starbucks gift card. All four participants met the criteria defined for a passive audience consumer. The participants' ages ranged from 20-23. Out of the four participants, two were male and two were female.

Lastly, participants in the *active audiences* focus group, or in terms of this study, *FG3*, were selected on a volunteer basis from a population of 214 individuals. Out of these 214 individuals, 6 of them volunteered to participate in exchange for extra credit on an exam of their choosing for their class. The participants either met or exceeded the minimum requirements of an active audience consumer, as defined in the section above. The participants' ages ranged from 18-23. Out of the 6 participants, two were female and four were male.

### Procedure

#### *Passive Audiences*

For the *passive audiences* (*FG1*, *FG2*) focus groups, participants were greeted and informed about the recording of the study. After signing their consent forms, the focus group started with questions inquiring about their demographics and interest in sports. Participants were asked about their favorite sports, sporting events and favorite teams/athletes. Participants were also asked about their social media habits and what teams/organizations/athletes they engaged with.

In the next section of the focus group, the participants were asked about their general perception of snowboarding and snowboarding culture. Participants were asked about how they

thought a snowboarder acts, dresses and do in their downtime, and were then asked how they developed those perceptions.

Next, participants were asked questions about their consumption of the Winter Olympics and Winter X Games. Participants were asked about their favorite Winter Olympians and events, then were asked about their consumption of the snowboarding disciplines during the events. After, participants were asked if watching those events were the main reason why they developed the perceptions they did of snowboarding.

Then, the participants were asked to watch a series of clips. There were four clips shown, two of which were from nationally-televised snowboarding events from the Winter Olympics and the Winter X Games and the other two clips were from movies critically-praised by major snowboarding publications (Transworld Snowboarding, Snowboarder Magazine and Yobeat.com) as parts that, captured snowboarding and its culture at its core. The first clip was of the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics Men's Snowboard Slopestyle Final. The second clip was of the 2015 Winter X Games Snowboard Big Air. The third clip was from the movie *NoToBo*, specifically snowboarder Sage Kotsenburg's part. Lastly, the fourth and final clip was from the movie *Shred Bots*. After showing all the clips, participants were then asked to compare the first two clips against each other to identify any differences they saw, and then were asked if their perceptions of snowboarding and its culture had changed after watching the last two clips.

Lastly, participants were thanked for their participation and were granted their earned extra credits to use toward their desired exam.

### *Active Audiences*

For the *active audiences* focus group, participants were greeted in the same format as the participants were in the *passive audiences* focus groups. After signing their consent forms, participants were asked questions about their demographics and their experiences with snowboarding, or if they only followed snowboarding closely, questions about their consumption of snowboarding-related media.

In the next section, participants were asked to identify any stereotypes they believe they were given as a snowboarder, their thoughts on the accuracy of the stereotypes and why they thought they were stereotyped like that. They were also asked what they thought the snowboarding culture represented as a whole.

Next, participants were asked about their consumption of snowboarding-related media, specifically questions about what they have seen snowboarding-related on broadcast television. Participants were asked about the Winter Olympics and the Winter X Games, their favorite snowboarding disciplines and their favorite athletes. Then, they were asked what their favorite snowboarding-related movies and video parts were, and if those movies and parts were representative of what the participants believed snowboard culture was like.

Then, participants were asked to watch the same four different video clips that the *passive audiences* focus groups watched, then were asked after to compare the first two clips and then were asked to compare the first two clips (Sochi 2014 Men's Snowboard Slopestyle Finals and the 2015 Winter X Games Snowboard Big Air Final) to the final two clips (Sage Kotsenburg's part from *NoToBo* and a clip from the movie *Shred Bots*). After, participants were asked if they felt accurately represented as a culture in the televised competitions, then asked questions about the authenticity of snowboarding during televised snowboarding competitions.

Lastly, participants were thanked for their participation and granted their extra credit.

## **Findings**

### **Passive Audiences**

#### *Perceptions of Snowboarding Culturally*

The participants identified several stereotypes that they imagine when they picture a snowboarder. The most common stereotypes the participants identified were that snowboarders tend to be “relaxed,” “laid back,” “adrenaline junkies,” jargon-heavy, risk-takers, very fashion-conscious, and “weed smokers.” These participants noted they developed these perceptions and stereotypes through their exposure to the culture during their travels to locations where snowboarders reside, as well as through advertising, specifically Red Bull and GoPro advertisements. These participants also noted that watching the Winter X Games and Winter Olympics contributed to these stereotypes to some degree, when it comes to perceptions about how snowboarders present themselves.

#### *The Winter Olympics and Winter X Games*

A majority of the participants found that watching snowboarding events in the Winter Olympics impacted their perceptions of snowboarding, albeit the degree of impact varied in different ways due to the participants’ level of active engagement when watching these events. The common denominator in their perceptions was professional snowboarder Shaun White. A participant suggested the Winter Olympics recognizes snowboarders as athletes. Another

participant suggested the Winter Olympics actually negates the stereotypes that snowboarders have, as they are in a professional setting and have to present themselves as such.

Out of the 20 total participants in the *passive audiences* category, 17 said they preferred the Winter Olympics over the Winter X Games. The general consensus among the participants was the Winter Olympics tend to be more family-focused and welcoming to those who do not follow snowboarding as compared to the Winter X Games.

All of the participants agreed that they consider snowboarding a mainstream sport. However, several of the participants noted that they could not see snowboarding becoming as big as golf, tennis or any of the traditional mainstream sports (football, hockey, baseball, basketball and soccer). One participant drew agreement from the other participants when he suggested that ESPN is the biggest contributor in the mainstreaming of snowboarding.

“It just seems like ESPN closes down for that time period just to focus on [snowboarding].”

#### *Impact on Perception after Exposure to Core Snowboarding Content*

After the participants were shown the video clips, most participants found that their positive perceptions of snowboarding were reinforced, especially the edits/movie parts. Other participants found that the clips did not necessarily change their preconceived perceptions of snowboarding, but instead were opened up to a new perspective of the culture. One participant noted that there are two sides to snowboarding that were revealed, and that the culture is simply diverse.

All participants were in agreement that they believed that the Winter Olympics and the Winter X Games accurately portrayed snowboarding and its culture, and that they found they were more motivated and inspired to try snowboarding and to get more interested in the culture after watching the edits/movie parts than when they watch the Winter Olympics/Winter X Games due to the edits/movie parts showing, “the fun side of snowboarding,” and it was less intimidating for them after watching the edits/movie parts.

### **Active Audiences**

#### *Self-Perceptions of Snowboarding Culturally*

The participants identified the stereotypes they felt that snowboarders are given. The participants identified the following stereotypes: rebellious, weed smokers, adrenaline junkies, reckless and fearless. The participants suggested that these stereotypes were developed due to snowboarding’s rebellious past, as also identified in Heino’s (2000) study. However, they believed that the rebellious foundation snowboarding was founded on was capitalized on by outside factors, which helped to tremendously enhance those stereotypes.

One participant suggested that snowboarding, as a culture, represents freedom and a new beginning. Another participant suggested that snowboarding as a culture and as a sport represents progression and growth.

One participant stated the following: “Snowboarding will overcome any stereotype the media gives out.”

#### *The Winter Olympics and Winter X Games*

Participants identified their favorite event in the Winter Olympics and the Winter X Games. All six participants agreed that in the Winter Olympics, halfpipe was their favorite event. However, in the Winter X Games, all six participants identified slopestyle as their favorite event to watch. One participant credited the difference in favorite events to the professionalism the Winter Olympics presents.

### *Media and its Impact on Snowboarding Culture*

After watching the video clips and edit/movie parts, participants were asked to identify any differences between the Winter Olympics broadcast and the Winter X Games broadcast. One participant identified the Winter Olympics commentary was more formal than the Winter X Games commentary. Another participant added that, “the commentators on the Olympic broadcast seemed clueless,” in reference to their broad descriptions of the tricks being performed.

Then, the participants were asked to note any differences they saw between the competitions and the edit/video parts. One participant suggested, “The video parts matter more to the representation of the culture than [the] competitions.” Another participant suggested that the Winter Olympics and the Winter X Games helps to legitimize snowboarding as an actual sport. This led to another participant suggesting that snowboarding being mainstreamed is beneficial to the industry and the pros, but little-to-no effect on snowboarders who go out and have fun recreationally.

One participant credited the rise in popularity to snowboarding to the rate in which snowboarding, and action sports as a whole, is progressing. “Action sports are progressing more



than traditional sports,” said the participant, citing previous research they conducted for another study they did.

Lastly, the participants engaged in a discussion about how snowboarding is portrayed as a culture in these televised events. All participants agreed that the Winter X Games and the Dew Tour portray snowboarding and the culture the most accurately. “They make it seem like it’s a party,” said one participant. However, the participants suggested that the Winter Olympics do not accurately portray snowboarding and its culture. One participant suggested that the term Olympian has lost its meaning and worth:

“Being an Olympian does not mean as much as it used to.”

Another participant suggested that the Olympics are failing the culture due to the structured nature of the event. This was met with disagreement from another participant, who suggested that the Olympics are broadening the culture, rather than hurting it.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This qualitative research was conducted to examine the accuracy of the framing of snowboarding and its culture by sports broadcast media and to see how it influences the perceptions of those audiences who do not actively seek out or consume snowboarding-related media content. In order to accurately examine this, samples from two separate populations of media consumers were needed. Those who snowboard and/or actively seek out and consume snowboarding-related media content were defined as *active audiences*, while those who did not actively seek out snowboarding-related media content or who did not snowboard were defined as the *passive audiences*.

Both the *passive audiences* and the *active audiences* identified very similar stereotypes snowboarders are given. Yet, it seemed those who were in the *active audiences* category identified more negative stereotypes they felt they were given, while *passive audience* identified more positive stereotypes. However, the *active audiences* spoke much more highly of their culture as a whole. Taking into account how each audience developed those stereotypes, such findings indicate snowboarders are framed in a more positive and family-friendly perspective through televised media.

Participants in the *passive audiences* category identified GoPro and Red Bull commercials as having an impact on their ideas of snowboarding. It is interesting to note the impact these two companies have on passive audiences through their advertising. The commercials of these two companies not only run frequently during these televised competitions, but they are constantly ran throughout the year, with many of their commercials featuring snowboarding in some form or fashion. This opens up avenues for potential future research on the effect popular action sports companies' advertising has on influencing the perceptions of these passive audiences, and to identify if these advertisements have a greater impact on their perceptions than nationally and internationally-televised snowboard events do.

An interesting variable brought up in the study is that perceptions and stereotypes vary by location. For example, the study suggested that, while snowboarders as a whole tend to share general stereotypes, while traits that the more specific traits and stereotypes could apply to snowboarders in one region but not apply in a different region. This could suggest that how snowboarders are portrayed to *passive audiences* vary in different locations as well.

*Passive audiences* are more likely to favor the Winter Olympics over the Winter X Games, the opposite from what the *active audiences* favor. This is most likely due to the availability of the Winter Olympics, as well as the professionalism and structure the Winter Olympics provides. *Passive audiences* believe that snowboarding being in the Winter Olympics does legitimize it as a sport. However, they also suggest that it tends to be more for entertainment than actual competition. This also leads these audiences to have their preconceived notions of snowboarders negated to an extent, as it shows professionalism and seriousness, which is counter to the rebellious nature of the sport's roots (Heino, 2000). It can be suggested that the commentary style of the Winter Olympics is attractive to *passive audiences* a bit more than the commentary style of the Winter X Games, as the commentary in the Winter Olympics tends to be made broad so everyone can understand what is going on.

Along those same lines, *passive audiences* do recognize snowboarding as more of an entertainment sport than a traditional, competitive sport, thus supporting  $H_2$ . The implications of this finding can be harmful to snowboarding and its culture, as it could reduce the legitimacy of snowboarding as a sport in the way wrestling is seen due to the WWE.

Exposure to the edits/video parts modified the perceptions the *passive audiences* had of snowboarding. Participants did note that some of their views on snowboarding were either changed or expanded on upon watching those clips. This evidence supports  $H_3$  to a degree, but not fully. The findings from the study do suggest that the vast majority of the participants never were exposed to the grassroots, cultural side of snowboarding. However, it can be argued that this hypothesis cannot be fully supported as some individuals that consider themselves passive have visited locations where they were exposed to the grassroots, cultural side of snowboarding.

Further research with more passive audiences is needed to fully support or reject this particular hypothesis.

While the Winter X Games and the Dew Tour do a much better job at accurately portraying snowboarding and its culture to *passive audiences* than the Winter Olympics do, it is suggested by the *active audiences* that none of those still accurately portray snowboarding and its culture enough to *passive audiences*, thus supporting  $H_1$ , especially in terms of the Winter Olympics. This also supports the arguments snowboarders like Terje Håkonsen have been making for decades about competition snowboarding not being representative of the culture (Mellgren, 1998) (Heino, 2000).

It is apparent that ESPN and the X Games are making an effort to show snowboarding more accurately through their recent *World of X Games* show that airs on ABC on Saturday afternoons, which shows snowboarding movies and snowboarding parts, as well as the snowboarding culture, alongside many other action sports subcultures. Yet, with the recent inclusion of snowboarding big air and team boardercross into the 2018 Winter Olympics in an effort to attract the rapidly-dwindling youth audience demographic (International Olympic Committee, 2015), it is becoming more and more apparent, including the support from this study, that both NBC and the International Olympic Committee are willing to risk completely selling out snowboarding's legitimacy as a sport and as a culture for more viewers, which means more money, completely contradictory from the values snowboarding was founded on, and the snowboarders are the ones who are going to pay for it, and those passive viewers will get the wrong interpretation of snowboarding, which can be problematic.

## **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

### *Limitations*

Due to the nature of this particular study, there were a few limitations that could have possibly had an influence on the results.

The primary limitation of this study was the location of where the study took place. The study took place in primarily in Lubbock, Texas, where there were a lack of subjects who fit the *active audiences* category, but an abundance who fit the *passive audiences* category. Reasons for this limitation include lack of funding for travel to locations where there were an abundance of subjects who fit the *active audiences* category. Other limitations of this study include lack of incentives for participation and this particular study was subject to a strict window of completion.

### *Suggestions for Future Research*

The results of this study have opened up potential areas for future expanded research on the topic of snowboarding and the media.

One suggestion would be for future research to focus on specifically female snowboarders and examining how female snowboarders are portrayed and framed in the mainstream media, and determining the accuracy of those portrayals. Going along those lines, future research in the topic may also examine minority groups (African Americans, Native Americans and other ethnicities in the United States) and how they are portrayed, if they are portrayed at all.

Another suggestion for future research is to conduct a study on social issues in snow sports (snowboarding, skiing and snowmobiling) and the media's influence on those issues. For example, in 2015, professional skier Gus Kenworthy, exclusively via ESPN Magazine, to announce that he is homosexual, making him the first professional action sports athlete to come out as homosexual (Roenigk, 2015) . Going along with the premise of this study, using ESPN Magazine as the primary outlet to publicly announce his homosexuality also brings up opportunities to examine the framing of social issues in sport media.

The final suggestion to expand upon this study is to conduct a content analysis on the Winter Olympics, Winter X Games and the Dew Tour to explicitly analyze what messages the major networks use in the broadcasting of these events. A content analysis was considered for this study but the lack of genuine broadcast footage from the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics found online prevented a content analysis from being conducted.

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## **Appendices**

### **APPENDICES I – FOCUS GROUP MODERATOR GUIDES**

#### **APPENDIX IA – ACTIVE AUDIENCE FOCUS GROUP**

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#### **MCOM 6050 Focus Group Moderator Guide**

##### **Active Audience Group**

##### **Part I. - Introduction**

Hello, I am Austin Nettleton and I want to thank you so much for participating in my focus group today. The purpose of this focus group is to gather qualitative data for my MCOM 6050 final project of how individuals who do not watch, participate in or follow snowboarding perceive snowboarding and its culture through what they have gathered from what they have seen around the web or on television related to snowboarding in an effort to understand how the media portrays snowboarding and its culture to passive audiences.

Please speak freely, honestly and openly about any questions and topics discussed.

Your identities and responses are 100% confidential and will only be used in the gathering of data. Your quotes may be used in the final paper.

If you understand and agree, please sign your name and date on the disclosure form in front of you.

##### **Part II. - General Knowledge and Demographics**

1. In order to break the ice, we will begin with general introductions. If you wish, please say your name, major, hometown and how long you have been snowboarding.
2. How often do you go snowboarding?
3. What skill level do you consider yourself?
4. What is your favorite place to ride?
5. What kind of snowboarder are you? (park, all-mountain, cruiser, racing, freeride, etc.)
6. What is your favorite snowboard brand?



### Part III. - General Snowboarding Perception and Experience with the Culture

1. As a snowboarder, what stereotypes do you think snowboarders have, if any?
2. Do you believe that snowboarders as a whole fit those stereotypes?
3. Why do you believe snowboarders are stereotyped like that?
4. Paralleling off the previous questions, what stereotypes do you believe female snowboarders have, if any? How did you develop those stereotypes?
5. Who is your favorite snowboarder? Why?
6. What do you think the snowboard culture represents?
7. Did you feel a barrier to entry, so to speak, when you started becoming more immersed into snowboarding, from a social standpoint?

### Part IV. - General Knowledge on the Winter Olympics and the Winter X Games

1. Do you watch the Winter Olympics?
2. What is your favorite snowboard event to watch in the Winter Olympics? Why?
3. Do you watch the Winter X Games?
4. What is your favorite event to watch in the Winter X Games? Why?
5. Does watching the Winter Olympics and/or the Winter X Games motivate you to go snowboarding?
  - a. Does it make you want to try new things on the mountain?
6. Do you watch any other snowboarding competitions?

### Part V. - Video Parts and Snowboarding Culture

1. What is your favorite snowboarding movie? Why?
2. What is your favorite snowboard edit? Why?
3. Which video part that you've watched do you believe best encompasses your idea of snowboarding culture the best? Why?

### Part VI. - The Media and Snowboarding

1. Now, I will show you a clip from the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, a clip from the 2015 Winter X Games, followed by two popular snowboard edits, highly rated by popular credible snowboarding media outlets such as Transworld Snowboarding, Snowboarder Magazine and Yobeat.com.

a. For the first two clips, do you notice any differences in how the event is presented?

b. From your standpoint as a snowboarder, do you feel that snowboarding as a sport and as a culture is portrayed accurately during broadcasted events?

c. Do you believe that snowboarding is becoming a mainstream sport?

i. If yes, do you think it is beneficial to the sport and culture?

d. Where do you see snowboarding at in the next 10 years?

i. Do you think the media will play a factor in it?

e. Lastly, do you believe that the Winter X Games, Dew Tour and the Winter Olympics give an inaccurate representation of snowboarding and its culture to audiences who do not snowboard or care to follow the scene?

#### Part V. - Conclusion

I personally want to thank you so much for your time, participation and contributions in my focus group this evening. While you are most likely here mainly for the credits, your thoughts and opinions are going to greatly benefit my research project and you will have played a critical role in getting me my master's degree in May. Thank you so much!

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#### APPENDIX IB – PASSIVE AUDIENCE FOCUS GROUP

##### Focus Group Moderator Guide

##### Non-Snowboarders/Non-Snowboarding Audiences

3/29/2016

#### I – INTRODUCTION

Hello, I am Austin Nettleton and I want to thank you so much for participating in my focus group today. The purpose of this focus group is to gather qualitative data for my MCOM 6050 final project of how individuals who do not watch, participate in or follow snowboarding perceive snowboarding and its culture through what they have gathered from what they have seen around the web or on television related to snowboarding in an effort to understand how the media portrays snowboarding and its culture to passive audiences such as yourselves.

You do not have to know anything about snowboarding at all to participate in today's focus group.

Please speak freely, honestly and openly about any questions and topics discussed.

Your identities and responses are 100% confidential and will only be used in the gathering of data. Your quotes may be used in the final paper.

If you understand and agree, please sign your name and date on the disclosure form in front of you.

## II – GENERAL KNOWLEDGE AND DEMOGRAPHICS

1. In order to break the ice, we will begin with general introductions. If you wish, please say your name, major, hometown and favorite sport.
2. Have you lived outside of Texas for any given period of time?
3. Where is your favorite vacation spot?
4. Do you play any sports (recreational, solo or team)? If so, which ones and for how long?
5. What is your favorite major sporting event you watch and why is it your favorite?
6. And this is the most played-out question in focus groups, but it is necessary to ask, so bear with me; what social media platforms do you use?
7. Do you follow any sports teams, organizations or athletes on social media? If so, who and why?

## III – GENERAL SNOWBOARDING PERCEPTION

1. When I say the word snowboarding, what comes first to your mind? It can be anything!
2. Describe what you think a snowboarder looks like and what a snowboarder does.
3. Are there any stereotypes that come to mind when I say the word snowboarder? Be honest!
  - a. Why do you think snowboarders fit that stereotype?
  - b. How did you develop that perception?
4. What are your thoughts about women's snowboarding?
  - a. Do you believe women in snowboarding fit the same stereotypes as men do?

## IV – THE WINTER OLYMPICS AND WINTER X GAMES

1. Do you watch the winter Olympics? If so, why?
2. Who is your favorite Olympian? Why?
3. Do you have a favorite winter Olympian? If so, who and why?
4. What is your favorite winter Olympic event to watch (excluding the opening and closing ceremonies)? Why?
5. Do you have a favorite winter Olympic memory?
6. Do you watch any snowboarding events in the winter Olympics?
  - a. If so, what and why?
7. Who is your favorite Olympic snowboarder?
  - a. Why?
8. Does the winter Olympics influence your perception of snowboarding?
  - a. If so, how?
9. Do you think snowboarding in the winter Olympics benefits the sport of snowboarding and its culture?
10. Do you watch the Winter X Games? If so, how many years?
11. What are your favorite events to watch?
12. Do you have a favorite snowboarder who competes in the Winter X Games?
  - a. If so, who and why?
13. Which do you like to watch more? The Winter Olympics or the Winter X Games? Why?

## V – THE MEDIA AND SNOWBOARDING

1. After watching the winter Olympics or the Winter X Games, do you have the desire to try snowboarding?
2. Do you believe that snowboarding in the Winter Olympics and the Winter X Games legitimizes it as a mainstream sport?
3. Are you aware of any other snowboarding competitions that are televised? If so, which ones and on what network?
4. Now, I will show you a couple of quick videos. The first are from the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics and the 2015 and 2016 Winter X Games , with the second coming from various movie parts widely regarded by snowboarding publications as good models of grassroots snowboarding.

- a. Sochi 2014 men's slopestyle final
- b. Chloe Kim snowboard superpipe X Games Oslo
- c. Mark McMorris Wins Snowboard Big Air at X Games Aspen
- d. NoToBo Sage Kotsenburg
- e. Too Hard: We on.
- i. Do you recognize any snowboarders in these parts? If so, who?
  - 1. Seeing those snowboarders you recognized in the Olympics and X Games from those videos, do your perceptions of them change? If so, how?
- ii. Does the Too Hard clip change your perception of women's snowboarding?
  - 1. If so, how?
- 5. Are you aware that ESPN and the X Games have a series called Real Snow that comprises of parts from professional snowboarders snowboarding in the streets and in the backcountry?

## VI – CLOSING QUESTIONS

- 1. After watching those videos, do you believe snowboarding is accurately portrayed in the broadcast media?
- 2. Are you more likely to try snowboarding after watching the clips from the first videos or from the second or neither?
- 3. Do those parts make you more or less interested in snowboarding?
- 4. Do you believe snowboarding can eventually become a mainstream sport?
- 5. If you do not follow nor care for snowboarding at all, how can sports media attract your interest?
- 6. Final thoughts?

## VII – CONCLUSION

Thank you so much for your time and interest in helping me gather data for my research project. Your input is vital to the success of my project and your contributions helped out greatly. You will be granted 1.25 SONA credits to your SONA account if you have one.

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