



The impact of the Beijing Olympics on New Zealanders' perceptions of Asia

Introduction

Asia New Zealand Foundation commissions Colmar Brunton to annually measure New Zealanders' attitudes towards, and perceptions of, Asia. Over the last 10 years, this programme of research has tracked the growth in New Zealanders' greater contact with Asian peoples and the growing importance of Asia to New Zealand across many facets of our lives.

In 2008, China hosted the Summer Olympic games, the XXIX Olympiad. This was only the third time that an Olympic Games has been held in Asia. Twenty years earlier, Korea hosted the Summer Olympics.

Attitudes and perceptions are created in many different ways. One of the most significant ways in which they are formed is through experiences. An event like the Olympic Games had the potential to positively impact the growing positive perceptions of China amongst New Zealanders.

In the 2008 research programme, pre and post Olympics measures were conducted to evaluate the likely impact of the Beijing Olympics on New Zealanders' perceptions of Asia. The pre Olympics measure was conducted in July 2008 with 500 New Zealanders aged 15 years and over. The post Olympics measure was the 2008 annual study which involved surveying 1000 New Zealanders aged 15 years and over in September and October of 2008.

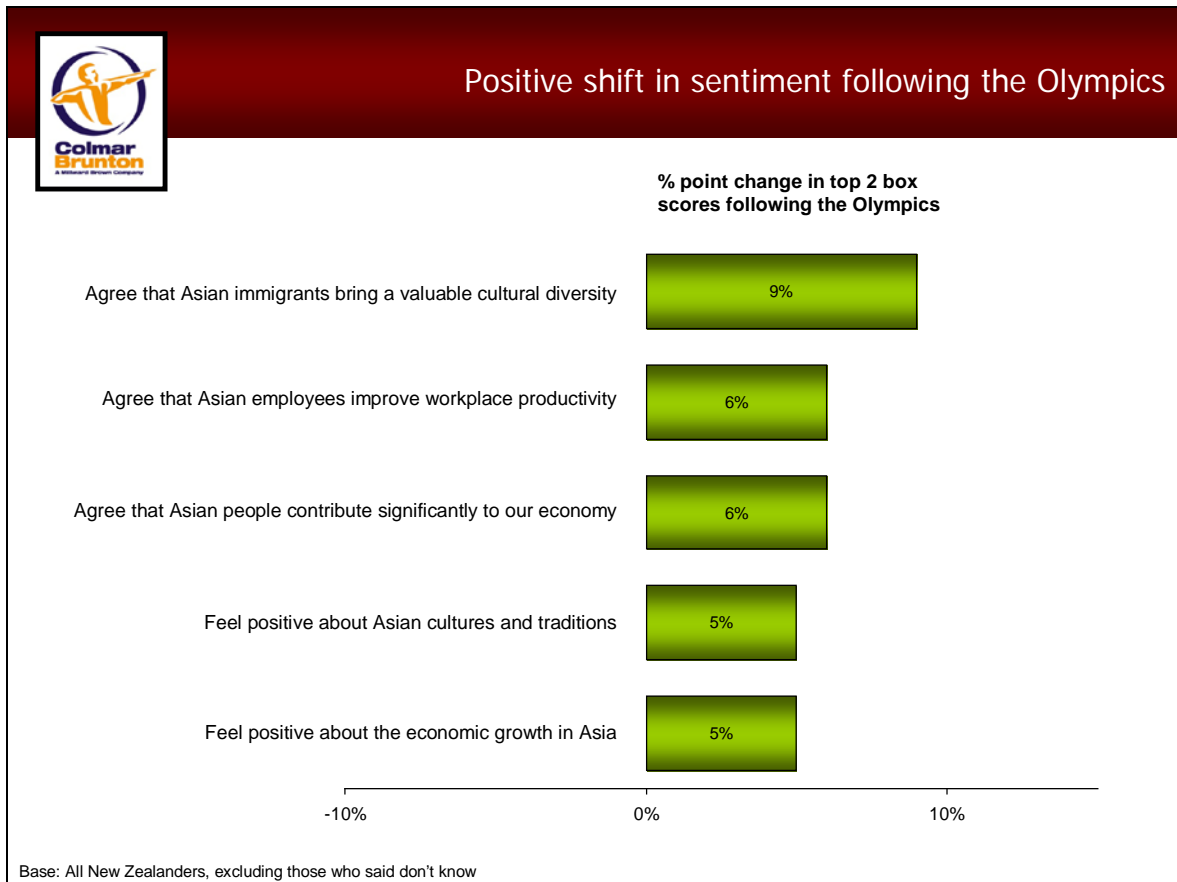
Findings

We found two significant positive increases between the pre and post measures:

1. The average feeling of warmth for the people of China increased by four degrees from 65° to 69° (this is measured as degree of warmth and favourability from 0 to 100).
2. Following the Olympics, 22% of New Zealanders (up 5% from 17%) thought that New Zealanders felt warmer towards the people from China compared to 12 months ago.

We asked those who said that they thought that New Zealanders felt warmer towards people from China for the reasons why they thought this. The single most common reason given for the change in warmth towards people from China was the Olympics Games in Beijing.

Looking beyond the direct measures of perceptions, the research sought to understand whether the above improvements spilled over into other measures. We found that the Olympics did not change New Zealanders' level of awareness of China as one of the countries that make up Asia. This appears to be because China already heavily dominated our awareness of Asian countries (nine out of ten New Zealanders). However, we found a number of notable improvements in New Zealanders' sentiments towards Asian peoples generally between the two measurements. These are illustrated in the following chart.



Using the Olympics to create momentum?

We sought to determine if the more positive sentiment towards China and its people, and attention surrounding the Olympics, translated into opportunities for New Zealand companies. As Air New Zealand was a sponsor of the New Zealand Olympic Team, their view was sought.

"The coinciding of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and the commencement of Air New Zealand direct flights from Auckland to Beijing allowed Air New Zealand to use its sponsorship of the NZ Olympic Team to unveil a new and exciting destination to a mass audience.

With the world focusing on Beijing we were able to provide a visual insight into this unique destination, its people, culture, tradition as well as its modern architecture. Beijing is now a firm consideration for many New Zealanders looking for new and exciting experiences."

James Abbott
Marketing Manager – Sponsorship and Events
Air New Zealand

Learnings

Significant positive global events of the scale of the Summer Olympics do not occur all the time. They have the ability to positively alter how we see other countries, and to change our behaviour in relation to those countries. Likewise, significant negative global events can adversely impact on perceptions. Whilst not a key area of focus for this paper, we did observe



that the melamine in milk problem reduced New Zealanders' feeling of warmth towards China during the same period.

Perceptions of people and other countries behave very much like corporate reputation. Positive, supportive attitudes are earned through positive performance. Reputations can be earned and lost through the behaviour of countries and its leaders.