How Do We Value Olympic Sport?

An analysis of the values communicated in New Zealand media coverage of the Tokyo 2020/21 Olympic Games, and the mediatized influences that shape them.

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Abstract

The modern Summer Olympic Games are distinct among other contemporary sporting mega-events, as the centerpiece of a movement to deliver a stipulated values doctrine across international societies: Olympism (International Olympic Committee, 2021c). Now an immense media spectacle; much has changed in the production and mediation of the modern Games since they began in 1896, significantly owing to successive waves of mediatization (Tomlinson, 2017; Frandsen, 2020). Since then, the Games have traversed significant global transformations from politics and conflict to professionalization and commercialization, systematic doping, and considerable societal changes. Still, Olympism remains at the heart of the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) global mandate espousing moral education (Chatziefstathiou & Henry, 2012).

Despite the established, ongoing relevance of Olympism, there has been limited research dedicated to understanding the communication of values in media coverage of the Olympics. The decision to hold the Tokyo 2020 Games amid the global COVID-19 pandemic (albeit after a one-year postponement) marks a pertinent moment to engage in such an investigation, against a backdrop of ethical debates over the Games risk to the health and wellbeing of athletes, officials, and Tokyo residents, weighed against its proposition to society (Shimokubo, 2023). That the Games ultimately went ahead under these unprecedented circumstances, with media even more essential to their presentation than ever, makes these Games a significant contemporary moment within which to evaluate the values communicated in event media coverage.

Within this context, New Zealand received international praise for its strict isolationist response to the pandemic, although stopped short of prohibiting the national Olympic team from competing in Tokyo (Beattie & Priestley, 2021; Theunissen & Wolf, 2022). This contradictory juxtaposition of pandemic restrictions in New Zealand and its Olympic participation, combined with the nation's reputation for placing a considerable emphasis on sports, makes for an intriguing case study in which explore the values communicated in Olympic media coverage (Bruce, Falcous & Thorpe, 2007).

Applying Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA), Frame Analysis and Thematic Analysis respectively; this thesis takes a three-stage approach to analyzing New Zealand media coverage of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, highlighting the nuanced contextual and media-logical applications of the constructed media texts: press releases, digital news, broadcast interviews and Facebook posts and comments. Each stage of the research is underscored by values theory, conceptualizing values as 'moral languages' intuiting the desirable, with mediatization theory applied towards understanding the findings in terms of the media and societal influences that inform their communication (Williams Jnr, 1979). The results reveal a cohesive values-order, highlighting Olympic excellence, nationalism

and athlete qualities, by which a ‘New Zealand Olympian’ archetype emerges. Overall, the findings testify to the resilience and robusticity of the Olympic values proposition in its mediatized constitution and questions the implications and applicability of these consistencies, relative to emergent challenges amid the international sporting landscape.

Table of Contents

Abstract ***2***

List of Figures ***8***

List of Tables ***9***

Attestation of Authorship ***10***

Co-authorship Contributions within this Thesis ***11***

Acknowledgements ***13***

Chapter One: Introduction ***14***

Research Objectives: **15**

Research Design: **16**

Media Selections: 16

Methodological Selections: 17

Stage One: Excellence, Respect and Friendship? Elucidating Olympic values in mediatized discourse amid the throes of the COVID-19 Pandemic. 18

Stage Two: Mediatization of two worlds: A Goffman-inspired frame analysis of values communicated in broadcast athlete interviews at the Olympic Games. 19

Stage Three: Mediatization, nationalism and socio-cultural layering: Values communication and the construction of the New Zealand Olympian Archetype on Facebook during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. 19

Summary of Methods 20

Significance of the Study **21**

Structure of the Thesis **22**

Conclusion **24**

Chapter Two: Literature Review ***25***

Section One: The Philosophy of Values **27**

Durkheim's 'Anomie' and De Coubertin's Olympic Solution 28

Discerning Values in Culture: Raymond Williams and the 'Structure of Feeling' 30

Empirical Values Research 31

Values in Media Culture: 'Structure of Feeling' meets Mediatization 33

Culture is Ordinary, Sport is Omnipresent 34

Section Two: Mediatization, MediaSport and the 'Sport-Media Nexus' **35**

Mediatization and Sport 37

Section Three: Olympic Values and Olympism **41**

The Origins of Olympism Values 43

Olympism Meets MediaSport 46

Challenges to 19th Century Olympism Over the 20th and 21st Centuries 47

Section Four: Aotearoa New Zealand: An Olympic Nation **52**

The Industrial Sport Revolution and The Empire 54

Shaping the New Nation: Colonialism and Sport 55

Contemporary Heroes: Olympic Role Models 56

New Zealand in Tokyo: The COVID-19 Pandemic 57

Concluding Summary **60**

Research Objectives: 61

Chapter Three: Methodology and Research Design 62

Inductive Qualitative Analysis 62

Coding 62

Research Stage One: Foucauldian Discourse Analysis 63

Foucauldian Analysis of the Olympic Movement 65
Foucauldian Methodology 67
Defining Objects and Selecting Enunciations 68
Refining Enunciations 69
Identifying Concepts 70
Theoretical Links to Power 71

Research Stage Two: Frame Analysis 72

Criticism of Frame Analysis 73
Applying Frame Analysis as Method 74
Stage Two Research Design 76
Understanding Values-Frames in Context: Frame Groups 78
Values-Frames Analysis: Mediatized Value-Frames 79

Research Stage Three: Thematic Analysis 79

Data Familiarization: "A Process of Immersion" (Braun & Clark, 2022, p.34) 83
Reflexive coding: "Organic, Evolving and Subjective" (Braun & Clark, 2022, p.53). 84
Searching for Themes: "Exploring Shared Meaning" (Braun & Clark, 2022, p.77). 85
Reviewing Themes: "Developing a Richness of your Themes" (Braun & Clark, 2022, p.97) 85
Defining Themes and Writing the Report: "Telling your Story Well" (Braun & Clark, 2022, p.149). 86

Conclusion 86

Introduction to Chapter Four: Research Stage One 88

Chapter Four: Excellence, Respect and Friendship? Elucidating Olympic Values in Mediatized Discourse Amid the Throes of the COVID-19 Pandemic. 90

Abstract 90

Introduction 90

Literature Review 91

COVID-19 and Tokyo 2020/21 91
New Zealand 92
The Olympic Games: Media and Mediatization 94

Methodology 94

Research Design 96

Findings 100

Olympic Excellence 102
Pride and Legacy 104
Athletic Excellence 105
Athlete Qualities 106
COVID-19 107

Discussion 107

Limitations 110

Conclusion **111**

Introduction to Chapter Five: Research Stage Two ***112***

Chapter Five: Mediatization of Two Worlds: A Goffman-Inspired Frame Analysis of Values Communicated in Broadcast Athlete Interviews at the Olympic Games. ***114***

Abstract **114**

Introduction **114**

Literature Review **116**

Communicating Values: The Olympics in Society 117

The New Zealand Team in Tokyo 118

Methodology **119**

Research Design **121**

Athlete Selection 121

Application of Frame Analysis 122

Contribution Coding 124

Findings and Discussion **124**

Values-Frame Contribution 127

Prominent Frames and Values 129

Mediatization, Values and Frames 130

Media Processes and Games Structures 131

Divergent Values-Frames: Laurel Hubbard and Valerie Adams 133

Conclusion **136**

Introduction to Chapter Six: Research Stage Three ***137***

Chapter Six: Mediatization, Nationalism and Socio-Cultural Layering: Values Communication and the Construction of the New Zealand Olympian Archetype on Facebook during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. ***138***

Abstract **138**

Introduction **138**

Literature Review **139**

Athletes, Social Media and the Olympics 140

Values, Mediatization and Society 142

Methodology **144**

Athlete Selection 146

Data Collection and Sample Cleaning 146

Coding and Thematic Interpretation 147

Findings **148**

'Post' Themes 148

'Comment' Themes 150

Discussion **154**

Athlete Posts: Situating Socio-Cultural Identity 154

Athlete Attachments and Socio-Cultural Layering 156

Facebook Logics and Olympic Exposure 158

Conclusion **159**

Chapter Seven: Discussion ***161***

Research Design **164**

Olympic Mediatization and Values Communication **165**

The Olympic Movement: Power and Processes 166

Social Roles on the Olympic Stage 167

Reinforcing and Reflecting Values: Athletes and their Audience. 171

Mediatized Values: A Summary 173

Olympic Values in the Context of a Global Pandemic **175**

Sport in New Zealand Society: Values, Heroes and Nationalism **178**

Contemporary Issues and Future Research **184**

Research Limitations **186**

Chapter Eight: Conclusion ***191***

References ***195***

Appendix D. ***240***

List of Figures

Chapter Five: Mediatization of Two Worlds: A Goffman-Inspired Frame Analysis of Values Communicated in Broadcast Athlete Interviews at the Olympic Games. 114

Figure 1. *Pie Chart Showing Communication of Upper Quartile Values-Frames by Athlete (A) and Journalist (J)*.....128

Figure 2. *Pie Chart Showing Communication of Upper Quartile Values-Frames by Values-Frame Communication Category*.....128

List of Tables

Chapter Three: Methodology and Research Design**.....*62***

Table 1. *Macro and Micro category examples COVID-19 (preview to p.99)*.....69

Chapter Four: Excellence, Respect and Friendship? Elucidating Olympic Values in Mediatized Discourse Amid the Throes of the COVID-19 Pandemic 90

Table 1. *Total texts per publication*.....98

Table 2. *Macro-categories identified with number of texts*.....,..99

Table 3. *Macro and Micro category examples COVID-19*.....99

Table 4. *Micro-Categories selected for analysis, including relative macro-categories and volume of articles per publication*.....100

Table 5. *Descriptive Groups of Common Values, Number of Distinct Values and Total Values Occurrences*.....101

Table 6. *Values Recorded by Descriptive Category 'Olympic Excellence and National Applications' and 'Athlete Qualities', Including Total Number of Values Recorded, Values as Percentage of Texts per Micro-Category, and Values as Percentage of Texts per Publication*.....101

Chapter Five: Mediatization of Two Worlds: A Goffman-Inspired Frame Analysis of Values Communicated in Broadcast Athlete Interviews at the Olympic Games. 114

Table 1. *Highest and Lowest Values-Frames per Group Count; Median; Upper, Lower and Inter-Quartile Ranges of Values-Frames Across the Sample*.....125

Table 2. *Showing Upper Quartile Frames and Values Including Values Count, Number of Interviews and Journalist (J) or Athlete (A) Contributions*.....125

Chapter Six: Mediatization, Nationalism and Socio-Cultural Layering: Values Communication and the Construction of the 'New Zealand Olympian' Archetype on Facebook during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. 138

Table 1. *Comments per athlete, Post 1 and Post 2*.....146

Table 2. *Themes and Values Identified in Athlete Posts 1 and 2*.....149

Table 3. *Themes and Values identified in Comments for Athlete Post 1 and 2*.....150

Attestation of Authorship

"I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning."

Leah Stanley

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Chapter One: Introduction

This research sets out to understand the Summer Olympic Games in terms of the social values communicated within them, as constructed and reinforced by mediatized processes inherent to their production, mediation and consumption. On a more personal note, it is also an attempt to reconcile my own feelings towards the Olympic Games and sport in general; as a New Zealander, a former athlete and 'Olympic relative'. Both my father and my husband participated in the Games, the latter retiring upon the announcement that the Tokyo Games would be postponed. These relationships, and my own athlete journey, no doubt inflect upon my perspectives on the Games, of which I find myself, at various junctions, both a fan and a critic. While my personal connections to the Games may be more engrained than most, the distinct rapture I can access via media channels every four years, tells me I am far from alone. What is it about the Games that exercises such power to engage? Why are they so evocative? So intrinsically important, broadly, across society? In many respects, this study is my attempt to unpack these feelings and attachments, by understanding what exactly it is that is communicated through the Games, unmasking the undercurrent messaging, and perhaps most importantly, its echo and consolidation in society.

As a heavily mediatized global sporting mega-event, the Olympic Games are both performed and experienced through a media lens (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006; Tomlinson, 2017). This has never been the case more than for the Tokyo 2020 Games, held in the absence of live spectators owing to health and safety restrictions incurred by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (Huffadine, 2021). The 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games, and the 2020 Tokyo Games are both notable for significant immersion in the latest wave of mediatization, characterised by emergent digital technologies and associated social media applications (Billings, Angelini & MacArthur, 2018a; Frandsen, 2020; Hutchins & Sanderson, 2017). Suffice to say, the media lens is increasingly varied, and the technologies associated with it never more a part of our everyday lives. Such is the post-modern media constitution of the Olympics, it is easy to forget the machinations behind their 1896 revitalisation- a desire among the European aristocratic class to unite a newly industrialized and increasingly globalized world under a moral banner (Brown, 2012; Scambler, 2005). That the Games remain popular around the world, attracting a global audience of over three billion people in 2021 (International Olympic Committee, 2021c), testifies to their ongoing socio-cultural relevance and the success of the commercial media mega-event they have become (Tomlinson, 2017). Yet, beyond the commercial entanglements and monetization of the Olympic brand, there has been little effort to understand the social value of the contemporary Olympic Games, despite its considerable evolution over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Rahman & Lockwood, 2011; Smart, 2018).

Utilizing values theory, this thesis examines the interpretation and understanding of values communicated in contemporary media coverage of the Olympic Games. Mediatization theory is also applied as a sensitising lens to reconcile the societal influences and media logics[1] shaping the manifestations of values in media content (Altheide & Snow, 1979; Krotz, 2017). Necessarily, this study is socio-culturally specific, acknowledging the specific context in which values are communicated and the respective media environment (Frandsen, 2020; Schwarz, 1992). The Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games not only featured a singular spotlight on the role of media communications of the Games but took place within the unprecedented environment of an ongoing, global pandemic. That the Games were held despite a global state of emergency, draws a special pertinence around the perceived importance of the Games and the associated values at their centre (Shimokubo, 2023; Yoneoka, Eguchi, Fukumoto, Kawashima, Tanoue, Tabuchi, Miyata, Ghaznavi, Shibuya & Nomura, 2022).

Finally, the case study for values identification and analysis in media coverage is New Zealand, a nation renowned for placing significance on sport and the Olympic Games. New Zealand offered a particularly interesting case for analysis, given the global acclaim afforded to country's strict, isolationist pandemic response (Beattie & Priestley, 2021; Bruce, et al., 2007; Knight, MacNeill & Donnelly, 2005). The juxtaposition of these seemingly conflicting priorities propositions the case as an intriguing glimpse into the mediatization of Olympic values communication, under potentially polarizing circumstances.

Research Objectives:

Accordingly, this thesis sets out to examine the communication of values in New Zealand media coverage of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games with the following objectives:

- To reveal the values communicated in New Zealand media coverage of the Tokyo 2020/21 Olympic Games.
- To examine how the values communicated in New Zealand media coverage of the Tokyo 2020/21 Olympic Games are influenced reflexively by media and society.
- To interpret, through analysis of the communication of values in New Zealand media coverage of the Tokyo 2020/21 Olympic Games, the value or role of Olympic sport in New Zealand culture and society.

These objectives form the basis for the specific research questions reconciled within three distinct components of the designed research.

[1] [1] 'Media logic is a concept developed by Altheide and Snow (1979), referring to the informing processes that drive media organizations interactions and decision making, and their consequent influences on society.

Research Design:

The research is structured and presented in three parts (referred to as stage 1, 2 and 3 respectively) comprised as manuscripts that contribute chapters four, five and six of this thesis respectively. Each stage of the research is dedicated to identifying, interpreting and understanding the values communicated in the media content, within the specific context of the media and societal processes that shape their construction.

Media Selections:

Each stage of the research examines a different format of media content representative of New Zealand media coverage of the Tokyo Games, conceptualized and analysed by three distinct methodological approaches. The selection of media content to form the samples for each stage was informed by several considerations:

- Media content that was available and accessible for analysis, given the delay between the event itself and this study.
- Media content involving a diverse array of contributors relative to media coverage of the Olympics (Institutional agents, journalists, athletes etc.)
- Media content reflective of the diverse platforms and formats by which media coverage of the Tokyo Games was disseminated and consumed.

This attention to the diversity of media content for analysis, including those constructing and contributing to the communications therein, was designed to capture a broad representation of the values communicated in New Zealand media coverage of the Games, while acknowledging the formative influence of the IOC in Games media access and distribution.

The resulting media sample for analysis included 173 press releases and 511 digital news articles (stage one), 18 athlete post-competition interviews (stage two), and 16 athlete Facebook posts and 876 associated Facebook audience comments.

The selected media comprising this sample and their access mechanisms for each stage are as follows:

Stage One

Press Releases by the IOC (12 articles) and NZOC (151) (website archives), and Digital News from *The New Zealand Herald* (325) and *Radio New Zealand* (186) (website archives). Content was limited to that supplied by these sources directly, ensuring contextual representation (e.g. international third-party news sources were not included). These selections offered comparative insights across institutional values messaging (IOC, NZOC) and whether the values therein were reciprocated in local online news coverage.

Stage Two

18 Athlete post-competition interviews, comprising a total of 49 minutes and 42 seconds of coverage. Interviews were provided directly and solely from *Sky New Zealand* as the only New Zealand broadcaster present in Tokyo. In this instance, the athlete voice was captured for analysis, within a key feature of broadcast media coverage (athlete interviews). This selection also enabled a comparison of athlete and journalist values communication, including the instigation of select values communication within the interactions, and the scope for the introduction of diverse or novel values.

Stage Three

16 Facebook posts by 8 New Zealand athletes, and associated audience comments (876). These were accessed from the athletes' public Facebook profiles. This final stage of the research positioned the athlete voice in direct communication with their perceived audience, interpreting the values communicated and their resonance with the responding audience.

In each case, the relevant media was determined by the same date range, spanning 16th July to the 15th of August 2021, capturing the period of the event, including one week prior to the Games and one week following. This selection was intended to capture the communication of any peripheral sentiments regarding the Games either in anticipation or in reflection.

These media selections established the parameters for a strict contextual focus on values in New Zealand media content, as pertaining to the societal and media influences that shape contextual mediatization of the Games. Certainly, the Olympic Games do not occur in a national vacuum so to speak, however, I posit that the values communicated specifically in New Zealand media coverage of the Games have something to say about New Zealand perspectives on the Games and the events, issues and individuals showcased within them. Citing mediatization theory, I argue that the values investigated herein are indicative of the enmeshing of media and societal influences pertaining to the Games that facilitate their communication and reception in New Zealand.

Methodological Selections:

Previous methodological approaches to values research, such as those incorporating computational language analysis, have been designed to isolate values sentiments within qualitative data, predicated on assumptions of the presence or absence of specific values (Cheng & Fleischmann, 2010). However, for this thesis I was less interested in whether (or not) the IOC successfully conferred the Olympic Charter and principles of Olympism into the media production of the Games, than I was in how and in what way, the institutional and media structures of the Games were evident as influences on the values communicated within the selected media coverage. The objective was not to attempt to hold any particular influences to account for salient or absent values, or to promote an idealized construct of media coverage of the Games. Rather, I sought to inductively reveal the values in New Zealand media coverage of the Games, and to consider how a variety of influences and structures indicative in

their media communication, demonstrate their role and influence in New Zealand society. The selection of methodologies that afforded this inductive, qualitative approach to media content analysis, was thus essential to the research objectives.

The decision to structure the thesis into three components each focused on a distinct type of media content, enabled the flexibility to adopt a discerning methodological approach suitable to the nature and specificities of the media formats. With values theory and mediatization theory informing the core theoretical orientations across the study, the following methodological selections (particularly stages one and two) lent additional theoretical considerations to the interpretation of media content, and the formative influences that shaped the values communicated.

Stage One: Excellence, Respect and Friendship? Elucidating Olympic values in mediatized discourse amid the throes of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

This stage of the research focuses on institutional communications (IOC, NZOC) and their relative reciprocity in news media coverage of the Olympics. Michel Foucault's (1972; 1978) conceptions of discursive practice and relational power in society offered theoretical compatibilities within an informed methodological approach towards the aims of elucidating and contextualizing values in the media texts. Accordingly, the application of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) to the examination of press releases and digital news articles, foregrounded the currents of relational power in the media content as formative influences on the communicated values. Paired with mediatization theory; the Foucauldian approach importantly acknowledged the influence of the IOC (and to a lesser extent the NZOC) in constructing the Games for media coverage, and their imposition of contractual strictures, as significantly gatekeeping the communication of the Games via media. Furthermore, Foucault's (1972; 1978) contentions that discourse goes beyond language, intuiting knowledges of the acceptable, salient, and alternatively, excluded; offers a framework compatible with Rokeach (1979) and Williams Jnr's (1979) attestations of values as notions of the normatively desirable, shaped and reinforced by social interactions- of which discourse can broadly be considered a record (Markula & Silk, 2011).

In line with Markula and Silk's (2011) approach to FDA, this stage of the research scaled the Foucauldian archaeological elements of the analysis to focus on values communication within a concise sample of media texts (Foucault, 1972). The discussion is sensitized by mediatization theory to consider the values findings across the media sources in terms of their connection to the media operations and design of the Games as mandated by the institutional governing powers. The FDA focus on power in discourse provided a fitting framework for these considerations, including exploration of the discursive power exercised in discourse relative to the pandemic and the Games, as revealed in the findings. The outcomes of this stage of the study prompted further questions bridging into stage two, notably: To what degree is there scope for media correspondents and sources to

diverge from institutional values discourse? And, more specifically: Do athletes and journalists contribute divergent values communications? These questions added pertinence to the stage two analysis, focused on the communication of values by athletes in a media format directly aligned to their competition and performance.

Stage Two: Mediatization of two worlds: A Goffman-inspired frame analysis of values communicated in broadcast athlete interviews at the Olympic Games.

Acknowledging the centrality of athletic competition at the Games, this stage of the study selected broadcast interviews with athletes within Olympic venues, as an established media format within event coverage (Fernández Peña, 2024). Selecting post-competition interviews specifically, this stage examined each side of the values exchange- journalists and athletes- both as interacting individuals and key contributors to communication of values in media coverage.

While journalists serving in these roles are media professionals whose work is informed (if not determined) by media logics, athletes represent their own interests albeit with obligations as representatives of the New Zealand Olympic team. Furthermore, the fact that the interaction takes place directly after competition, pertaining to an outcome that cannot be definitively predicted, proffers an element of spontaneity to the interaction and the human responses involved in it. To capture these distinctions within the media format, Goffman's (1974) Frame Analysis was selected as a theoretical framework structuring the methodology. Described loosely as 'sentiments of desirability', Rokeach's (1973) values were identified as interpretable within frames; discernible language features structuring the "organization of experience" (Zerubavel, 2024, p.2). This novel uniting of theory informed the method for identifying 'values-frames' within the communication, with mediatization theory sensitizing understandings of their salience relative to media and societal processes. Goffman's (1959; 1979) theories on self-presentation and social roles also support frame theory, enabling greater attention to the interactional nature of the media format and the relative contribution of values by both athletes and journalists.

The discussion highlights two prominent cases of novel values-frame invocation, with correspondents observed bringing external values into media coverage. Considering these observations, and historical examples of athlete protests (expanded upon in section three of the literature review), questions as to the capacity for athletes to influence Olympic values discourse gained an added salience leading into the final stage of the research focused on athlete social media.

Stage Three: Mediatization, nationalism and socio-cultural layering: Values communication and the construction of the New Zealand Olympian Archetype on Facebook during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games.

Building on the findings from research stages one and two; the final stage examines the New Zealand athlete voice in terms of values communication relative to their audience, through the examination of

social media messaging on Facebook. In doing so, the sample captured both athlete statements (posts) and the responses corresponding from their audience (comments), thus interpreting two distinct groups of contributors to values communication, from two different formats within the media platform. This stage of the study takes an important step towards understanding the communication of New Zealand sporting values in social media exchanges between athletes and their audience(s), and considers the ongoing resonance and significance of Olympic sport in contemporary New Zealand society,

The task of reconciling findings across two connected, yet distinct media formats, required a flexible approach to analyse the two forms of communication both independently and in relation to one another. This need for flexibility was the primary rationale informing the selection of Thematic Analysis as the methodology, as it could be applied separately to both media, with a continuity of approach by which to draw meaningful insights between the two. Guided by the methodological frameworks described by Braun, Clarke and Weate (2016) and Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012), I conducted a tandem analysis of athlete 'Posts' and audience 'Comments', coding values and interpreting themes specific to each format. The subsequent discussion considers the findings between the two under the sensitizing lens of mediatization theory; revealing commonalities in the values as indicative of logics pertaining to the Facebook format (e.g. the algorithm, timing), and cultural values pertinent to the New Zealand socio-cultural context.

The analysis reveals strong consistencies in the values shared by athletes and audience members alike regarding the role and performance of the New Zealand athletes, converging on an archetype of what it means to gain the status of a New Zealand Olympian. Drawing on New Zealand sports history and applying mediatization theory towards understanding this communication in the media content, I consider how the revealed values continue to permeate contemporary New Zealand sporting narratives, and perhaps more importantly, ongoing media communications of the Olympic Games.

Summary of Methods

The methodological diversity applied across the stages of the research offered new theoretical conceptualizations applicable to the research aims and-broadened my perspectives as a researcher. This methodological variation was especially important for challenging my own interpretation of context and the perception of the values communicated, as well as sharpening my abilities as a researcher to detect *where*, *how* and *why* the values were communicated. Although challenging at times, the juxtaposition of Foucauldian and Goffmanian method and theory in application to the media content and contributors, served to draw attention both to the macro-influences of society at large, and the micro-influences of people within societal structures. Both conceptions proved revealing of the values that emerged as salient and applicable within the media content and context. Furthermore, the application of thematic analysis to the final stage of the research, aligned effectively

with the relatively variable media format, offering an ability to embrace both preceding influences upon my own development as a researcher. In doing so, I was able to draw on both macro and micro socio-culturally contextual insights to interpret the values emergent in the themes, supported by the consistent contentions of mediatization theory. These theoretical reinforcements granted me greater confidence in the reconciliation of findings across the three stages of the research, and in forming my own resolutions on their relevance and significance both within New Zealand, and on an international scale.

Significance of the Study

This study constitutes a novel integration of both values theory and mediatization theory as a means of conceptualizing communications of what is valued in society, and the underlying influences of both media and society that shape values communication. That the values are examined as communicated and disseminated through media, infers that salient values-gain significance as they are reinforced to the audience consuming them, or even (in the case of social media), participating in their construction (Cheng & Fleischmann, 2010; Maio, Olson, Bernard & Luke, 2006; Scheufele, 1999). In the context of the Olympic Games, these theoretical applications enable a perspective on the social relevance of Games values across a broad association with the Games, from the institutional, to the participant, to media and, ultimately, audiences. This multiplicity appears distinctive, both among academic understandings of Games narratives and values, and of New Zealand Olympic culture alike. Furthermore, by targeting samples of media content at each stage of the analysis, this study remains true to a specific iteration of recent Games history, examining the values constructed in and of the time and place in which they were communicated. This temporal specificity affords an important contemporary understanding of Olympic sporting values and culture in New Zealand, which have largely been established upon more distant, historical terms. Cohesively, the stages of the research cover a variety of different contributors to media coverage of the Games in New Zealand, highlighting varying influences on the mediatization of the values communicated, and the media and societal agents constructing them. By maintaining consistency in the aims of each stage of the study pertaining to the communication of values, the overall thesis presents a significant examination and cataloguing of values, communicated across a diverse network of mediatized sources that broadly facilitate the New Zealand mediation of the Tokyo 2020/21 Olympic Games.

Conceptualizing Olympic sporting values, and the forces that shape their media communication as examined in this thesis, offers significant considerations for understanding change, and negotiating development in the sport and media landscape. From the Enhanced Games to E-sports, or contentions over gender identity in sporting categories; the values of the Olympic movement and those attributed to it, consistently jostle at the centre of determinations on the future of sport and its role in society (Loland, 2022; Milton-Smith, 2002). This thesis, as an approach to understanding *what*

exactly the values are that Olympic sport in its contemporary mediatized form communicates, and *how* that communication is shaped, is an essential step in reconciling Olympic sports' role in society, and the directions it may assume in the future.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis consists of eight chapters consistent with the requirements for a Format Two thesis. Accordingly, this introductory chapter has introduced the three components of the research approach, organized herein as three journal articles comprising chapters four to six of the thesis.

Chapter Two presents a literature review structured into four sections. To begin, **section one** reviews the philosophical roots of understandings of values in society, from Ancient Greek philosophy through to modern sociology and post-modern cultural theory. This journey highlights the fractured, transdisciplinary nature of values scholarship, culminating in the work of Rokeach (1973,1979) and Schwartz (1992) as seminal values scholars alongside contemporary advocates for values analysis within content analysis. **Section two** reviews the scholarship on the interdependent relationship between sport and media, introducing mediatization theory as a means of conceptualizing the mutual influencing noted as occurring between the two. The section includes an overview of sport media studies that have utilized mediatization theory to conceptualize the relationship, with a particular focus on studies regarding the Olympic Games. This section positions the use of mediatization theory as a 'sensitizing lens' in sports scholarship, as is applied in this thesis. In **section three** of the literature review, sport and values meet in an overview of the history of the modern Olympic movement, including the foundational values of Olympism amid the historical socio-cultural context of sport in the western world during the late 19th century. From here, the review extends to the development of, and challenges to, the Olympic movement and associated values over the course of the 20th and early 21st centuries, focusing on waves of mediatization and commercialization that have transformed the Games into the commercial media spectacle that it is today. Finally, **section four** considers the history of sport in New Zealand, noting the nations colonial history and formative years contemporaneous with developments in the organization of sport in Britain and the founding of the modern Olympic movement. This section covers existing literature on the significance and role of sport in New Zealand society, and media sport studies focused on understanding New Zealand sporting culture, identifying a gap in the space of values in Olympic media coverage. Finally, this section considers the context of the research in terms of New Zealand amid the COVID-19 pandemic, juxtaposing the nation's aggressive, isolationist response with its support of the Tokyo Olympic Games.

Chapter Three offers an expanded review of the methodologies and methods applied to each stage of the research, serving as a supplement to the brief presentations offered within the respective journal formats. The chapter introduces the thesis as a whole as an inductive, qualitative undertaking, before

situating the three selected methods and informing theories: Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, Frame Analysis and Thematic Analysis, within their applications across the respective stages of the research. The review offers an overview of the research design at each stage, where the methodology or method aligns with existing academic approaches and where the integration of values and mediatization theories lend added distinction to the research approaches.

Stage one of the research analysis is presented in **Chapter Four** of the thesis: A Foucauldian Discourse analysis of Olympic press releases and New Zealand online news articles produced during the Tokyo 2021 Games period. This article connects Olympic media coverage to the governing institutions that uphold the doctrine of Olympism and investigates the dissemination of values therein through New Zealand online news. This article discusses the power dynamics between the Olympic organization and media that condition the communication of values in media coverage and examines the relative divergence or reproduction of identified values in the mediatized New Zealand socio-cultural context.

Chapter Five presents **stage two** of the analysis, a Goffman-inspired frame analysis of values communicated between athletes and journalist in broadcast Olympic post-competition interviews. This article focuses on Olympic competition spaces as moments for values communication, as an opportunity for athletes to assert their own values priorities. The analysis reveals important insights into the interactional dynamic between journalists and athletes and the respective impact on values communicated in the mediatized space. This analysis employs a novel integration of values and frame theory, exhibiting the theoretical compatibility of these approaches to understanding values in communication.

Chapter Six presents the third and final stage of the analysis, a thematic analysis of athlete Facebook posts and their subsequent audience comments. This study, investigating values in New Zealand athlete social media alongside the responses exhibited by their audience, is the first of its kind both in terms of social media and contemporary New Zealand athlete media. This chapter delves deeper into the mediatized socio-cultural context underpinning athlete values communication, and the reciprocation and reverence of these values among the audience.

Chapter Seven coalesces a comprehensive discussion and conclusion of the research findings, identifying consistencies between the prominent values at each stage of the analysis, and interpreting their connections in terms of influencing mediatized processes. The chapter discusses the socio-cultural roots of the prominent identified values and their significance in the New Zealand socio-cultural context and considers why and how they continue to permeate diverse, ever-expanding media coverage. The chapter also considers the strengths and limitations of the research, including my own

reflections over the course of the research journey, and outlines where further analysis of values in sports media may continue to serve the field in the future.

Chapter Eight summarizes the findings and discussion into a cohesive conclusion to the research project. The chapter reviews the academic contribution of this thesis, including: The varied media sample; the integration of mediatization and values theory within the methodological approach; and the findings as they relate to the impact of mediatization processes on the communication of values in Olympic media coverage. The chapter interprets the research findings in terms of the legacy of the Olympic Games and their historical values, alongside the evolution of media and societal processes contributing to their mediatization. Finally, the chapter situates the remarkable nature of the mediatized Olympic values findings in terms of their historical resonance and what they reveal about the powers and influences that continue to guide them.

Conclusion

This introductory chapter has situated the premise for the research enquiry in terms of the Olympic Games as a sports media mega-event, the values doctrine it seeks to uphold (Olympism) and the contextual contradictions of the Tokyo 2020/21 event due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Refining the research scope to a New Zealand case study, the aim to identify and interpret Olympic values communicated in New Zealand media coverage in terms of the mediatized processes that shape their communication has been established, and the design of a novel media content analysis integrating values theory and mediatization theory has been presented. Accordingly, the three stages of the research process have been outlined, featuring a diverse range of media samples for analysis, and three distinct methodological approaches and supporting theoretical perspectives.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Broadly, sociological interest in the study of sport only emerged in the latter half of the 20th century. Horne and Manzenreiter (2006) note that such endeavours were "still seen as something of a joke by mainstream sociology until recently" despite the compatible applications of the social aspects of sport to "most classical, modern and postmodern sociological theoretical perspectives" (p.1). Within this still expanding area of interest, the context of sporting mega-events has emerged as their own sub-discipline, characterized by specific interest in "large-scale cultural (including commercial and sporting) events, which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance" (Roche, 2000, p.1). Such events, Horne and Manzenreiter (2006) contend, have two main pre-requisites: they must carry considerable implications for the host city, and they must attract significant media coverage. Accordingly, theorists taking a sociological approach to understanding sporting mega-events have (so far) placed considerable emphasis on host cities, regarding the impacts of the event, and the perceived benefits of hosting versus the considerable costs and disruptions incurred as key concerns (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006; Tzanelli, 2023). Other studies have foregrounded political motivations driving involvement with events, and relative demonstrations of power aligned both with hosting and participating (Alshikhy, O'Sullivan, Polkinghorne & Gennings, 2025; Mangan & Hong, 2011). Alternatively, Kellner's (2003) descriptions of the all-consuming nature of media spectacle that pervades such events, and Richard and Palmer's (2010) concept of "festivalization" capturing societal need for eventfulness and perceptions of the exceptional, largely characterize efforts to understand the social appeal of sporting mega-events (Miah, 2024). The commonality between these studies lies in the objective to understand the functional or interactional role of mega-events in society, both as they relate to those directly immersed and impacted by them, and as performed before a broad, globalized audience (Roche, 2000).

Despite academic interest in sporting mega-events, there has been little discussion of what these events mean for societies on a moral level- in the host city and beyond- in terms of the meanings and sentiments interred and associated with them. The Olympic Games presents as a particularly intriguing case study in this area, as a contemporary mega-event founded upon a deliberate moralistic doctrine, prefacing the exhibition of intentional meanings and understandings (Chatziefstathiou & Henry, 2012; Fernandes da Silva, Borba, Vicenzi & Boaventura, 2025). Setting aside promotional and economic analysis of the Olympic brand and salesmanship (for now), questions remain as to the values communicated to, and assumed by, society through the Games. Moreover, the Games reliance on media (as stipulated by mega-event theorists) both extends a global influence of the values communicated, and offers a medium within which to examine the communication of any such meanings as they are spread across increasingly diverse media platforms (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006; Hutchins & Sanderson, 2017). Immersed in this equation are the event itself, the individuals

central to it (athletes, officials, media personnel), media companies and commercial entities, nations and politicians, and perhaps most importantly, spectators. Accordingly, any attempt to understand media communications of the Olympic Games in terms of social meanings or values interred, must reconcile these various influences and functions, while retaining a focus on the human interactions performed within the Games. In this interest, this thesis utilizes values theory as a framework to conceptualize social understandings embedded in media communications surrounding the event, by highlighting the presence of attributes and concepts communicated as *desirable* to society, and indicative of a moral preference (Rokeach, 1979, Williams Jnr, 1979). Furthermore, by sensitizing the application of values theory in this study through the lens of mediatization theory, I intend to reconcile the values communicated in media coverage of the Tokyo 2020 Games amid the various media and societal influences that shaped their communication. By adopting this novel theoretical integration, I focus on interpreting the communication of values in media coverage of the Games within a selected socio-cultural context (New Zealand), and conceptualize these communications as indicative of broader media and societal reflections of social or human values associated with the event (Rokeach, 1979).

Section One: The Philosophy of Values begins with a review of theoretical conceptions of values in society, including their philosophical roots; manifestations in culture and media; and empirical research endeavours. From here, mediatization theory is introduced to the discussion towards proposing compatible intersections of values theory and mediatization theory as aligned with conceptions of values as social embodiments in culture, and media content as reflective of media and society (Frandsen, 2015; Rokeach, 1979; Williams, 1958a). This section concludes with an introduction of sport as a pervasive cultural construct, increasingly mediatized in its sociological constitution (Frandsen, 2020; Rowe, 2003).

I continue in the **Section Two: Mediatization, MediaSport and the 'Sport-Media Nexus'** with a focus on the deep interconnections between media and sport, with a particular emphasis on these interconnections as applied to sports mega-events (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006; Wenner, 1998). Sport-media applications of mediatization theory are reviewed as a reconciliation of these interconnections, with a particular interest in research regarding the Olympic Games (Licen, Antunovic & Bartoluci, 2022a). I conclude this section by summarizing the preceding notes on values, sport and media through the lens of mediatization theory, towards conceptualizing values communicated in sport-media content as reflective of contextually-sensitive media and societal influences.

Having acknowledged the constitution of the contemporary Olympic Games as a mediatized socio-cultural construct, **Section Three: Olympic Values and Olympism** examines the origins of the modern Games as a sporting event founded upon a moralistic values mandate, beginning with the

coalescing of Olympism amid early modern European society (Chatziefstathiou & Henry, 2012; Koulouri, 2006; Scambler, 2005). I then traverse the challenges and influencing processes affecting evolution of the Games, as catalogued in the literature spanning the course of the 20th century and into the 21st (Loland, 2022; Real, 1998; Real & Beeson, 2002). This section increasingly foregrounds the significance of media and commercialization as influences on the Games, and as positing challenges to the socio-cultural moors grounding Olympism values. This discussion extends into political appropriations of the Games, contradictory to the internationalism central to Olympism, and the subsequent literature surrounding nationalism in media coverage (Billings et al., 2018a; Tomlinson, 2017).

Section Four: Aotearoa New Zealand: An Olympic Nation establishes the case study for analysis- New Zealand- in terms of the nation's historical and socio-cultural relationship with sport and the Olympic Games. Existing research suggests that New Zealand's colonial past proximate to the evolution of modern sport and Olympism, and ongoing prioritization of sport in society, make the nation a suitable values case study (Watson & Ryan, 2018). Likewise, the temporal context for analysis- the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games- as a unique proposition owing to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. I conclude the literature review with an overview of the pandemic context both in New Zealand- praised for its comprehensive elimination strategy- and the host city Tokyo (Beattie & Priestley, 2021; Grout, Summers, Wilson & Baker, 2021). The juxtaposition of hosting the Games as an exhibition of health and virility during an ongoing global health crisis, posits a particularly pertinent historical moment at which to examine the values communicated in media coverage of the Games.

This literature review will traverse both the academic landscape and historical interconnections of, and between: values, sport, media and the Olympic Games. At several junctions the ideas are so proximate, that deviating from a linear structure to illuminate their profound interconnections is necessary for establishing the foundations of this thesis. In these cases, I am compelled to revisit timelines with some repetition of content, in service of illustrating the inextricable threads between them.

Section One: The Philosophy of Values

Questions of human or social values; their function, uniqueness, formation, and malleability are as old as philosophy itself. Writing in the 4th century BCE, Aristotle begins his Nicomachean Ethics with the line "Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly declared to be that at which all things aim" (Ross, 1998, p.1). This opening goes on to beget some of the key existential questions of philosophy: What is the good? Where can it be found? By what means can it be identified, pursued, and achieved? Aristotle then frames the social context of his ethics, further defining his pursuit of the human good by directing it towards what he refers to as politics, but that which can be applied more broadly to society:

> Since politics uses the rest of the sciences, and since, again, it legislates as to what we are to do and what we are to abstain from, the end of this science must include those of the others, so that this end must be the good for man…though it is worthwhile to attain the end merely for one man, it is finer and more godlike to attain it for a nation…these then are the ends at which our inquiry aims, since it is political science, in one sense of that term (Ross, 1998, p.2).

Thus, Aristotle's ethics centres on the question of 'goods' that motivate individuals and society towards the desired end-state, the description for which he uses the Greek word *Eudaimonia*. Ross (1998) notes this word is often translated as 'happiness', but in fact carries a greater sense of agency than the state of feeling English speakers would tend to associate with. In simpler terms, and indeed in terms of *values*; we can interpret Aristotle's concerns for the ethics of society as a desire to understand the values that motivate and condition society's human citizens, and by which the desired end state of being can be defined, sought, and ultimately achieved. Values then, underpin every aspect of human social life, and to conceptualize them as Aristotle has (albeit with differing terminology) is to seek value constructs in the fabric of the social world, that is, "the good at which all things aim" (Ross, 1998, p.1). Furthermore, and in the interest of an introduction to social values, it is clear that philosophical questions over the notions or constructs of 'goods' in the social world long predate the academic ordinances of the social sciences into which they have been brought and continue to be explored (Risjord, 2022).This is a transdisciplinary sphere concerned with the sources of value in the social world, and the interpretation and understandings of their meanings and effects on society (Risjord, 2022; Lee, Whitehead & Balchin, 2000).

Durkheim's 'Anomie' and De Coubertin's Olympic Solution

Although the study of ethics, morals and values has its roots in ancient philosophy, the beginning of the 19th century saw a shift in the academic landscape, impacting perceptions of values and approaches to values research (Clawson & Vinson, 1978; Jadaszewski, 2018; Rokeach, 1979). It was at this time that the disciplines now referred to as the social sciences (anthropology, sociology, economics, and psychology) broke away from philosophy, and in doing so diversified conceptualizations of long held philosophical questions - including those theorized by Aristotle towards understanding moral and human goods - by varying approaches (Animesh & Naboshree, 2025; Cheng & Fleischmann, 2010). This era of western sociological scholarship is characterized by the social contexts of the time, such as moral grappling in the aftermath of war, political rupturing, and flagging religious cohesion (Brown, 2012; Scambler, 2005). This (and subsequent) eras of sociological thinking are particularly relevant to the context of this study, as they relate to the considerable evolution of organised sport that took place at the time, and the subsequent embodiments of values in sport- and in particular Olympic sport (Gruneau & Compton, 2017; Brown, 2012; Loland, 2022). It is no coincidence that the modern Olympic movement was born out of France during this period of moral ambiguity, described by French sociologist Emile Durkheim as 'anomie', defined by a lack of social cohesion owed to flagging commonalities between peoples (Bellah, 1973). Durkheim attributed much

of these issues to expanding industrialisation and skill specialisation, limiting the social identities of workers and their subsequent relationships with society. According to Durkheim, the moral voice of society is an integral thread of social connection, that becomes embedded through the common identification of social fixtures, symbols, and meanings:

> It is society who speaks through the mouths of those who affirm them (societal ways of action) in our presence; it is society whom we hear in hearing them; and the voice of all has an accent which that of one alone could never have (as cited by Bellah, 1973, p.170).

Here, Durkheim is referring to social norms, born of underlying social values, embedded in physical, visual, and audible representations recognizable to members of society. Reiterated throughout his explanation of his idea of the totemic principle, Durkheim appeals to cultural representations of social values and norms as directing the common actions and expectations of society (Bellah, 1973). These feelings described by Durkheim and the need for cultural unification within society, can ultimately be seen to be realized in the codification and organization of sport as a point of collective cultural identification over the 19th century (Ryan, 2007; Scambler, 2005). Indeed, by the mid-twentieth century, George Orwell (1945) would critique the rise of international sport's function as a forum for expressions of national identity, while Benedict Anderson (1983) echoes Durkheim's musings on common feeling among national citizens, and identifies sport as an important vehicle for coalescing and symbolizing the 'imagined community' of the nation (Gruneau & Compton, 2017; Kalman-Lamb, 2021; Warren, 2018). These accounts over time describe how through this nexus of notions of values, identity and nationhood, sport became established in western thinking as mechanisms for societal cohesion.

Considering the 19th century and Durkheim's concerns for the *anomie* of his nation, it is important to relate that these concerns were shared by his countryman, wealthy aristocrat Pierre De Coubertin. De Coubertin would ultimately resolve that sport be the antidote to a defined lack of moral education among young men, which he would ultimately unite with rising antiquarianism in the upper classes, to propose an idealised revival of the Ancient Greek Olympic Games (Koulouri, 2006; Scambler, 2005). De Coubertin's own moral compass would ultimately direct him towards the upper-class British boarding school system, introducing him to amateurism values of sportsmanship, camaraderie, and fair play alongside the physical ideals of sport, and its close associations with muscular Christianity.[2] (Scambler, 2005; Llewellyn & Gleaves, 2016). These values would ultimately contribute to the foundational Olympism values promoted by De Coubertin at Sorbonne in 1894. Alongside values of post-war global solidarity and universalism, many of these values remain relevant to the Olympic

[2] It is interesting to acknowledge a parallel to the Aristotelian philosophizing drawn upon at the outset, wherein *Spartan* values celebrating discipline, courage and service, appear reinvigorated within muscular Christianity (Parker & Watson, 2014; Schütrumpf,1994). In so doing, they represent another historical values order with a pertinent relevance, familiar to Aristotelian contemporaries, though positioned somewhat adversarially to Aristotle's Athenian background.

Charter to this day, and are noted as valuable attributes of the contemporary Olympic brand (Chatziefstathiou & Henry, 2012; Rahman & Lockwood, 2011; Scambler, 2005). The modern Olympic Games, therefore, were very much an embodiment of conceptions of a certain impression of social values at the time in which they were conceived, with the Games themselves promoted as the mechanism by which these values would be promoted to wider society, and indeed around the world. However, as later theories on morality and social values note, values are historically and socio-culturally contextual, shifting and evolving with society (Schwartz, 1992; Williams Jnr, 1979). Thus, despite contemporary reverence in the Olympic Charter, the values instilled in the modern Olympic Games cannot necessarily be considered as indicative of the interpretations and associations of Games values by global society, nor within the many distinct socio-cultural contexts that engage with the Olympic movement today.

Discerning Values in Culture: Raymond Williams and the 'Structure of Feeling'

Through the mid- 20th century, social science scholars continued to theorise as to the functioning of values in society, particularly: How values become established; how and the degree to which they are disseminated and shared throughout society; and how they can be identified and understood (Lee et al., 2000; Rokeach, 1979). Much like the moral soul-searching that coloured the theories of Durkheim and initiatives of De Coubertin in the preceding century, western sociological during this period was also heavily influenced by the socio-political environment, notably the aftermath of two world wars, followed by an (ongoing) cold war and related ideological battles between socialism and capitalist individualism (Middleton, 2020). Perhaps consequently, one of the great challenges to values thinkers of the time was not just the identification and understanding of social values, but how to intentionally prescribe and direct certain values to and through society, referred to by Middleton (2020) as a "purposive reconstruction of morality" (p.1141). Middleton (2020) discusses the evolution of values theory as tied to conceptions of culture. Here, Middleton (2020) references debates among scholars and artists regarding the notion of culture and its relationship with art, and importantly the artist's role in the creation of culture. The crux of this contention appears to be the question over whether artists are endowed with the power to wilfully reconstruct social values, or if their work is to be conceived of as a product of society and thus a reflection of culture (Middleton, 2020). These ideas have been contested, not just with reference to the position of the artist and the cultural minority that they may or may not represent, but also along Marxist lines of class and the determination of culture either as elite, common or both (Middleton, 2020). To the question- Can culture represent universal understandings (values) in society? Williams' (1958a, 1961) answer seems to be a complex yes, with values to be found in a common intersection between the classes' determinant of culture, noting:

> In our culture as a whole, there is both a constant interaction between these (class based) ways of life and an area which can properly be described as common to or underlying both (Williams, 1958a, p.327).

Williams' (1958a) theory can thus be seen to continue the work of forerunners such as Durkheim in conceptualizing understanding of social values through socio-cultural interaction and associated creative productions. Furthermore, although initially focussed on externalized culture as a representation of moral understanding within society, later iterations of Williams' work appear to have fought to further defend his concept of values as mutually agreed representations of moral understandings between divisions in society, such as those imposed by social class (Middleton, 2020). Much like Durkheim's metaphor for social morality as an inner voice tied to social symbols and representations; Williams would ultimately describe the unification of democratic, industrial and cultural influences on socio-moral understandings as somewhat intangible to casual observers, although able to be noted through "the body of intellectual or imaginative work, in which, in a detailed way, human thought and experience are variously recorded" (Williams, 1961, p.41). Williams (1961) would include in this list "all artifacts of culture from poems to buildings and dress-fashions" (p.49). In this determination, Williams' (1961) theory thus highlights cultural artefacts and productions as a meeting point of moral meaning and understanding, representative of identifiable experiences and expectations of members of society embodied in culture. In general, Williams can be seen to steer away from ideas of purposive morality and focuses instead on the everyday embodiments of social meaning, noting that "culture is ordinary" (Williams, 1958b, p.54), belonging to all people and an innate part of creative construction however it may manifest (Middleton, 2020, p.1151). While Williams' theories are not beyond critique, and have been scrutinized as to their universal applications to society, these elements of Williams' 'structure of feeling' can be broadly applied to conceptualizing an understanding of social values as embedded in all facets of social culture, including media coverage of sport.

Empirical Values Research

Towards the end of the 20th century, transdisciplinary approaches to values research moved beyond philosophical theorising to become more cohesively organised and identified around empirical research interests, a process which contemporary values scholars' credit largely to the works of Milton Rokeach (1973, 1979). As the above trajectory charted from Aristotle to Durkheim and to Williams demonstrates, values research already had an extensive socio-philosophical tradition. Yet, Lee et al. (2000) and Cheng and Fleischmann (2010) note that the transdisciplinary nature of that tradition was fractured through a lack of consistent values definitions and terminology (also evident in the above scholars' variable references to good, morals and values). This disciplinary fracturing served to hinder the coalescence of burgeoning empirical efforts to identify and understand values in society (Cheng, 1997; Cheng & Fleischmann, 2010; Tan, Mahadir Naidu, & Osman, 2018). Lee et al. (2000) credit the works of Rokeach as a key influence in the bringing together of conceptualizations of values, which he refers to as 'human values', and defines accordingly:

> An enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence (Rokeach, 1973, p.5).

This definition is found reiterated in the works of prominent values scholars including Robin Williams Jnr (1979), whose conceptualization of values note their function as a moral language, intuited along common understandings of the desirable (valuable) and undesirable. These conceptions and approaches to values in society remain at the heart of theories and methodologies of more recent values researchers, with connections still observable to early philosophizing (Cheng & Fleischmann, 2010; Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992). Aristotle's framing of the 'good' in society towards seeking and achieving *Eudaemonia*, can be seen reflected in Rokeach's (1973, 1979) seminal values survey- the Rokeach Value Survey (RVS)- in which two lists of 18 values are identified, classified as 'Terminal' values and 'Instrumental' values. Much like Aristotle, the former describes an ideal, aspirational moral end state, while the latter details the qualities an individual perceives as necessary in order to achieve their desired end state. Rokeach (1973) pioneered the use of a survey structure as a means of investigating values in society, in which respondents are required to rank the values in order of those with which they identify most strongly, with the results mapped across respondents to determine the order of prominence of values within social groups. Thus, evolving from philosophical notions of values, the work of Rokeach (1973) and latter values scholars has focused on the empirical investigation of values in society, with the survey approach a popular option to identify and catalogue values in society (Cheng, 1997; Cheng & Fleischmann, 2010; Tan, et al., 2018).

While effective for certain research interests, the survey approach also hinges upon the researcher's commitment to the values orders defined by the survey, and the degree to which they considered these values to be universal (Cheng & Fleischmann, 2010). Critics of the RVS have noted that the values selected in the survey have been cultivated and refined largely among northern American social groups, which along with the prescriptive nature of the survey approach, make claims of universality problematic (Cheng & Fleischmann, 2010; Lee et. al, 2000). These concerns have been somewhat addressed by subsequent scholarship, notably the work of Schwartz (1992) in the development of the Schwartz Values Survey (SVS) which organized a larger list of 56 values within 10 core values groups, cultivated through extensive, diverse data collection across various cultural contexts (Lee et. al, 2000). Much like the RVS, the SVS refers to a hierarchical system of values that motivate behaviour and belief, which Schwartz and Bilsky (1987) argue satisfy three key universal human needs: biological function, social action, and group cohesion. While the RVS and the SVS both offer values orders in survey form, Cheng and Fleischmann (2010) advocate for the application of values research to content analysis, removing the subjective, suggestive nature of the survey approach. A benefit of this approach, and one that is integral to this study, is the opportunity to analyse values in a format consigned to the historical socio-cultural context within which the content is produced, removing the opportunity for distortion due to shifting perspectives of survey respondents over time. For this study, given the central historical and socio-cultural interest pertaining to the Tokyo 2020/21 Olympic

Games and the values communicated in New Zealand media coverage, this content analysis approach is most applicable to the content and context in which Games values are to be explored. Furthermore, media content as the sample for analysis also aligns with understandings of values in culture, as supported philosophically by Williams (1958a, 1961), and evidenced in recent values research such as the above stated work by Cheng and Fleischmann (2010).

Overall, recent values research has served to consolidate several key aspects across transdisciplinary approaches. First, as mentioned above, the definition of values as operating as per Rokeach's (1973) definition is largely upheld across recent scholarship, along with the notion employed in the RVS and SVS that values operate in a hierarchical system (Ingelhart, 1997; Lee et. al, 2000; Maio, et al., 2006). What is open for investigation and refinement, is the nature of values across various socio-cultural contexts, cross-cultural interpretation and expansion of values constructs, the formative and evolutionary capacity of values systems, and (with ongoing exploration and comparison) an increasingly robust framework regarding *which* human values can be considered universal and by *what* definition (Cheng & Fleischmann, 2010; Lee et. al, 2000). Given this thesis is concerned with a particular socio-cultural context- New Zealand media discourse regarding the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games through the lens of mediatization theory (introduced in the following section)- the question of whether the values inherent in media coverage are experienced and interpreted universally by the media audience is not a central focus. Rather, with the understanding that media content is a reflection and reconstruction of society influenced by processes of mutual inter-influencing change between media and society (mediatization), the values identified and analysed therein can be interpreted as those born from this relationship between media and society, subsequently reproduced and disseminated to the media audience (Hjarvard, 2013; Krotz, 2017). These, therefore, are the values that gain media salience and are thus significantly granted the capacity of media platforms to influence society (Bardi & Goodwin, 2011; Maio et. al, 2006; Rokeach-Ball, & Loges, 1996).

Values in Media Culture: 'Structure of Feeling' meets Mediatization

Having established the philosophical and empirical traditions of values research, it is important to elaborate further on the theories underpinning the selection of media content and mediatization as the methodological and conceptual choices for this study. To begin with connections to values philosophy; Williams' (1958a, 1961) description of creative figments of culture as a living record of the social experience, can be seen echoed in more recent media communication theories regarding media content and processes of mediatization (Frandsen, 2020; Krotz, 2017). Bearing similarity to Williams' ideas of cultural embodiments of social values, mediatization can be defined as a process by which media and social institutions mutually influence and shape one another, a deep interconnection which can be seen to reflect the priorities and functions of each, within a mutually influencing framework (Couldry & Hepp, 2017; Frandsen, 2020, Hjarvard, 2013). Thus, the theory that mediatization represents a mutually influencing relationship between media and society, with media content indicative of logics and processes significant

to each, can be seen to insert media as a means of cultural production and dissemination, into Williams' socio-cultural 'structure of feeling'. By uniting these two concepts in this way, media content therefore can be viewed as a cultural embodiment of social values, relevant to the society and context within which it is produced. This conception of media content as representative of social values, discernible through analysis, also aligns with media theory regarding the construction of news media, which is described by Schudson (2011) as a reflection and reconstruction of reality, whereby the creative, contextual perceptions of reality are also embedded by the media producer and communicator (Fowler, 1991; Richardson, 2007). To this point, Maio et al., (2006) explain that values are both innate and conditioned by the surrounding social environment, including (significantly) by messages purported in the mass media, while Bardi and Goodwin (2011) detail five facilitators of a possible changes to values beyond adolescence including: "direct persuasion, adaptation, identification, consistency maintenance and priming "(p.7). Schwartz (1992) also testifies to the role media can play in setting the agenda for value discussions, describing their capacity "to inoculate ideologies, values and attitudes" (p.292). The literature thus paints a picture of values as shifting cognitions, naming media broadly as a key vehicle for values influence, and subsequently media content as an important medium for values analysis (Cheng & Fleischmann, 2010; Rokeach-Ball & Loges, 1996; Hahn, 2002).

Culture is Ordinary, Sport is Omnipresent

In further uniting the socio-cultural values conceptions of Williams (1958a, 1961) and Frandsen (2020) and Hjarvard's (2013) definitions of mediatization theory, it is also important to recognize theories regarding the relationship between media and sport, and the role of media in the production and constitution of sport as a socio-cultural institution. Rowe (2003) notes that sport is everywhere "an omnipresent part of our lives whether we like it or not" (p.2). As Rowe (2003) attests, this is largely due to the fact that media drive the commercialization and dissemination of sport through increasingly accessible portals of engagement, a relationship conceptualized by Wenner (1998) as 'MediaSport' and Nicholson, Kerr and Sherwood (2015) as the 'Sport media nexus'. Both terms describe the deep interconnections between sport and media that have been noted as running ever deeper from the mid-20th century onwards (Nicholson, et al., 2015; Wenner, 1998, 2015). These terminologies make it clear, especially in the context of professional sport and sporting mega-event such as the Olympic Games; that sport and media have become inextricable (Billings & Wenner, 2017; Manzenreiter, 2015; Rowe, 2003, 2004). This interconnection has led Frandsen (2020) to promote mediatization theory as a key conceptualization for understanding the relationship between sport, media and society, advocating for its use a 'sensitising lens' attending to the mutual influences that run through the media construction and mediation of sport, sport itself, and audience engagement (Jensen, 2013). In adopting this theory as a sensitizing lens, and with deference to Williams' theory of culture as a manifestation of social values; sports media content can thus be perceived of as embodying the socio-cultural values promoted by media and societal processes. Furthermore, that Bardi and Goodwin (2011) and Maio

et.al (2003) have noted the propensity for media to influence values change in society, grants the media side of this media-society relationship additional relevance when it comes to understanding the values promoted to, and adopted by society.

As relayed in the above sections, the relationship between sport and media is central to this thesis. It also broadly defines the field of media sport research, an academic meeting of media, communications, sport and sociological scholars concerned with understanding the intersections of sport in media as each contribute to the other, concurrently interacting with and shaping society (Billings & Wenner, 2017; Rowe, 2015). Mediatization theory, as it relates to conceptualizing the relationship between media, sport and society, is the focal point of this section, but it is necessary to begin with an overview of the history of this core relationship, as the literary foundation attesting to their interdependence and socio-cultural constitution.

Section Two: Mediatization, MediaSport and the 'Sport-Media Nexus'

Over the late 20th century, the relationship between sport and media or 'MediaSport' has progressively expanded as an area of academic inquiry (Wenner, 1998, 2021; Roche, 2000; Rowe 2003). As mentioned previously, scholars in the field acknowledge the deep interconnections of sport as a cultural and social construct, and media as a critical means by which society experiences, interprets, and participates in sport (Hoye & Nicholson, 2008; Wenner, 2015; Sherwood, Kerr, Thompson & Nicholson, 2025). The literature depicts this as a process of evolution, eventually giving way to the diverse and expansive sport-media environment recognized today (Horky & Budiasa, 2024; Miah, 2024; Rowe, 2015; Wenner, 2021). From the late 19th century, sports were becoming more and more organized and constituted by their media coverage (Horne & Whannel, 2020; Hutchins, 2014; Manzenreiter, 2015; Ryan, 2007). From horse racing, distance walking and cycling races founded and promoted by newspapers, to the sale of television rights for the 1960 Olympic Games, through to today's digitized internet media environment hosting coverage of sports events; sport has become increasingly facilitated, promoted, sold and experienced through various evolving media technologies and platforms (Kassing, 2024; Frandsen, 2020; Miah, 2024). As a result, elite, international, *commercial* sport (such as sport mega-events) have become considered something of a media product; cultivated and optimised for media consumption (Maguire, Barnard, Butler & Golding, 2008; Roche, 2000; Rowe, 2003; Boykoff, 2014).

This conception is at the heart of Nicholson, et al., (2015) definition of the 'sport media nexus' describing a interconnection in which media and sport are distinct from each other, interdependent while governed by their own institutional operations. This dependency, according to Nicholson et al., (2015), is due in large part to the immense popularity of sport for attracting a media audience, and the significant commercial and scale benefits media (television in particular) offer to sports organizations as the managers and stagers of sports events (Billings et al., 2008; Guttmann, 1992; Whannel, 2009).

Furthermore, given the cultural and social roots of sport, and its operation in society at both a community level (children's, social and masters sports leagues etc.) and elite, aspirational levels (world championships, mediated national leagues, through to mega events such as the Olympic Games); mediatization theory has been increasingly applied to research seeking to understand society's relationship with sport through media, as well as media's relationship with society *through* sport (Licen, Frandsen, Horky, Onwumechili & Wei, 2022b; Frandsen, 2020; Tomlinson, 2017). At the elite end, Tomlinson (2017) describes the mediatization of mega-events such as the Olympic Games as a deeply foundational process embedded in the event itself, stating:

> Sports mega-events are, in this sense, mediatized in a "process characterized by a duality, in that media have become integrated into operations of other social institutions and cultural spheres, while also acquiring the status of social institutions in their own right (p.9).

Tomlinson's (2017) description is indicative of an increasingly popular conceptual application of mediatization theory for the analysis of the relationship between sport and media, and the effects of the integration of these two entities on respective cultures and social behaviours.

Furthermore, mediatization is widely defined as a process by which media and social institutions mutually influence and shape one another, a deep interconnection which can be seen to reflect the priorities and functions of each, within a mutually-influencing framework (Frandsen, 2020, Hjarvard, 2013). Mediatization as a conceptual framework can be operationalized to understand the relationship between society and media, as an evolving, inter-influential process of growth and change (Hepp, Hjarvard & Lundby, 2015). Frandsen (2020) characterizes change in the processes of media and society as occurring in waves of mediatization, spurred by changes in media technologies and their adoption and integration into social life, with historically grounded interconnections of media and society also shifting and evolving within the process (Krotz, 2017). Thus, to the benefit of this study, mediatization theory offers a research perspective by which media and society can both be understood from an inclusive media content based approach (Hepp, et al., 2015).

Moreover, in recent years mediatization scholars have typically fallen into one of two conceptual categories: the socio-constructivist and the institutionalist (Hepp, 2009; Jensen, 2013). Couldry and Hepp (2017) advocate for the socio-constructivist approach to mediatization, wherein media are conceptualized as various facilitators of communication that contribute to the construction of social reality. By this conceptualization, media technologies and formats are diverse and multifunctional, bearing consequences for social behaviour, perception and construction of reality on both an individual and mass level (Couldry & Hepp, 2017; Driessens, Bolin, Hepp, & Hjarvard, 2017). Alternatively, mediatization scholars favouring an institutionalist perspective, perceive of media as operating by 'media logics': formats, technology, objectives and processes that in turn influence how media content and technologies are selected, distributed and consumed (Altheide & Snow, 1979;

Hjarvard, 2013). This concept of 'media logics' as advocated by Altheide and Snow (1979), encompasses a broad range of media operations including: the presentation of media content; use of language and grammar; and media content selection and emphasis, all elements that have become core components of media research within the mediatization framework. While Couldry and Hepp (2017) and Krotz (2017) have criticized the focus on 'media logics' as reductive to the task of inclusively expanding understanding of the reach of effect of media on society (and vice versa), the term has nonetheless come to denote an interest in media influence, the processes that command media operations, and the subsequent consequences for media and social change (Hjarvard, 2013; Schallhorn, Nölleke, Sinner, Seeger, Nieland, Horky, & Mehler, 2022; Thimm, Anastasiadis & Einspänner-Pflock, 2018). Furthermore, the socio-constructivist and institutionalist approaches to mediatization do not exclude one another, with ongoing academic debate continuing to define the similarities and differences between the two conceptualizations, including where they overlap (Jensen, 2013; Frandsen, 2020). Where they agree- regarding the omnipresence of media in society and its impact on social behaviour and reality- can be considered the cornerstone of mediatization theory as applied to mediatization research, wherein the socio-constructivist and institutionalist conceptualizations have both invoked specific contexts of mediatization research, with each offering the capacity to broaden understanding of media and society (Frandsen, 2020).

There has been considerable debate in academic circles as to the application of mediatization theory in empirical research and, at the time of writing, this remains unresolved as far as a systematic mediatization methodology is concerned (Jensen, 2013; Frandsen, 2020). Increasingly, the mediatization approach has served to offer researchers a guiding perspective by which (in combination with interdisciplinary techniques, theory and methods) insights into the effects of media change on culture, society and media have been generated (Dmukhovskaya, 2025; Ehrlén, 2022; Schallhorn, et al., 2022). Frandsen (2020) and Jensen (2013) refer to this application of mediatization theory as serving as a 'sensitizing concept' whereby the mediatization perspective operates as a focusing lens, drawing attention to the complexity of interconnections between media and society, and their subsequent roles and impacts on media and social change. By adopting this application of mediatization theory as a sensitizing approach to understanding the relationship between sport and media, this thesis looks to mediatization as a guiding theoretical framework by which to investigate the relationship between the Olympic Games, media and society as it relates to Games values, within the cultural context of New Zealand media coverage.

Mediatization and Sport

The mediatization approach has been applied effectively to investigations of media and sport across a range of sport and cultural contexts, reflecting the historical interconnectedness between the two, and

the relevance of time and cultural space in interpretating the relationship. Frandsen (2020) acknowledges this spectrum of mediatization research as applied to sport, stating:

> The nature of this interconnectedness has varied from sport to sport, and across time and cultural contexts, and there are cases where particular sports have been launched and constructed through the lens of, and due to needs of media organizations (p.10).

Here, Frandsen (2020) alludes to events orchestrated by media organizations, an increasing trend in the present digitized world of esports, but also a considerable factor at the inception of such prominent events as cycling's *Tour de France* and *Giro d'Italia*, both owned by newspapers that are now multifaceted media companies (Stanley, 2021; Spalletta & Ugolini, 2014). These events have been analysed through the lens of mediatization theory, with studies drawing on the historical affiliations of media with the event, while examining factors such as the present media environment, the event's execution and financial structure, to divulge the impact of the media-sport interconnection (Frandsen, 2014; Licen et al., 2022a). Furthermore, mediatization theory has been broadly employed as a means of investigating and justifying research into the structure of sports organisations, fan interactions, and the development and processes of sports events, alongside developments in media technology and features, including more recently, the advent of digitalization (Birkner & Nölleke, 2016; Frandsen, 2020; Hutchins, Li & Rowe, 2019).

In relatively recent works, Jensen (2013), Frandsen (2020) and Hepp (2019) have all referenced digitalization as a significant new wave of mediatization, infiltrating the daily lives of people to the extent that Hepp (2019) has termed 'deep mediatization'[3]. Hepp (2019) distinguishes this concept to recognize the increasing omnipresence of digital media, from smart fridges to AI bots, that have transformed communication and social behaviour broadly in society (Driessens, et al., 2017; Kassing, 2024). Frandsen (2020) refers to this transformation as having had a significant impact on sport, not only in the realms of international sports organisations, but in the everyday lives of people who engage with, participate in and socialize through, sport. Hepp (2019), Frandsen (2020) and Jensen (2013) all advocate for greater research attention be paid to mediatization occurring as a result of digitalization, with Jensen (2013) claiming such research is crucial in order to contribute to a robust conceptual understanding of mediatization theory, and to test its validity in the context of novel, expanding processes of change. However, these acknowledgement of digitalization and digital media as precipitating a contemporaneous wave of change in sport, by no means qualifies such platforms as the only media offering revelations to be gained through research, nor suggests that these new media technologies have superseded the influence of legacy media technologies such as newspapers and television (Billings et al., 2018a; Hutchins & Sanderson, 2017). Moreover, in order to represent the

[3] 'Deep mediatization' is a concept used by Hepp (2019) to describe mediatization as an intricate, deeply embedded matrix of media and society on a fundamental level, rendering the lines of intersection between them difficult to discern.

relative effects of different media types existing within the ecology of interest, it appears prudent to balance selections appropriately to the context of the sport and culture under investigation, acknowledging both present and historical interconnections between specific media and the relevant sport. This contextualization is particularly relevant to this study with regards to the Olympic Games, as an event extensively mediated and shaped via television (Billings et. al, 2018a; Rahman & Lockwood, 2011; Real & Beeson, 2002; Rowe, 2003).

To the Olympic context specifically, the influence of media and associated commercial priorities of the Olympic Games has been of considerable interest to media sport scholars, who have conceptualized the relationship in various theoretical terms, all of which share a common deference to their interconnectedness, although not placed under the term mediatization (Boykoff, 2014; Roche, 2000; Smart, 2007). Smart (2007) describes the development of modern sport over the 20th century as the product of an ever-expanding global capitalist environment, noting the crucial role of media technologies and media publications in leveraging a common cultural authenticity inherent to sports events, as a mechanism for promoting consumer interests (Billings & Wenner, 2017; Hoye & Nicholson, 2008; MacAloon, 2010). Smart (2007) notes that between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, increasing globalization and capitalist consumerism, combined with interest in sport and recreation by media and society, saw the birth of various sports events and federations, including the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1894 and the Olympic Games in 1896, stating:

> As the century progressed, the commercial world drew increasingly on sport's cultural capital value to raise the global profile and appeal of corporate brands and to expand the global market for their products…one analyst remarked that professional sport, the media and corporate sponsorship constituted a seemingly indivisible trinity, 'a golden triangle' from which each of the parties was able to derive a substantial profit (p.114).

Here, Smart (2007) describes the increasing interconnections between sports events, media and sports commerce, as driving the escalating global scale of sporting events such as the Olympics, although stops short of invoking mediatization to conceptualize the media-sport relationship. However, Tomlinson (2017) provides an extensive chapter on mediatization and the Olympic Games, stating:

> The fact that the Olympics, and equally high-profile events such as the men's football World Cup, command the bigger global audiences across an expanding range of platforms- in turn attracting some of the highest levels of investment in event-sponsorship in history- is illustrative of the influence and hold of the mediatization process on the sports mega-event in the global media landscape of the early 21st century (Tomlinson, 2017, p.52).

Tomlinson (2017) goes on to offer perhaps the most direct account of mediatization of the Olympic Games over time, referring to the process explicitly in his conceptualization of iterations of the Summer Olympic Games from 1896 to 2016. This historical review portrays a varying reinvention of the foundational sporting culture established by Pierre De Coubertin in the first modern Games in 1896

(more on this under *Olympic values: Olympism*), with Tomlinson (2017) describing the history of the Games as evolving in phases, driven in large part by mediatization processes central to the commercialization of sport, proliferating further with the leveraging of television rights at Los Angeles 1984. To do so, Tomlinson (2017) draws together several colliding processes as contributing to the specific staging of the Games in each iteration, wherein internationalism, emergent individualism, and the rise of celebrity and consumption, combine through mediatization to drive the event towards a scale of unparalleled spectacle in the latter 20th century (Kellner, 2003; Manzenreiter, 2015; MacAloon, 2010). Olympic critic, Boykoff (2014) summarizes this present state of the Games as existing as 'celebration capitalism', wherein the Games exist in their own socio-political state characterized by political exception, public-private partnerships, "festive commercialism" and unsubstantiated "feel-good" environmental claims (p.5). Furthermore, in charting this course of Games evolution, Tomlinson (2017) joins Roche (2000) in identifying the Los Angeles 1932 and Berlin 1936 Games as two pivotal events in the development of Olympic mediatization, laying the foundations of professionalization, commercialization/consumerism, and the expansion of media integration into the Games:

> LA '32 and Berlin '36 were identified by Roche (2000) as pioneering media-technological events, laying the foundations for a media-driven commodification of the Olympics…show an intensification of scale and media-activity, locating the Olympic event as more than just a sideshow on the global stage, rather an emergent cultural product prominent within the global political economy. Media technologies, global markets and the professionalization of sport would accelerate this trend (Tomlinson, 2017, p.64).

As such, Tomlinson (2017) posits that over the 20th century the Games have increasingly become established as a cultural institution both economically and socially dependent on media in order to continue to function and mediate at (or to continue to amass) an immense global scale; driving the priorities of Olympic organizers and media institutions towards one another (Fernández Peña, 2024; Gruneau & Compton, 2017; Miah 2024). This continues to describe the contemporary Olympic-media relationship, which has been noted as permeating all aspects of the event from the host city, to the event venues, media coverage, athlete and fan interactions and more (Billings & Wenner, 2017; Billings et al., 2018a; Hutchins & Sanderson, 2017; Liu, 2019). Furthermore, this history describes the considerable significance of media processes and evolution to the production and consumption of the Games, which can also be considered as contributing to defining and magnifying the values conveyed through the Games in and to society (Geurin & Naraine, 2020; Liu, 2019; Yan, 2020).

Beyond descriptions of a vast integrated media-sport landscape, studies adopting mediatization theory to examine the Olympics have included targeted analysis of social behaviours impacted or instigated by the media-sport integration. Chagas, Fonseca and Vargas (2020) analysed the behaviour of activist protesters at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games, wherein protestors deliberately targeted mediated positions in Olympic venues during competition to call for the removal of interim Brazilian president Michel Temer. From a cultural perspective, Lawson (2011) draws on mediatization

theory in her investigation of the interplay between ancient Chinese cultural ritual at the opening ceremony for the 2008 Beijing Olympics, focusing on the integration of media both within the performances, and as facilitating intercultural communication through their mediation to the external, global audience. Considered alongside Tomlinson (2017), these studies demonstrate the diversity of application of mediatization theory to the analysis of the Olympic Games, society and the media; suggesting a flexible paradigm for both an overarching analysis of Olympic development alongside media, as well as more targeted explorations of society or media in the Olympic context. Within his study of the use of smartphones in sports stadiums, and spectators subsequent resistance to mediatization processes, Hutchins (2016) enacts a response to "a call for a broader range of responses to mediatization to be examined" proffering that mediatization theory is both vast and multi-faceted in its potential applications to research targeting the sport-media-society nexus (p.424). This thesis too, is a departure from existing studies of Olympic mediatization, in applying the theory to understanding the values of the Olympics as they are understood and communicated through media enmeshed in Games coverage. By applying the theory in this way, I proffer that analysis of media content offers a medium to meaningfully determine the social values imbued in Olympic sport, in that it represents and communicates the values assumed within the mediatized construction and production of the Games.

Section Three: Olympic Values and Olympism

Central to any discussion of values and the Olympic Games is a review of the literature surrounding the origins of the modern Olympic movement, and the purposeful enshrinement of values in the constitution of the early modern Games, known as Olympism (Chatziefstathiou & Henry, 2012; Llewellyn & Gleaves, 2016).

As previously stated, sport facilitates and disseminates social values, reinforcing and educating ethical and moral positions within societies (Chatziefstathiou & Henry, 2012; Loland, 2022; Theodorakis, Krommidas, Hassandra & Georgiadis, 2026). While sport in a broad sense embodies sets of practical values pertaining to participation and competition, Olympic sport in particular holds social values at its foundational core, enshrined in the Olympic Charter as the principles of Olympism (Brown, 2012; Maguire, 2015; Smart, 2018). These principles, (and their associated values) underpin the Olympic Games and the Olympic Movement (the national and international governing bodies behind the Games) and provide a moral framework for the purpose behind the Games, simply a spectacle of sporting entertainment (Lopes dos Santos, Gonçalves, Condessa, Nunes da Silva, & Delaplace, 2021). Put simply, the Olympic Games are supposed to *mean* something beyond the celebration of winners, disappointments of losers and financial gains made by Olympic organisers, hosts and stakeholders. Chatziefstathiou and Henry (2012) note the impact of Olympism on contemporary society's impressions of sport, sports people and the Games themselves:

> The person in the street carries with her an internalised concept of the Olympic phenomena, which implies for example a set of propositions about what kind of person the 'Olympic athlete' is, but also implies aspects of how those athletes and other Olympic actors should behave- a moral agenda which is bound up with the notion of Olympism, indicating aspects such as fair play, generosity of spirit…and opposition to doping, and which is also, importantly if less directly, related to ethical issues such as gender equity, multiculturalism and so on (247).

Chatziefstathiou and Henry's (2012) statement resonates with Durantez-Corral's (1994) consideration of Olympism as the founding philosophy of the Games, geared towards the promotion of "peace, democracy internationalism, and the moral transformation of man"(p.76). Furthermore, Guttman (1992) explains that the Olympic Games were deliberately contrived around a set of sporting values intended to shape societal impressions of the Games and those associated with them; a purposeful endowment that extends back to the establishment of the first Olympic Charter established at Sorbonne in 1894 (Chatziefstathiou & Henry, 2012; Koulouri, 2006; Real, 1996). Although the Olympic Charter is updated every year by the IOC, many of the values that remain at the charter's core owe their roots to the 19th century European environment within which they were first conceived, a condition that Chatziefstathiou and Henry (2012) reveal is indicative of a reflective quality of the charter accordingly with contextual geopolitical and societal challenges. Such influences have continued to inform interpretations of the Games and Olympism over time, shaping societal impressions right through to today (Chatziefstathiou, 2015; Giulianotti, Hognestad & Spaai, 2016).

Importantly, Maguire (2015) explains that the dispersal of Olympic values in contemporary global sport are derived from those founded in the 19th century, and serve to reinforce western ideological dominance over sports culture, culminating in a standardized "global idiom of achievement sport"(p.521). Alternatively, Brown (2012) claims that Olympism's association with the Games has dwindled in recent years, fading into the background of the contemporary sporting spectacle. Rahman and Lockwood (2011), Real and Beeson (2002), and Real (1996) support this idea in critiquing the integrity and authenticity of Olympism values in 21st century Games iterations. However, what is clear even within these critical testimonies, is that Olympism values have been a core feature of the modern Olympic Games since their inception, with significant, ongoing impacts on the social values associated with Olympic sport (Llewellyn & Gleaves, 2016; Giulianotti, et., al, 2016).

Scambler (2005), Chatziefstathiou and Henry (2012), Real and Beeson (2002), Koulouri (2006) and Maguire (2015) all regard the 19th century origins of Olympism as critical to understanding the values of Olympism and Olympic sport over time, including the Olympic brand as it has been recognized today (Rahman & Lockwood, 2011; Smart, 2018). In particular, values associated with moral education, internationalism and amateurism emerge in the scholarship as defining features of Olympism from the inception of the modern Games, tenets of which remain evident in the fundamental principles of Olympism recorded in the IOC's most recent Olympic Charter:

> Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example, social responsibility and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles. The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity (International Olympic Committee, 2021c, p. 8).

The above references to education; the joy of effort; social responsibility and universal fundamental ethical principles within a mission for a peaceable international society; are a testament to the aforementioned values and ideologies entrenched in the modern Olympic movement, experienced through sport and embodied by Olympic athletes (Lopes dos Santos, et al., 2021; McNamee, 2006). Furthermore, the origins, development and ultimate *persistence* of these values can be seen to reflect both the Olympic movement's relationship with society over time, and the reflexive nature of the contemporary commercialized, mediatized Olympic Games (Chatziefstathiou & Henry, 2012; Rahman & Lockwood, 2011).

The Origins of Olympism Values

As previously mentioned, it was towards the end of the 19th century that Pierre De Coubertin took it upon himself to begin investigating a better means of educating and improving the wellbeing and military readiness of the men of France (Chatziefstathiou, 2015; Culpan, 2017; Horne & Whannel, 2020; Guttman, 1992). These grand ambitions were shaped amid social crises associated with the onset of modernization and industrialization, and the lingering aftermath of defeat in the Franco-Prussian war which had left an indelible impression on De Coubertin as a child (Brown, 2012; International Olympic Committee, n.d.; Scambler, 2005). Within this self-imposed mandate, De Coubertin began publicly and privately interrogating a means of ensuring peace, prosperity and unity both at home and between nations. These were notions shared broadly in society at the time, as the European West entered a period of relative peace and stability, and accordingly as Brown (2012) notes, required a new moral code. Within De Coubertin's mission, Horne and Whannel (2020) refer to the significance of the Frenchman's visits to England, particularly referencing the sporting curriculum of the English public school system as a decisive influence. These institutions praised physical exertion as essential to education, extolling virtues of sport connected with health and wellbeing, and celebrating Muscular Christianity alongside gentlemanly values prizing fair-play, resilience and persistence over victory (Scambler, 2005; Ryan, 2007; Weber, 1970). De Coubertin's own notes record his views on education as the "key to happiness" and sport as a critical ingredient for a holistic, prosperous learning experience (Muller, 2000, p.205). As such, it is widely noted that De Coubertin perceived sport as playing a vital role in the moral education of young men, wherein gentlemanly competition would foster the qualities of fair-play, resilience and chivalry, alongside an equally important priority of physical aptitude (Brown, 2012; Chatziefstathiou & Henry, 2012; Koulouri, 2006; Rahman & Lockwood, 2011). Real and Beeson (2002) note that De Coubertin extended these

expectations of sport to democracy and international relations, and quote De Coubertin accordingly in reference to the proposed modern Olympic Games:

> Healthy democracy, wise and peaceful internationalism, will penetrate the new stadium within the cult of honour and disinterestedness which will enable athletes to help in the tasks of moral education and social peace as well as of muscular development (p.3).

These values as attributed by De Coubertin, would endow early modern Olympic sport with a social, moral and educational objective beyond the simple outcomes of winning and losing, while establishing a competitive framework that encouraged physical excellence. Scambler (2005), Smart (2012) and Kidd (2013) all note that even at the outset of the modern Olympic competition nations competing against each other under the banner of internationalism appeared paradoxical. However, the significance of Olympic internationalism values clearly continue to bear prominence in the current Olympic Charter, as illustrated in the following selection from the charter's fundamental principles:

> The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity (International Olympic Committee, 2021c, p.8).

Furthermore, the Olympic Charter continues to support De Coubertin's (albeit problematic) stance that sport ought to remain independent of politics, intended to offer a shared space within which countries come together to celebrate humanity and unity (International Olympic Committee, 2021c). While the internationalism intentions of the Games charter appears unchanged since De Coubertin's era, implementing these values has proven problematic throughout the history of the Games, leading various scholars to question the efficacy of the Olympic movement altogether (Rahman & Lockwood, 2011; Real & Beeson, 2002; Real, 1996). These questions are explored further in this literature review under the heading 'Challenges to Olympism'. However, it is clear here that internationalism as an ideal of global solidarity irrespective of politics, was and continues to be, a clearly stated values priority for the Olympic movement (Horne & Whannel, 2020; Giulianotti, et al., 2016).

Yet, De Coubertin's studies of the British sporting curriculum were not the only inspiration for Olympism values. At the time of his enquiries, antiquarianism was also on the rise in aristocratic circles, which Koulouri (2006) credits for drawing De Coubertin to the Ancient Olympic Games. De Coubertin's attraction to the Ancient Olympics would not only lead to the instatement of the modern Olympic competition, but also help to condition the Olympism values that were attributed to them (Chatziefstathiou, 2015; Llewellyn & Gleaves, 2016; Guttmann, 1992). The Ancient Olympic Games took place every four years at Olympia in Greece from 776BCE - 221AD, and were a religious celebration of the god Zeus, an orchestration of sporting events involving Greek athletes from various cities across the Greek peninsula and wider Mediterranean, competing in celebration of their common gods and culture (Lunt, 2009; Spivey, 2012). This idea of athletes of the Greek world coming together for the celebration of sport appealed to De Coubertin, no less because the Greek states were often

embroiled in conflict with one another, with the Olympic Games taking place under a protective peace (Koulouri, 2006; Spivey, 2012). Here, De Coubertin saw a parallel between the Greek world and the unfolding globalized world, reinforcing his determination for an apolitical, international sporting celebration for the betterment of international unity and peace. However, internationalism and solidarity were not the only parallels De Coubertin found in the Ancient Games. In the Ancient stadium, competitors were lauded by their city for their success but they did not compete for monetary gain, their reward consisting of a simple olive tree wreath, anointing their physical excellence (Toohey & Veal, 2007). Rahman and Lockwood (2011) and Toohey and Veal (2007) refer to this modest celebration of victors in the Ancient Games as reinforcing De Coubertin's view of sport as providing a social and moral service, whereby competition should be entertained for this value alone, and not for monetary gain.

Moreover, Koulouri (2006) and Scambler (2005) state that these conditions (that would become a feature of Games known as amateurism) effectively supported the classist social structures of the time, whereby competition was reserved for the upper, so-called 'leisure' classes, with the working classes largely excluded on account of their inability to participate due to working commitments. Toohey and Veal (2007), Rahman and Lockwood (2011) and Koulouri (2006) further note that De Coubertin's glorification of the amateur ancient athlete did not reflect the true realities of what was a much more professional sporting landscape in ancient times (Llewellyn & Gleaves, 2016; Faulkner, 2012). They make the point that while ancient Greek athletes were not rewarded financially at the Olympic Games, many athletes were paid to train for them, and more still earned monetary prizes offered by various other sporting competitions. Furthermore, Toohey and Veal (2007), Real (1996) and Koulouri (2006) state that these issues were deliberately overlooked by De Coubertin in his Olympic revival, citing their incompatibility with the moral and educational values inherent in De Coubertin's views of sporting internationalism; his own exclusionist tendencies (on the basis of class, gender and race); and their ill-fit with his vision of the humble sporting gentleman (Chatziefstathiou, 2015; Llewellyn & Gleaves, 2016; Krieger, Pieper & Ritchie, 2020). Accordingly, modern amateurism glorified the humble athletic hero, which become a core value of modern Olympism and stringently restricted athlete earnings for much of the 20th century (Llewellyn & Gleaves, 2016; Toohey & Veal, 2007; Yttergren, 2007). Perhaps most importantly, amateurism has also served to support a fundamental Olympic trope- the athlete hero- which Rahman and Lockwood (2011) claim continues to act as a key vestige of authenticity, drawing the contemporary Games back to its ancient, religious roots. Significantly, Toohey and Veal (2007), Rahman and Lockwood (2011), Koulouri (2006) and Scambler (2005) all agree that, although (mis)appropriated to De Coubertin's modern social norms; the ancient Olympic Games offered the modern Olympic movement a historical gravitas that, along with the values instilled in the Olympic Charter, served to style the Games as *the* premiere international sporting event- a reputation that would become increasingly established over the 20th century (Krieger,

et.al., 2020; Guttman, 1992). Ultimately, the birth of the modern Olympic Games in 1896- with the addition of De Coubertin's Olympic rings[4] as a symbol of global unity in 1920- would place Olympism values at the forefront of sporting ideology, a prominence that continues to today, although not unchallenged nor entirely unchanged.

Olympism Meets MediaSport

Over the 20th and 21st centuries, media covering sport have played an increasingly significant role in anchoring the social and physical spaces of sport in society. Aligning with Olympism, Horne and Whannel (2020), Maguire (2015), and Rowe (2003) agree that the moral constitution of 21st century global sport was largely born out of Britain in the late 19th century, and has since been exported, distorted and reconfigured through temporally increasing processes of industrialization, globalization and mediatization. These processes transformed what had been largely amateur, recreational enterprises into international competitive juggernauts of media and commerce, as described by Horne and Whannel (2020):

> "(the Olympics have) been shaped by the forces of commodification, globalization, and digitalization; it is increasingly shaped by the convergence of the once distinct technologies of television, computers, and the internet; and is having to come to terms with the rise of streaming of content via the internet." (p.195).

As Horne and Whannel (2020) explain, media has amplified sport, enabling the proliferation and commodification of a previously amateur, leisure exercise, while embodying social values and moral directives relatable to the audiences own social experiences (Billings & Wenner, 2017; Maguire, et al., 2008; Rahman & Lockwood, 2011; Smart, 2005). Through this socio-cultural and technological expansion, the Olympic Games of the mid-20th and 21st centuries came to represent the pinnacle of sport and sporting values; a constantly evolving constitution due in no small part to the development of media technologies and mediatization (Billings, et al, 2018a; Tomlinson, 2017). Considering this relationship, mediated Olympic sport can be seen as embodying the social values attached to Olympic sport by both media and society, reflecting the mediatization theory framework. Furthermore, given that mass media are noted by value scholars Maio et al., (2006) and Schwarz (1992) as instrumental to the construction and dissemination of values in society, it is therefore pertinent to analyse media content as a means of determining and understanding Olympic values in context- a focus of this thesis relatively unexplored by current scholarship.

[4] The Olympic rings designed by De Coubertin himself, represent the five continents connected in solidarity (International Olympic Committee, 2020).

Challenges to 19th Century Olympism Over the 20th and 21st Centuries

Chatziefstathiou and Henry (2012) refer to Olympism values as subject to change in interpretation and meaning on the basis of historical and cultural context, resonating with values scholars Bardi and Goodwin's (2011) acknowledgement of values change over time (Llewellyn & Gleaves, 2016; Geurin & Naraine, 2020). Furthermore, considered alongside the above testimony to the interconnections of media and sport, that Maio, et al. (2006) and Schwarz (1992) specifically reference the role of media as shapers and disseminators of values, it is reasonable to contend that Olympism values reflected in the Olympic Games have changed over time- including by media influences.

Olympic scholars have noted nationalism, politics, professionalization, commercialization and, importantly, *mediatization* as posing significant challenges to De Coubertin's Olympism; challenges that have both conditioned changes to Olympism values over time, and contested them Geurin & Naraine, 2020; Nybelius, 2024; Maguire et al., 2008; Rahman & Lockwood, 2011). Given the aim of this thesis is to interpret the communication of values in media coverage of the Games media through the conceptual lens of mediatization, it is important to acknowledge discussions in the existing literature detailing the impact of contextual social phenomena on the Games and Olympism values, as testifying to values change, and in contribution to the historical, socio-cultural and media technological backdrop to the 2021 Games in question.

In considering mediatization as a both a force for change in the Olympic movement, and as a conceptual lens by which to approach analysis of contemporary Olympism values; this thesis recognizes the formative and facilitating influence of media technologies and corporations on the proliferating commercialization, professionalization and spectacle of the Olympic Games (Kellner, 2003; Manzenreiter, 2015; Nybelius, 2024; Tomlinson, 2023). It is clear that corporate interest (in both the Games and its athletes) and IOC revenue is inextricably linked to the Games' media exposure, primarily fulfilled through television coverage, as described by Kidd (2013):

> If members of all classes, both genders and virtually every national community in the world now play sports and compete in the Coubertin Olympics, the mass media have greatly contributed to this result …the commodity production of sports information by the mass media has been crucial (p.441).

Here Kidd (2013) attests to the combination of commercialization and mediatization as two of the most important drivers of change in the Olympic movement. Commercialization of the Olympic Games has been closely linked to the event's mediatization through the development and utilization of new media technologies over the 20th and 21st centuries (Kidd, 2013; Maguire et al. 2008; Rahman & Lockwood, 2011; Real and Beeson, 2002). Real and Beeson (2002) and Kidd (2013) signal the beginning of an expansive commercialization of the Games as associated with the escalation of wealth gained by the IOC through the sale of Games television rights. Real and Beeson (2002) note the exponential rise in capital gained by the IOC from television sales, from $600,000 in 1960, to $714

million in 1996, with television revenue replacing ticket sales as the principle source of income garnered from the event. This monumental increase in revenue testifies both to the expansive mediation of the Games via television, the medium's significance as a global viewing platform, and the increasing influence of television media driving spectacle as a production priority of the Games (Billings, & Wenner, 2017; Fernández Peña, 2024; Kellner, 2003; Manzenreiter, 2015).

The link between mediatization and commercialization of the Games only deepens when considering the inclusion of corporate sponsorship of the event, attracted by the exposure offered by the media spectacle. In 1982 the IOC instituted The Olympic Program (TOP), opening the Games to commercial sponsorship through deals negotiated with the IOC, funnelling revenue back into the Olympic organization (Kidd, 2013; Maguire et al., 2008; Maguire, Barnard, Butler, & Golding, 2010). In addition to the attraction of the Olympic brand itself, Rahman and Lockwood (2011), Kidd (2013) and Segrave and Chu (1981) note the vast mediation afforded to sponsors of the Games, (and likewise nations and athletes) as offering an especially enticing proposition for sponsors, positioning brands within the Games spectacle, facilitating exposure to billions of viewers (Billings et al., 2008; Horne & Whannel, 2020; Guttman, 1992). Furthermore, that Olympic broadcasters around the world are required to partner with free-to-air platforms, promises an even larger audience for corporate sponsors (Fernández Peña, 2024).

While media technologies have offered the Games a greater platform from which to access a significant global audience, from an Olympic values perspective the decision to leverage the Games for monetary gain has been problematic (Llewellyn & Gleaves, 2016; Geurin, & Naraine, 2020; Krieger et al., 2020). Although commercialization and mediatization have enhanced the Games movement's global reach, it is also begs the question- if Olympic sport should stand as sport for sports sake, how could it also operate as a capitalist enterprise benefitting wealthy stakeholders? Maguire et al. (2008) and Rahman and Lockwood (2011) note that Olympic powerbrokers have had to weigh the risk of compromising Olympism values protecting the sanctity of Olympic sport as an apolitical production, against commercial associations with corporations that may or may not share the same values. Ultimately however, both Real (1996) and Rahman and Lockwood (2011) proffer that the decision to open the Games to commercial interests proved inevitable, allowing the Games to survive in a postmodern capitalist environment, balanced in part by the creation of TOP to keep sponsorship jurisdiction in the hands of the IOC, somewhat assuaging concerns of the misappropriation of Olympism values. Llewellyn & Gleaves (2016), Real and Beeson (2002) and Kidd (2013) all suggest that the preservation of Olympism values through the commercial transition has been questionable and vulnerable to corruption, citing the increasing commercial value of the Games as opening values priorities to the influence of external interests. The degree to which this has been the case is a topic of ongoing discussion. However it is clear that challenges posed by commercialization and mediatization

associated with the sale of the Olympic brand, have posed threats to the hegemony of Olympism values in more recent times and may continue to do so.

Perhaps one of the most visible departures from De Coubertin's Games and associated values, was the decision in to permit professional athletes to compete in the Games in 1988 marks one of the most stark departures from De Coubertin's Olympism, abandoning the long-held tenet of amateurism (Eitzen, 1989; Llewellyn & Gleaves (2016, Grunneau, 2023). Once again, the intersections of commercialisation and mediatization are attributed to the move to include professional athletes in the Games (professionalization), with Rahman and Lockwood (2011) and Maguire (2015) noting that the commercial incentives promised by the inclusion of high-profile athletes with their own fanbases and media following, proved too tempting for the IOC to resist. Llewellyn and Gleaves (2016) attest that ending Olympic amateurism was no small concession, with Rahman and Lockwood (2011) claiming the Olympic movement successfully navigated the divorce proceedings by continuing to leverage an authenticity foregrounding humility and sportsmanship, values largely established by amateurism. As a result, aspects of amateurism are noted to live on in the Olympic movement, although they exist within a professionalized paradox, as Rahman and Lockwood (2011) attest:

> Nonetheless, the reiterations of amateurism have become a central part of the modern Olympic discourse, and indeed provide a distinctive Olympic dimension to the 'authenticity' that is foregrounded to distract audiences from the commercialization of the Games (p.826).

This paradox, (in addition to the various others previously highlighted) demonstrates the flexibility of mediated Olympism values to accommodate the strategic decision making of the Olympic movement, generating concerns from Segrave and Chu (1981) and Maguire et al.'s (2008) over the true authenticity of the Games, and IOC commitment to its own distinguished values. Furthermore, Kellner (2003) and Rahman and Lockwood (2011) note the inclusion of professional athletes in the Games as contributing to an increasing spectacularization of the event, prioritized in order to fuel the Games' commercial appeal to media broadcasters and sponsors alike. Yet, much as Real (1996) claimed that commercialization of the Games was inevitable in a capitalist world, affording athletes the ability to profit from their sport while being eligible for the Games seems equally imperative, especially when propositioned beside professional sports events offering significant athlete renumeration opportunities. Furthermore, in light of recent contentions over athlete pay, and the emergence of athlete remuneration packages by sporting federations and national Olympic committees (NOC's) aligned to Olympic performances, it would seem that the terms of departure from amateurism are yet to be fully negotiated (Harris & Dulin, 2024; World Athletics, 2024a; New Zealand Olympic Committee, 2026). However, in the interests of this thesis, it is clear from these testimonies that complex interconnections of mediatization and commercialization have driven development and change in the Olympic Games over the 21st century, shifting foundational Games values in the process.

Increasing mediation and mediatization of the Games can also be seen to have threatened modern Olympism values in association with geopolitical pressures. Political contentions between participating nations have been noted in various investigations of media coverage of the Olympic Games, broadly identifying nationalism in regional coverage of competing nations as key drivers of the constructed mediation of the Olympic Games, in paradox with the internationalism values (Billings, Brown, Brown, Qing, Leeman, Licen, Novak & Rowe, 2013; Rider & Llewellyn, 2015). From the earliest introduction of television media to the Games in 1936, Real and Beeson (2002) note that the host nation, (Germany, Berlin), utilized the Olympic platform to proliferate its own governing ideologies, with the self-proclaimed prosperity of Nazi Germany featuring heavily in symbolism and staging around the city. These symbols were foregrounded by media coverage of the Olympic city and bolstered by German cinematic propaganda, marginalizing the racism, antisemitism and militarism at the core of the Nazi movement (Guttmann, 1992; Mackenzie, 2003). The Berlin example testifies to the considerable power purchased by host cities to influence Games narratives through mediation of the event, concurrently shaping the international reception of both the Games, and the Olympic movement. Real and Beeson (2002) go on to describe how geopolitics have continued to shape media narratives surrounding the Olympic movement through the Cold War years (1948-1989), noting the frequent comparisons of results American media along east and western lines. Furthermore, Boykoff (2017) details how nations have utilized the Olympic stage to protest various political contentions, including the 1976 African boycott of the Montreal Games protesting New Zealand's attendance, as a nation continuing sporting engagements with Apartheid South Africa. Just one Games later, the majority of the New Zealand team itself would boycott, alongside 80 other countries in protest of the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan (Edwards, 1984). This use of the mediated Olympic stage to elevate participating nations' political statements, demonstrate both how the Olympic Games are unable to remain entirely distant from politics and political discord, and that internationalism as a Games value can thus become compromised- a consequence exacerbated and enabled by the scale of Games mediation (Boykoff, 2017, Krieger, 2025, Tomlinson, 2023).

As alluded to previously, nationalism in media coverage and audience consumption of the Games can also be considered as colouring the dissemination and reception of Olympic values (Krieger, 2025). Nationalism in the Games has been considerably explored in sports scholarship, including as complicating the internationalism and solidarity espoused by Olympism (Eagleman, Burch & Vooris, 2014; Mori, 2019). Koulouri (2006) notes that even in the early instalments of the modern Games, nationalism featured heavily within the universalist context of competition, becoming an ingrained aspect of Games competition that would become a feature of Olympic historical and sociological analysis (MacArthur & Reichart Smith, 2012; Billings, et al.,. 2013; Mori, 2019). Billings et al., (2013) define nationalism in recent Games as "the inflation of perceived similarities within regional and national borders while understating presumed commonalities with people of other nations" (p.914).

Distinct from the political power plays enacted by host nations described in the Berlin context, Billings, et al. (2013) state that Olympic media coverage is inherently nationalist and that therefore, owing to the contemporary scope and scale of television coverage of the Games; all audiences are exposed to nationalist narratives.

Billings et al. (2013) study goes on to reveal that different nations' television coverage of the Games exhibits varying manifestations of nationalism with variable effects on the television audience, stressing what other sources have since noted, that cultural context in analyses of Olympic nationalism is essential (Rider & Llewellyn, 2015; Wang, 2024). This would suggest that the cultural context of participating nations also considerably shapes the manner in which the Games are received and understood by the relevant national audience, as conveyed through available media coverage. Furthermore, Mutz and Gerke (2018) claim that nationalism should be encouraged broadly in sports coverage, as a means of increasing the emotional investment of the audience in the spectacle. They argue that nationalism makes sport more meaningful to the audience, justifying its place in society as inspiring national commitment and pride (Mutz & Gerke, 2018). Both of these studies reveal the problematic nature of communicating internationalism values in media coverage of the Games, and raise questions over the reconciliation of Olympism values in media communications across the various national media contexts that combine to comprise the mediated constitution of the Games.

Nations are not the only stakeholders in the Olympic Games with the power to influence media narratives and public perception of the event. Athletes, through both their performances and overt political statements, have transcended media headlines of Games coverage, directing the attention of both media organizations and society (Boykoff, 2017; Brice, 2023; Rider & Llewellyn, 2015). One avenue through which this has been achieved is athletic performances, with Real and Beeson (2002) crediting the impact of the success of sprinter Jesse Owens at the 1936 Olympic Games as shattering the racial superiority narratives of the Nazi host nation. It has also been achieved through protest, such as Czechoslovakia's Vera Čáslavská bowing her head on the gymnastics podium during the Russian national anthem, in solidarity with protests for independence from the Soviet regime (Boykoff, 2023).[5] Importantly, these examples of athletes' political action, and the previously stated power of participating nations to shape Olympic staging and competition; demonstrate that Olympic political neutrality is not assured in media coverage, despite the IOC's preference for internationalism (Tomlinson, 2023).

[5] It should be noted that the symbolic value of these efforts and protests as they are celebrated today did not necessarily transcend in their own time. Jesse Owens experienced racial injustices as a black person in pre-civil rights USA, while Čáslavská returned to face ostracism by the prevailing communist regime, ultimately forcing her retirement. (Drake, 2011; Webster, 2018; Reynolds, 2018).

Finally, the global media-scale of the Olympic Games has been thoroughly catalogued in this literature review, however, the combination of the global reach of Olympic mediation and the need for contextual relativity in values research, bears consequences for this study that are worth noting. Broadcast coverage of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games was conducted by over 60 broadcast rights holders, aligned with national Olympic committees (NOC's) as the arbiters of the Olympic brand in their respective regions (Olympic Broadcasting Services, 2019). Within these regional divisions, media coverage of the Games is edited and shaped into a media product relevant to the audience it is presented to (Billings et al., 2018a; Fernández Peña, 2024). These considerations formed the basis of my decision to focus this thesis on a single-nation case study (New Zealand) in order to best interpret and reconcile the values communicated relative to a specific socio-cultural context. Accordingly, the following section reviews the literature surrounding the role of sport in New Zealand, and particularly Olympic sport, including the nation's Olympic history, and the Games ongoing relevance within the defined socio-cultural media environment.

Section Four: Aotearoa New Zealand: An Olympic Nation

Both mediatization and values scholars insist on the application of cultural and social context to appropriately understand relevant effects on individuals, institutions, and society (Frandsen, 2020; Schwarz, 1992). It is therefore important to review the cultural context of the media coverage selected for values analysis, as that relevant to New Zealand Olympic athletes, officials, media and audience.

At a glance, New Zealand, as a relatively small national participant in the Olympic Games, offers a helpful scale reduction in the task of understanding and interpreting extensive media coverage of a global-sporting mega-event. However, New Zealand is also an appropriate socio-cultural context within which to examine values in media communications surrounding the Games, due to its considerable investment in, and enthusiasm for sport and the Olympic Games (Bruce, et al., 2007; Dalziel, 2011; High performance sport, 2021; Gammon, Ramshaw & Waterton, 2013). To this point, and in terms of the influence and significance of sport and its intertwining with media in New Zealand, Bruce, et al. (2007) note that:

> The processes through which mediasport influences our ideas about the world may be more powerful here than in many other nations because of the importance New Zealanders place on sport (p.164).

In making this assertion, Bruce et.al (2007) recognize the significance of sport and sports media broadly in New Zealand and delineate media coverage of sport in New Zealand as carrying considerable socio-cultural significance (see also Bruce, 2009). To this first point on the significance of sport in New Zealand society, Falcous and Potgieter (2022) adopt Coakley's (2015) position the prevalence of the "great sport myth" in New Zealand society, a belief that "the purity and goodness of sport is transmitted to those who participate in or consume it; and [that] sport inevitably leads to

individual and community development" (p.403). Falcous and Potgieter (2022) go on to explain that this myth is perpetuated across "Media, by politicians, sports administrators, educators, athletes and marketeers who promote sport as a unifying, character building, integrative force, and hence a social good"(p.155). Relatedly, their study provides a detailed narrative analysis of moments of New Zealand sporting history, acknowledging where events have penetrated and shaped the sporting mythscape (Falcous & Potgieter, 2022). This approach thus also aligns with Coakley's (2015, 2021) determination that sociological research needs to challenge the belief of sport as "inherently good and pure", and not determinedly accept or excuse its contradictions (p.403). As the preceding studies demonstrate, this position has been influential on academic approaches to understanding sport in society, in subjecting investigations to the presumption of societal belief in sports inherent good, as one answer for its perseverance, power and popularity in society (Coakley, 2015; Stojanovska, Kerr & Ryan, 2023). However, this thesis takes a different approach, that is, to inductively question *what* the values communicated through media coverage of Olympic sport are, how they are communicated, and what influences might be shaping their communication.

Furthermore, although media are mentioned as influential to the formation sport 'myths' or ideals- here and across various sources- the contributions of media coverage to the narrativization of the 'sporting myth' requires expansion (Bruce, et al., 2007, Kohe, 2010). To begin, media, as they are referred to, are not a singular or static mechanism for narrativization, as illustrated by the preceding mediatization section describing the evolution of media technologies and platforms, and subsequent waves of mediatization (Hutchins & Sanderson, 2017; Frandsen, 2020). Therefore, to understand media as a contributor to ideas around the meaning of sport in New Zealand society, requires ongoing study across various media platforms, time and context. It is not that this work is absent, there exists an expanding space of academic interest in sport in the media in New Zealand, with recent studies focused on representations of gender in media coverage, including around the inclusion of trans-athlete Laurel Hubbard in Tokyo 2020, and an ongoing inquisition by Sport New Zealand into media coverage of women's sport (Scovel, Nelson & Thorpe, 2023; Sport New Zealand, n.d.; Thorpe, Nelson, Scovel & Veale, 2023). Such studies, alongside others investigating the use of athlete celebrities in sports marketing, and the coalescing of national identity in promotional campaigns, speak both to the broad acknowledgement that sport matters to New Zealander's, and that media are seen as central to reinforcing such ideas (Bruce, 2009, Bruce & Chapman, 2010; Falcous, 2007; Kirkwood & Warren, 2019; Pierce, Hodge, Taylor & Button, 2017). However, as yet, there has been no attempt to broadly distil the communication of sporting values in New Zealand media coverage, much less from a media-centric angle aimed at understanding the media and societal processes that have shaped their communication during a contemporary sporting moment. This study takes an important step in this direction; isolating a specific sporting context in which to inductively enquire as to the communication

of values in the media coverage across various contemporary platforms, and theorizing as to their formative influences.

Further to the above, much of the academic interest in New Zealand's relationship with and attitudes towards sport has been conducted by various socio-historical approaches (Falcous & Potgieter (2022; Kohe & Warren, 2019; Watson & Ryan, 2018). Such insights are essential for understanding the historical context of New Zealand's national associations with sport, and the societal underpinnings applicable to the contextual media coverage. Regarding the Olympic Games more specifically, Kohe and Warren's (2019) historical study of oral histories within the New Zealand Olympic Committee (NZOC) and its surrounding stakeholders and media community, revealed insights into the national psyche regarding the nation's sporting history. In a series of interviews with Olympians, media representatives and sports administrators; Kohe and Warren (2019) identified responding themes testifying to the potency of sport and the Olympic Games as a source of national pride, as encapsulated by the following respondent:

> Sport defines New Zealand on the world stage…Sportsmen and women place higher expectations of themselves in New Zealand because of the importance New Zealand society places on sport. This can be motivational as New Zealand has a proud sporting history. They aspire to those things that matter to us as a nation (p.1239).

Here, Kohe and Warren (2019) describe the significance placed upon sport in New Zealand society, a relationship that historians have traced back to the nations colonial roots.

The Industrial Sport Revolution and The Empire

New Zealand makes for a fascinating study in the function and influence of sport in society, as a nation colonized by Great Britain amid a formative era of industrialization, urbanization and emigration; transforming British society and accordingly, sport across the Empire (Friedman & Bustad, 2017; Perkin, 2007). Ryan (2007) describes the settlement of New Zealand as running parallel to considerable developments in British sporting culture, highlighting "regular working hours, a higher disposable income, the expansion of rail and other transport networks , and the growth of the popular press in response to improving educational standards" as drivers of sport as a recreational and competitive enterprise exercised widely across society (p.97). However, as previously noted with regards to Olympism, sport in Britain was heavily influenced by class structure (Friedman & Bustad, 2017; Perkin, 2007). With a growing middle class engaging in sport as a means of denoting respectability, while divides between the working and the aristocratic class gave rise to moralizing notions of the working class professional and the gentleman amateur respectively (Scambler, 2005; Friedman & Bustad, 2017). As noted prior, these socio-economic divides formed the foundation for amateurism in Britain (later adopted by the Olympic movement) and a philosophy that sport was undertaken as a character building exercise, preparing (at the time, young men) for the greater struggles of life, wherein consequently, a focus on winning or gaining from sport was a threat to its

idealistic constitution (Crawford, 1985; Friedman & Bustad, 2017; Jobling, 2000; Scambler, 2005). These were the beginnings of moral sporting values, ideals that would be exported to New Zealand with British settlers throughout the second half of the 19th century, while greater western Europe increasingly looked to sport as a moral cohesive; the antidote to the social upheavals of the aforementioned transformative processes (Carlisle, 2026; Jobling, 2000; McNamee, 2006)

Olympic founder Pierre De Coubertin's reverence for British aristocratic sporting culture has been discussed previously in this chapter. With this in mind, it is important to note here the significant influence of British sporting culture on the emergent Olympic movement, both in terms of a cultural understanding of sport as a virtuous undertaking for the development of character and morality; but also towards the organization of sport for the benefit of solidarity in an increasingly global world (Jobling, 2000; Maguire, 2011; Scambler, 2005). In many respects, the sporting developments in Britain, particularly as they pertained to the patronizing upper classes, were at least as informative an influence on the Olympic revival as the ancient Greek games themselves (Koulouri, 2006; Scambler, 2005). As a nation in the midst of British colonisation at this time, the emergent New Zealand was significantly conditioned both by British use of sport as a colonising cohesive, and by the integration of sporting values into the foundations of early national identity (Watson, Palmer & Ryan, 2016).

Shaping the New Nation: Colonialism and Sport

The moralistic divides between sporting amateurism and professionalism in Britain and their links to class are illustrative of the social conditioning that sport acquired during this period, and its societal uses towards establishing ideals of social distinction and aspiration (Borell, 2016; Hokowhitu, 2007; Watson & Ryan, 2018). Much as the principles of amateurism served to marginalize the working class in Britain; the ideals of sport and physicality as a moralistic endeavour were drawn on by British settlers in New Zealand to justify their perceptions of cultural superiority over the so-called sedentary indigenous Māori peoples (Carlisle, 2026; Hokowhitu, 2004; 2007). Importantly, Hokowhitu (2007) notes that early European settlers in New Zealand lacked the ability to understand Māori cultural practices as connected to a worldview starkly different than their own. Rather, early settlers in New Zealand were quick to denigrate Māori physical cultural practices on grounds of their difference to Western European culture, and thus as indicative of the 'heathen' and 'uncivilized' (Hokowhitu, 2004; Ryan, 2021). In particular, early European record-keepers of pre-colonial cultural practices conceived and impression of Māori as a relatively sedentary, whimsical people, characterized as indulging in physical amusements sporadically, without structure or intent, and as generally preferring a sedentary, relaxed way of life (Hokowhitu, 2007; Ryan, 2007). This construction illustrates a clear contradiction of emergent western sporting values, at a time where sport was idealized as a structured, formal undertaking separate from working endeavours, that denoted exclusivity and class, as well as aspiration (Borell, 2016; Thomson, & Jackson, 2016; Watson & Ryan, 2018).

That pre-colonial Māori were characterized as not adhering to these agreements of the nature and purpose of sport in western society, helped to established sport as a litmus test for the success and prosperity of the new colony (Borell, 2016; Watson & Ryan, 2018; Hokowhitu, 2007; Palmer, 2007). As in other British colonies, the institution and practice of sport- especially rugby and cricket- became a central means of assimilating indigenous cultures to that of the colonizing immigrants, and thus a core component of early national identity (Watson, 2007; Watson, et al., 2016; Watson & Ryan, 2018). Furthermore, Hokowhitu (2007) relays that the first national Rugby team to tour Australia and Britain in 1888, was largely comprised of Māori players, a fact that was lauded as a consequence of colonial success, and thus a British triumph as a "Tribute to our colonizing faculty…Wherever the Englishman goes he carries the bat and the goal posts with him"(cited in Ryan, 1993, p.50). That the British press would celebrate the representation of Māori in the New Zealand Rugby team, is demonstrative of the continued authority perceived to be exercised over early New Zealand as a member of the British Empire (now Commonwealth), and the reception of early New Zealand sporting identity overseas as a reflection of British success (see also Carlisle, 2026). New Zealand's sporting success on the world stage became a validation of the nation, both at home and abroad, which would also contribute to begetting rivalries with neighbouring colonies such as Australia (Watson & Ryan, 2018). Over time, such demonstrations of national prosperity through sport became increasingly linked to a sense of national identity, a point of pride for the young nation, proving its development and relevance both to the empire, at home, and to the rest of the world (Warren, 2018; Watson, 2007; Waston & Ryan, 2018). It is from here that the roots of New Zealand ideals of sport are grounded, contemporaneously incorporating that which are detailed in the preceding section regarding the coalescing of Olympism (Thomson & Jackson, 2016). Moreover, this history acknowledges that notions of sport and sporting success as a virtuous beacon of prosperity and moral character, are very much embedded in the formative national conscience, which Falcous and Potgieter (2022) agree continue to endure in the nation (Ryan, 2007; Watson & Ryan, 2018).

Contemporary Heroes: Olympic Role Models

Furthermore, Kohe and Warren (2019) describe how New Zealand Olympian's in particular perceive themselves as leaders in society, and adopt a corresponding sense of social responsibility, citing a former Olympian and administrator as stating:

> The value of role models, fair play, and effort are important and is what the Olympic movement tries to teach. There is an obligation to do more than just be the sportsperson as there is an education aspect. This aspect of developing the person and Olympism being a way of life is often lost on the media who tend to have a narrow scope which is focused on results and medals (p.1243).

This quote testifies to the perception of the significance of Olympic athletes in society beyond their contribution to the medal tally, aligning with Maguire's (2011) claim that sport represents a "fertile ground for the reproduction of hero narratives"(p.854). Accordingly, New Zealanders who achieve

success on the Olympic stage are afforded the country's highest honours, while those who simply participate join an exclusive club of lifetime achievers revered for their ascension to the world's biggest sporting contest (Knight et al., 2005; Kohe & Warren, 2019; Thomson & Jackson, 2016). Warren (2018) notes that the success of New Zealand athletes as nationally-perceived "underdog(s) on the world stage" reinforces an aligned societal perspective that the nation overachieves in the international sporting stakes, thus heightening the value of sporting success as a prized attribute of the nation and its peoples (p.2).

Carrying the torch of national pride at the Olympic Games also comes with high societal expectations, as revealed in Knight et al.'s (2005) thematic analysis of disappointment narratives in New Zealand media coverage of the 2000 Games in Sydney. Knight et al. (2005) attest both to New Zealand's national interest in the Games and investment in athletic outcomes, while also drawing attention to the social value of sport and competition values highlighted in the coverage. Their findings refer to media themes reporting a need to inspire a will to win in new generations of school children, the demand for a cultural change favouring toughness and achievement (Knight et al., 2005). Furthermore, the achievement of sporting success in New Zealand requires careful management by the athlete in question, with Kirkwood and Warren (2019) identifying professional athletes as prone to affliction by the sword of Tall Poppy Syndrome (TPS), referred to as "The New Zealand habit of denigrating or 'cutting down' those who are successful"(p.103, see also Feather, 1996). To avert such cases, Kirkwood and Warren (2019) identify the need for athletes to construct communications that foreground their "hard work and determination" in order to justify their success as deserved (p.103). That contemporary athletes must emphasize the moralistic virtues of their success- effort and application- presents an interesting correlation with amateur notions of sport as both a moralistic pursuit, virtuous by way of the action of undertaking it (Fernandes da Silva, et al., 2025). Although sport in society has undoubtably changed considerably since the 19th century, not least in its mediated constitution; these consistencies suggest that the sporting foundations of colonial New Zealand may yet bear important contextual socio-cultural influence on the values communicated respective of athletes at the Olympic Games (Coakley, 2015; Kohe, 2010; Thomson & Jackson, 2016).

At once acknowledging the historical socio-cultural foundations of sporting ideals in New Zealand, my focus on media coverage branches away from these historical approaches to afford an examination of New Zealand sporting values amid the contemporary media landscape. In doing so, I proffer greater understanding of both the contemporary communication of Olympic values in New Zealand media and society, and of the significance of media to their ongoing constitution and dissemination.

New Zealand in Tokyo: The COVID-19 Pandemic

Finally, this study places a priority on the socio-cultural context of the media sample, including its temporal setting relative to the Tokyo 2020 iteration of the Olympic Games. As alluded to prior, the

COVID-19 pandemic is a decisive feature of this Games environment. Not only did the pandemic drive the unprecedented postponement of the 2020 Games, it also determined the conditions of its resumption in 2021, including the isolation of athlete bubbles, PPE requirements, and importantly, the exclusion of spectators (Radio New Zealand, 2021a; Yoneoka, et al., 2022). Yoneoka et al. (2022) and Shimokubo (2023) detail the considerable public outcry in Japan that came with the decision to postpone the Games to 2021- resumed despite the ongoing state of emergency in Tokyo- on account of both the health and safety risk to the city's residents, and paradoxically, the restrictions against spectators. These conditions are ripe for the concerns of mega-event theorists interested in the impact of the Games on host cities and nations. In this sphere, Oshimi, Yamaguchi, Fukuhara and Taks (2025) analysed risk perception among Tokyo residents in June prior to the beginning of the Tokyo Olympics in 2021, finding that trust in event organizers played a significant role in mitigating risk perception among residents. Alternatively, Ando, Samahito, Kutintara, Noikasem & Samahito (2025) took interest in the volunteer base necessary to host a Games, noting that volunteers contributing to the Tokyo 2020 Games did so largely out of affection for the event, seemingly uncomplicated by the pandemic context. In their differences, these studies illustrate the tension between risk and Olympic appeal or festivalization in Tokyo during the 2021 Games, which can be considered applicable to all those involved- athletes, officials, and media alike (Richard & Palmer, 2010). It is therefore interesting to examine the values underpinning the Olympic-appeal side of this tension, as an understudied (although ultimately decisive- the Games went ahead) opponent to the potential for unmanageable spread of the COVID-19 virus, and associated harms (Siddiqui, Alhamdi & Alghamdi, 2022; Shimobuko, 2023). It is also important to make clear, that in the absence of spectators, media coverage of the Games became the exclusive means of watching and interpreting the Games, with limited interactions across the host city beyond the Games itself (Grout, et al., 2021). Therefore, analysis of media coverage of the Games (and the values communicated therein) is even more significant to the constitution of the Tokyo Games in time and place, as the only mechanisms for Games dissemination and audience consumption.

As a case study; this point regarding the implications of the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic as a global health crisis is best explored here as it pertains to New Zealand. New Zealand is a geographically isolated island nation, key attributes that enabled the New Zealand government to respond to the threat of the pandemic in early 2020 with the imposition of an aggressive elimination strategy (Theunissen & Wolf, 2022). The approach sought to prevent COVID-19 from entering the country, and to suppress any incursions before community spread could occur (Rajan, 2022). To ensure this, the government initiated an alert system of four levels, with the most extreme measures reserved for level four- in the case of community spread of the virus. This involved extreme measures of social isolation, requiring households to isolate from each other with few leisure freedoms, and restrictions around access to essential goods and services (Cumming, 2022). Additionally, the New

Zealand government ordered the cessation of international travel and a limited managed isolation system (MIQ) for returning New Zealander's (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, n.d.). This response framework endured throughout 2020, with adjustments made as the nation achieved relative isolation from the virus. Leading into the Games in 2021, New Zealand had enjoyed a period of normalcy relative to the pandemic, although the threat remained present (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, n.d.). Quarantine-free travel with Australia was ceased at the end of June due to an increase in cases there, amid urging for renewed vigilance following the emergence of the Delta strain (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, n.d.).

Importantly, at this time New Zealand's response to the pandemic was largely supported both within the nation, and applauded by the international community (Beattie & Priestley, 2021). While tensions over vaccine mandates would transpire in the period after the Games, it is significant to note the political bipartisanship of the elimination strategy within the timeframe set for this analysis, and the relative cooperation of the nation (Beattie & Priestley, 2021; Claridge, 2020). Beattie and Priestley (2021) and Rajan (2022) note the significance of social cohesion and unity in the government's pandemic rhetoric, including "Unite against COVID-19" and invoking the phrase the "Team of 5 Million", both referring to the need for a collective contribution of the nation to ensure successful virus elimination (Rajan, 2022, pp.1-2; Beattie & Priestley, 2021). Given this widespread commitment to the cause, and the strict isolation measures adopted, it is stark to consider the nation's support for the Tokyo 2021 Olympic Games, as an event requiring the transgression on these isolationist princilels, and affording otherwise unattainable privileges to the Olympic team, including travel and early access to vaccines (Reuters, 2021; Sport New Zealand, 2021). While the ethics of hosting the Games were questioned in New Zealand media at the time of the postponement and leading into 2021, there appears to have been no organized resistance to New Zealand's participation in the Games, politically or socially, with COVID-19 response minister Chris Hipkins referring to the Games as an exception of 'national interest' (Reuters, 2021). However, with the pandemic continuing to shape the everyday lives of New Zealanders at the time of Tokyo 2020/21, it is unclear the degree to which pandemic concerns or considerations weighed on New Zealand's anticipation of the Games, or in media coverage of the event itself. By selecting Tokyo 2020 as the Games for analysis of values communicated in Olympic media coverage, I consider these contextual juxtapositions of the pandemic as having the potential to elicit values pertinence within the Olympic media coverage. That New Zealand is widely accepted as both a 'sporting nation' and a global leader by way of its isolationist pandemic response, proposes a befitting tension against which to examine the values of Olympic sport.

Overall, the context of the pandemic on a global scale presents as an unprecedented moment in Olympic history, the latest in a long list of historical challenges that have shaped the Games over time. It is thus a significant, contemporary moment in which to examine the values proposition

communicated through the Games, and to interpret the media and socio-cultural influences that serve to shape it.

Concluding Summary

This chapter has reviewed a selection of relevant literature regarding values theory; sport and media; mediatization theory; Olympism and the Olympic Games; and New Zealand sporting culture. The review contextualized the research approach in terms of the applicable integration of values theory and mediatization theory; conceptualizing the qualitative, inductive identification and analysis of values in media coverage as reflective of informing media and societal processes. It further presented the contextual foundation for case study selection both in terms of the nation of New Zealand, and the Tokyo 2020/21 iteration of the Olympic Games as a significant, contemporary sport-media moment.

Grounded by this literature, the chapters four, five and six each adopt distinct methodological approaches to the analysis of values in media coverage, presented as three journal articles to meet the requirements of thesis by publication (format two). In each case, a novel meeting of values theory and mediatization theory constitute the overarching theoretical framework, however, where relevant additional theoretical perspectives interred in the selected methodologies serve to expand the discussion.

Chapter Four examines press releases produced by the International Olympic Committee and New Zealand Olympic Committee (respectively) and digital news articles produced by *Radio New Zealand* and *The New Zealand Herald*. The research method applied is Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, following a guiding structure offered by Markula and Silk (2011). This methodological selection offered a definition of discourse compatible with values theory, with a focus on the power relations between the selected institutions and media platforms, within the above-stated values and mediatization theoretical framework.

Chapter Five examines broadcast post-competition interviews between athletes and journalists, produced by the New Zealand Olympic regional broadcaster *Sky New Zealand*. Goffman's (1974) frame theory is operationalized as methodology, positioning values as frames presented, reflected and contested through social interactions. This approach acknowledged the interactional, spontaneous nature of the interview format as a human social interaction before a media audience, with mediatization theory proffering the influencing processes akin to the Olympic-media environment.

Chapter Six adopts a thematic analysis approach to examining the communication of values in athlete Facebook posts, and their respective audience comments. This selection of method enabled a flexibility to adapt to the specificities of these two Facebook formats, and to reconcile findings from each as both relational, and independent of the other.

While these chapters each feature their own research questions, contextually oriented to the appropriate media format and samples; all chapters are designed to respond to the overall research objectives set out in the introductory chapter, returned to here:

Research Objectives:

- To reveal the values communicated in New Zealand media coverage of the Tokyo 2020/21 Olympic Games.
- To examine how the values communicated in New Zealand media coverage of the Tokyo 2020/21 Olympic Games are influenced reflexively by media and society.
- To interpret, through analysis of the communication of values in New Zealand media coverage of the Tokyo 2020/21 Olympic Games, the value or role of Olympic sport in New Zealand culture and society.

With these objectives in mind, the following chapter presents an expansion on the method and methodologies applied at each stage of the research process, situating the approach in each of the subsequent chapters in terms of their relationship to the selected media samples, and in contribution to the overarching theoretical contentions of the thesis as a whole.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Research Design

As the preceding chapters outline, this thesis is structured into three prospective journal submissions each with different approaches to method. This chapter offers an elaboration on the method and methodologies selected, their integration into the research design and compatibility with values theory and mediatization theory as the overarching theoretical contentions of the thesis. In doing so, the chapter explains the distinctive contribution of each approach to the samples selected for analysis, while also demonstrating their alignments with each other and combined suitability to the research objectives.

Inductive Qualitative Analysis

All three stages of this thesis seek to identify and understand the communication of values from an inductive, qualitative position, that is, according to Williams and Moser (2019) "generating theory from collected data" (p.47). More specifically, this research approaches values underpinning in the various forms of media communication from the theoretical position that the values are there to be found (as stipulated by values theorists such as Rokeach (1973; 1979) and Maio et al., (2006)), but not from the (deductive) position that certain values are expected to appear in various contexts of media communication (Naeem, Ozuem, Howell & Ranfagni, 2023; Williams & Moser, 2019). This is an important feature of this study, consistent across the three methodological approaches, contributing to an inductive understanding of values in media coverage of the Olympic Games, underpinned by values theory and sensitised by mediatization theory. Broadly speaking this approach resides within a well-established arm of qualitative research that is no less flexible and variable in its applications (Naeem et al, 2023; Patton, 1990), as demonstrated across the differing methodologies and methods presented within this thesis.

Coding

Within qualitative research, coding refers to a process by which researchers identify, track and attribute meaning to observations in content, or as described by Saldana (2013): "A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p.3). Thus, codes can be considered as determinations of meaning made by the researcher, although these can be applied in a variety of ways. Williams and Moser (2019) describe the coding process as occurring across three stages. The first is the open phase, in which a large volume of texts is interpreted for "distinct concepts and themes for categorization" (p.48). The open process invokes new codes for new patterns in the text as they are identified, before moving into the axial phase, where codes are compared to each other, adjusting and re-orienting codes where necessary, or increasing the scope of the code, refining the number of codes to meaningfully reflect the diversity identified. Finally, selective

coding requires the researcher to determine which codes sufficiently infer a meaningful pattern, worthy of theoretical analysis and discussion (Saldana, 2013; Williams & Moser, 2019). Importantly, as Williams and Moser (2019) attest, the open-axial-selective stages of coding need not necessarily occur in a linear order, but may cycle between stages before entering into the theoretical stage of analysis. It is, however, crucial that the researcher document and justify the coding process, towards ensuring repeatability of the research, and to demonstrate suitable rigour to support the validity of the results (Bingham, 2023; Saldana, 2019).

This framework for qualitative coding underpins each stage of this thesis, employed across several methodologies and methods, with adjustments made to best represent the interest of the methods and theories, as well as the media content. Further explanations of the precise coding process used at each stage of the research are given with the following sections, where each research stage is presented in terms of the informing methodologies and method selected, with explanation given to how these have been adopted into the respective research designs.

Research Stage One: Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

Although well established as a methodological approach across the humanities (Mills, & Denison, 2014; Schirato & Danaher, 2020; Lemke, 2002), Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) does not present as a singular methodological approach, nor denote a specific approach to method (Markula & Silk, 2011; McHoul, & Grace, 1993). Rather, FDA is perhaps best understood as an umbrella term widely capturing theoretical and methodological concepts purported by French philosopher Michel Foucault, applied to the understanding of knowledges in discourse over time, and crucially, the power relations and social structures that govern them (Bastalich, 2009; Christensen, 2024; Markula & Pringle, 2006). The conceptualization of discourse as encapsulating power relations underwriting society, shaping and influencing the communication of social knowledges, is a distinguishing feature of the Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis, delineating the approach from the likes of Fairclough's (2013) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Kelly, 1994; McHoul & Grace, 1993). Unlike CDA, FDA does not seek to critique discourse in alignment with an idealised morality (Fairclough, 2013; Foucault, 2020b). Rather, the idea that power is inherent to society is embedded in Foucault's (2020a, 2020b) understandings of discourse, wherein the examination of discourses affords a scope to understand how power manifests in the communication of social knowledges, and the consequences for society.

For Foucault (2005; 2020b) discourse is not simply the act of communication and that which is communicated, it is also the innate network of influences conditioning social knowledges, shaped over time that determine what is communicated. In doing so, the Foucauldian approach to discourse

asks why are the objects of discourse communicated the way they are? Who is allowed to say what, and why? (Foucault, 1974; Markula & Silk, 2011; Markula, 2014).

A feature of the Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis is the understanding that power is omnipresent in society, transcending everything from the language we use, to where, how and by whom knowledge is known and communicated (Bevir, 1999; Markula, 2014, Foucault, 2020b). Foucault's work recognises two types of power; the juridical, in which power is possessed and extends from the top down (such as the state) and the disciplinary; power is relational, enacted widely throughout society, not contained or limited to a certain social group (Christensen, 2023; Lemke, 2002; Markula & Silk, 2011). Disciplinary power in particular is extensively explored in Foucault's work, defined in Kelly (1994) as "not conditioned by the sovereign but by discourse…not primarily repressive but productive, that is, it produces the subjects who submitted to their own subjectivity (p. 374). Foucauldian power in this sense is a discursive force in which a subject is created, that subject being the human (Foucault, 2005, 2020b). Foucault applies this conception of power to understand the evolution of the human subject over time, interpreting the interactions and influences that confer to define individuals and group behaviour, as well as broader elements of the human condition within society, notably sexuality and mental stability (Foucault & Howard, 2001; Foucault,1978).

Furthermore, within this understanding of discursive power, Foucault (1972) contends that language structures and shapes communication in a manner the simultaneously invokes a controlled system, pertaining to what is able to be communicated, by whom and how. In doing so, so called discursive practices are the communication of knowledges through language that "systematically form(s) the objects, subjects, and concepts of which they speak. (Foucault, 1972, p.49) The language itself is thus not simply a passive function of communication, but rather a means by which knowledge and truths are formed, shaped in turn by the social structures within which they are uttered (Foucault, 1972; McHoul & Grace, 1993). Understood in this way, discourse when applied to the analysis of written texts, considers both the language that is used, and the underlying social conditions within which it is used, revealing what is considered to be true, or more importantly, acceptable within the context of the communication (Markula, 2015; McHoul & Grace, 1993). This is the theoretical understanding of discourse than underpins the FDA approach, that is to reveal contextually held knowledges, and the societal conditions that shape them, through the analysis of statements through which they are produced (Bastalich, 2009; Christensen, 2024). Given the interest of stage one of this thesis is to investigate values communication in press releases and news articles; textual records of communication of a common context over a fixed time period, employing FDA as the methodological approach offered a direct application of Foucault's ideas on power in society, compatible to the

overarching theoretical contentions of values theory and mediatization theory regarding media and societal influences on media coverage of the Olympic Games.

Foucauldian Analysis of the Olympic Movement

Adopting these Foucauldian understandings of power and discourse towards understanding values communication in Olympic media coverage, it is essential to consider the various powers that conspire to produce it including: The Olympic movement, media, athletes and the consuming audience. Approaches to understanding the knowledges embedded in the Olympic movement and the power structures that serve them, have been explored in different ways, exemplifying the diversity of application of Foucault's theories to academic enquiries and methods. Culpan (2017) unites Olympism with Foucault's ideas of the docile body as shaped by "mechanics of power…not readily seen or identified as they are deeply embedded in institutional practices associated with governments, corporates, community organizations and capitalist ideology" (Culpan, 2017, p.76). In doing so, Culpan (2017) posits that Olympism is one such enactment of power, influencing the performance of the body, through a network of "social forces… generally sponsored by governmental and societal institutions e.g. schools, sporting organizations (bodies), corporations, media and networks of practices that permeate every level of daily life" (p.76). Culpan (2017) identifies Olympism itself as a form of self-regulating power, while the commercial media spectacle of the Games as ordinances by the IOC represents what Foucault (2020a) referred to as coercive power, paraphrased by Culpan (2017) as (power) "Aimed at controlling and dominating the conduct and behaviours of individuals externally" (p.80). Culpan (2017) goes on to describe the power effected by the Olympic ideology as centralised in the sporting body, as a fundamental aspect of what sport is, emblematic of an aspirational way of life. Culpan (2017) coalesces De Coubertin's intentions for Olympic power as "a mix of authoritarianism, evangelicalism, condescension, righteousness and knowing-ness" (p.80). That De Coubertin and his compatriots assumed this position of authority over what a virtuous or aspirational life should look like, Culpan (2017) argues, encapsulates Foucault's views of governmentally; a concerted effort to decree, guide and surveil the conduct of athletes and nations belonging to the Olympic movement. Interestingly, Culpan (2017) takes this position, acknowledging the various forms of power and influence the Olympic movement holds, and advocates for the uniting of Olympism education (which Culpan (2017) identifies as the internal, self-regulating form of Olympic power), within a physical education pedagogical framework. Culpan (2017) theorizes that in doing so, the values and principles of Olympism would become invested in educational pathways through a critical constructivist lens, and thus endure beyond association with the Games themselves, challenging their meaning beyond that of corporate and governmental powers that shroud the event.

Culpan's (2017) position not only distinguishes the mechanisms of power within the Olympic movement itself, but also displays how the Foucauldian approach to understanding power in society is not one that seeks to correct or replace the revealed structures with an idealised version of social reality. On the contrary, Culpan (2017) aligns with the self-regulatory power of the Games, suggesting that the knowledges that inform them could be better recognised and understood through critical engagement outside of the Games themselves. In this way, Culpan (2017) advocates for awareness and examination of the meanings that inform the influencing powers, and the aspirational end-state that they aim at. Although not a discourse analysis, these enactments of Foucault's concepts of power in society, are also illustrative of the Foucauldian framework for discourse analysis: Identifying and examining social knowledges as embedded in power structures both internal and external through society, revealing what is known and the mechanisms by which it becomes known.

Alternatively, Brown (2012) takes up their analysis of Olympism from the position that at its inception, De Coubertin's Olympism was propositioned as a moral antidote for what he viewed as crises in society. From there, Brown (2012) investigates the efficacy of such a proposition, by examining various crisis discourses that have pervaded the Games over time, concluding that Olympism has lacked resilience in the face of transformational commercial, media and geo-political challenges (to name but a few). Invoking Foucault along with de Certeau (1986), Brown (2012) describes the Olympic Games as a venerated ideal, patronized on an almost religious level, with those who worship the ideal ceding power to the knowledges and structures determinant of it. This, Brown (2012) suggests, has rendered the Olympics ineffective as a remedy for moral crisis "as impacted by discourses of commercialization, professionalization amateurism, professionalism, internationalism, nationalism, peace, militarism…that have the power to mean, to define, and to direct the Games "(p.160). Brown (2012) concludes by equating the Olympics with De Certeau's theories, stating that the Olympics are "an empty stage, but with different operations inscribed upon it—transformational in one case, productive in the other" (de Certeau, 1986, p. 96). Brown's (2012) final lines suggest that a Foucauldian view on power as determining and shaping meanings ascribed to the Games, predicates an inevitability that such ardent devotion to the very knowledges that construct the Games, ultimately stifle their efficacy to serve in moments of crisis.

These examples demonstrate how Foucauldian ideas on power in society, omnipresent and transmitted through external and internal structures and influences, have been variously applied to examine the Olympic Games and its doctrine of Olympism as an influential power (see also Fernandes da Silva, Dallaire & de Ribeiro Bozzetti, 2026; Sugden, 2012). Similarly, the decision to select the IOC and NZOC as two of the sources for analysis in stage one of this thesis, recognizes both as distinctive powers in the Olympic Games media structure, as the orchestrators of the event (and

regional guardians of the Olympic movement), who also significantly regulate media coverage. Thus, any examination of discourse including the communications from these entities, and subsequently the media that rely on them for content, would be remiss not to acknowledge the relationships between them, and the interests that shape them. With support from the conceptualizations of Culpan (2017) and Brown (2012) I contend that Foucault's (2020a) theories on power in society can reveal and examine the internal and external power relations that impact the communication of values in the selected media content. This research adopts this focus on external and internal power as a compatible framework within which to understand values in discourse in terms of knowledges underpinning the communication, with Mediatization theory prioritising the external and internal processes related to the production and dissemination of media content.

Foucauldian Methodology

As stated earlier, there is no set method paired to FDA (Markula & Silk, 2011; Mills & Denison, 2014). However, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and latter works, Foucault (1972, 1978, 2020b) details two main methodological concepts applied to analysis of discourse: Archaeology and Genealogy.

Archaeology in the Foucauldian sense refers to objects in discourse as artefacts, anchored to the time and place in which they are examined. The approach offers an analytical conceptualization of objects within stratified layers (sequential discourses) of history, in which the same object under examination across layers can reveal influential shifts in the social structures and power interactions that constitute its function. Foucault's (1972) conceptualization of objects of discourse in terms of archaeology is the antecedent to his latter genealogical approach, which takes the historical situating of knowledge and discourse and moves towards a more explicit exploration of the power relations that define it over time. Accordingly, Foucault's genealogical approach is to explore objects of discourse over the context of their history, simultaneously held against wider shifts and changes in society, revealing the trajectories of knowledges that have shaped how they are understood in society, including how they interact with power and social order (Foucault, 1978; Bastalich, 2009). In Foucauldian terms, this latter connection - between the object and ordained powers in society that contribute to knowledge of it- shifts the object to a 'concept', that is, the effective impact of the knowledge and understandings underpinning the object on its place and treatment, in and by society (Markula & Pringle, 2006; Markula & Silk, 2011).

As these terms describe, a comprehensive Foucauldian analysis of discourse in the context of this research, would be to acknowledge the values as objects of the discourse, perhaps drawing from those stipulated by Olympism (as in Culpan (2017) and Brown's (2012) examples) and examine them in terms of the utterance over time, overlapping with historical shifts in both the Olympic movement

and wider society (Markula & Silk, 201, p.131). However, as this research is interested in understanding how the Olympic Games are communicated in terms of values in media coverage at a particular historical junction, to trace the Games over time or localise a vague definition of 'values' as a Foucauldian object, would not be prudent to the research objectives. Rather, this research approach adopts elements of Foucault's ideas of archaeology and genealogy, by keeping the Olympic Games as the object of analysis within a concise period of history (Schirato & Danaher, 2020; Lee, Bernstein, Etzel, Gearity & Kuklick, 2018). In doing so, the knowledges informing the object (conceptualised in terms of values theory) can be explored, taking into consideration how they are communicated, where and by whom, as well as the wider societal conditions of the time - importantly the COVID-19 pandemic. By understanding the communication of the Games in terms of the values communicated in discourse, the Foucauldian shift from object-concepts affords a theorization as to the connections between the knowledges (or values, situated as concepts) assumed in communication of the Games and the power structures that inform their communication by various media, and wider societal structures.

To implement FDA as a framework towards achieving the objectives of this research, the research design draws from the method described by Markula and Silk's (2011), embracing Foucauldian principles in order to examine knowledges in discourse within a concise temporal setting. The approach advocated by Markula and Silk (2011) is referred to below, justified alongside the research design as implemented in stage one (chapter four).

Defining Objects and Selecting Enunciations

Aligning with FDA terminology, this research takes the Olympic Games as the object of the discourse - that which is under examination towards the elucidation of concepts - theoretical links to societal power structures (Markula & Silk, 2011). Within this conceptualization, values are akin to the knowledges that underpin the object, and thus evidentiary of unspoken power relations. Therefore, before values in Olympic media discourse can be investigated, parameters need to be drawn that will define the examination of the object. Foucault (1972) defined statements referring to the object as enunciations, which can be conceptualised on a large scale, in this case the media texts selected for analysis, and on a smaller scale - fragments of language where the statement presents. Markula and Silk (2011) offer that FDA methodology may select the relevant sources of discourse as the enunciations, under the predication that they capture communication of the object. Accordingly, and as a media analysis, press releases from the IOC and NZOC, and online news articles from news outlets *The New Zealand Herald* and *Radio New Zealand* during the Games were selected as the enunciations for analysis.

Refining Enunciations

The next stage of the process required a close reading through the selected enunciations (texts), identifying those where values statements were made relative to the object, and discarding any that did not meet that criteria. With a total number of 647 articles across the selected publications identified, an additional step was invoked at this stage of the analysis, broadly acknowledging the context in which the object was referred to. This enabled the texts to be organised into 9 inductive macro-categories describing the context, for example: 'COVID-19', 'Athlete/Sport' and 'Nations'. The full list of micro-categories is detailed on page 100 (chapter four).

Given the large number of texts included in the analysis, a secondary categorization was adopted, to grant a more specific contextual focus within each Macro-Category. This was determined inductively based on applicable consistencies in the media content regarding the application of context to the Games. These categories are referred to as Micro-Categories with an example of those derived from the COVID-19 Macro-category, previewed here for ease of reference:

Table 1.

Macro and Micro category examples- COVID19 (preview from p.99).

Macro-Category:	Micro-Categories:
COVID-19	COVID-19 Pandemic (global)
	COVID-19 in Japan (national)
	Controversy surrounding the Games regarding COVID-19
	COVID-19 at the Games

The development of micro-categories afforded a way to organise the enunciations (texts) into common groups relative to the object (the Olympic Games), offering a structure for cross-referencing values-statements coded in the texts, ensuring consistent representation of the values interpreted. These categories did not inhibit the expression of like-values across different contexts, but rather gave offered greater visibility for commonalities and cross-context values occurrences. At the conclusion of this organizational step, 41 micro-categories were identified across the seven Macro-Categories. With the micro-categories established, the texts were analysed a third time, this time for the identification, interpretation and coding of values-statements.

Identifying Concepts

Having established and ordered the enunciations, Markula and Silk (2011) require that the next stage of the FDA interpret the discourse to identify textual or language features pertaining to knowledges expressed in context, revealing how and where certain knowledges become established, towards establishing grounds upon which to interpret theoretical links to power. It was therefore necessary to incorporate a framework for identifying how a 'value' may present in the discourse. To this end, the research stipulates an operational definition for values identification:

> Presentations or understandings of preferability, including relative designations of the desirable and undesirable, either explicitly or implicitly within the text, including priority, repetitiveness and/or range and variability as designated in the text.

Embedding this application of values theory within the FDA framework allows the research approach to reconcile the knowledges revealed in the analysis of the discourse in terms of the values underpinning them, directly responding to the research objective. This is a novel integration within the Markula and Silk (2011) FDA framework, to satisfy the interest of the thesis, and to present the findings under terms that are compatible across the various stages and approaches.

Accordingly, the analysis of press releases and online news articles consisted of reading through the enunciations and inductively coding values statements where they reside in the texts in terms of the values interpreted within them. The coding process adopted here is an iterative one, with codes added and adjusted to best reflect the values communicated in context, as supported by Bingham (2023) and Williams and Moser (2019). Upon completion of coding the selected texts, the codes were collected into like-groups (with categorizations noted) and revised a final time, ensuring consistent representation of the interpretation of the values statements and the values-codes applied to them, thus following Markula and Silk's (2011) step for grouping concepts (values) into 'Individualizable groups of statement'. This produced a total of 85 distinct values-statement codes (individualizable groups of statements), with a total of 883 individual values-statements identified (referred to in chapter four as 'values occurrences'). These statements could be identified as expressing multiple values, in which case they were recorded and coded once for each, such as the following example:

> "We can only go faster, we can only aim higher, we can only become stronger, if we stand together- in solidarity" (International Olympic Committee, 2021f).

This quote from IOC president Thomas Bach, expresses an explicit value for **solidarity**, imbued through an analogy referencing the Olympic motto - higher, faster, stronger, which serves to

aggrandises the event (value= **Olympic excellence**) and reminds his audience of the physical prowess of the athletes exhibited within it (**athletic excellence**).

Following Markula and Silk's (2011) framework, at the conclusion of coding the identified values-statements were reorganised, explicitly linking them to the context in which they are invoked and the function they are interpreted to serve in the discourse, or "link(ing) the individual statements to the general domain of statements" (p.132). These inductive groups were developed from the interpretation of the values identified, and the contexts provided by tracing their macro and micro categorizations by text and publication. At the conclusion of this process, 10 descriptive groups of values-statements were assembled, describing the application of allocated values-statements within the discourse. These are recorded in Table 5 within the article (chapter four, p.101).

Theoretical Links to Power

The final stage of Markula and Silk's (2011) approach to FDA analysis is to interpret the identified individualizable groups of statements in terms of their function relational to the powers inherent to the discourse. These theories are rooted in the above documented process; connecting the context in which the statements are made to the general domain of statements and surrounding discourses (Markula and Silk, 2011, pp.132-3).

Given the vast quantities of values and values-statements identified, I decided to commit attention to selected values which emerged as prominently and meaningfully expressed across the discourse. To do so, I drew on methodology regarding purposive selection offered by Patton (1990), and supported by Markula and Silk (2011), as a pragmatic mechanism for scaling data towards the most meaningful insights. The key here is for the researcher to make informed selections on where such meaningful insights reside, and not to be swayed by predetermined bias (Patton, 1990). Although caution is required on behalf of the researcher to select data responsibly, this is an accepted practice in qualitative research, and a suitable fit for this analysis as one prioritising an inductive exploration of which values may be revealed, by whom and why (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025; Patton 1990). Had that not been the case, a speculative study of the qualities of Olympism in the discourse, perhaps informed by Foucault similarly as Culpan (2017) and Brown (2012) have demonstrated, might have been a better fit for purpose, or rather a prescriptive context-specific survey approach to values as offered by Rokeach (1973, 1979) and Scwartz (1992).

Accordingly, in Table 6. (p.102), I present two descriptive groups- 'Olympic Excellence' and National Applications' and 'Athlete Qualities' - which collectively represent 599 of the 883 values-statements (occurrences) identified. Within these, seven prominent values are visible as widely represented

across the publications and accounting for a significant concentration of values-statements (occurrences). These are the values selected for discussion, with accompanying examples from the texts, thus fulfilling Markula and Silk's (2011) final stage of FDA analysis- "exploration of objects of power" (p.133).

Connecting to the overarching theoretical contentions of this thesis, the discussion is shaped by the integration of mediatization theory, angling the theoretical focus towards media and societal processes that drive and shape media content. This approach recognises the communicative function of the different types of media content, including how they are constructed, why they are constructed, where, by and for whom (Kassing, 2024; Nybelius, 2024). It also highlights the connections between the institutions behind the media content - the IOC and NZOC- and their relationship to both the Olympic movement and media outlets covering the Games - *The New Zealand Herald* and *Radio New Zealand*. While mediatization theory provides the lens to scrutinise these interconnections, the combination with an FDA approach retains the scope to acknowledge additional societal dynamics- crucially for this thesis- governance and discourse surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic in New Zealand and abroad.

Research Stage Two: Frame Analysis

Much like FDA, Frame Analysis as the methodological approach selected for stage two of this thesis, does not follow a singular prescriptive method, but rather the informing theory of a foundational figure in the field of sociology: Erving Goffman. Goffman (1959, 1961, 1974) was a pioneer of the micro-analytical approach to understanding social behaviours and customs, and their connection to social structures, culture and settings, perhaps most famously captured in his 1959 book *The Performance of Self in Everyday Life*. For Goffman (1959), the very exhibition of one's self in the public domain was a performance, a cultivated process of communication drawing on everything from setting, to attire, styling, body language and the spoken word, inserting and attesting the individual's position in society relative to the applicable relationship with the public or audience, and the customs and norms within which the performance takes place. Thus, performances - the act of existing within and interacting with society- are not mere whims on the part of the performer, but the result of an internalization of propriety in society, their current position, their desired position and their perception of others in their company (Dolezal, 2017; Goffman, 1959; Miller, 1995).

While Goffman's frame analysis is nominated as the methodological approach to this stage of the research, there commonalities between frame theory that and Goffman's theories of self-presentation, that warrants some expansion. Whilst self-presentation refers to the curation of self based on implicit (and sometimes explicit) understandings and conventions as to the roles and

positions of the individual within society; Goffman (1974) regards frames as communicative frameworks, guided by individuals' experiences as members of a shared society, by which certain meanings intentionally underpin communication. Thus, both self-presentation theory and frame theory, can be seen to rely on the same overarching theoretical perspective that individuals are both aware, and innately conditioned within society to give certain acceptable performances or responses, or risk exposure associated with stepping outside the societal norm (Gordon, 2023; Persson, 2019; Scheff, 2005). As a result, human behaviour and communication can be understood and interpreted in terms of the context and structures within which it is performed, identifying the roles that individuals play congruent to specific settings, or conversely, when they defy convention (Miller, 1995; Zerubavel, 2024). As stage two of this thesis investigates the communication of values in post-event athlete interviews with journalists at the Olympic Games - interactions between individuals in defined settings and roles in front of the media- these theoretical conceptualizations are particularly compatible to the research objectives.

Criticism of Frame Analysis

It can also be considered that many qualitative methods and methodologies encounter resistance within the academic community on grounds of reliability and repeatability of results, and frame analysis has been no exception (Cacciatore, Scheufele & Iyengar, 2016; Gamson, 1975; Van Dijk, 2023). For frame analysis as method, critics cite the lack of a cohesive approach, from the conceptualization of what constitutes a frame, its identification in the data analysed and the analytical process converting insights in robust, repeatable results. Such criticisms point to the variability in the way the theory has been applied as method across studies and academic disciplines, highlighting different functions and metrics for frame analysis depending on the interests of the research (Cacciatore, et al., 2016; Van Dijk, 2023). D'Angelo and Kuypers (2010) caution that an emphasis on salience can be a drawback of frame analysis in media studies, in that it can risk inflating the significance of frames and the issues they describe in the texts. Furthermore, Van Dijk (2023) claims that the diverse implementations of so-called 'frames' across academic fields has created confusion over the defining features of frames and their conceptualization for analytical enquiry, with the term often substituted for beliefs, attitudes, or even values (Van Dijk, 2023). In the case of my research, the combining of frame theory with values theory aids in the distinction between the frame conceptualising the interaction and socio-cultural conditions in which it takes place, and the value as that which is communicated as preferential.

Similarly to Van Dijk (2023), Carnahan, Hao and Yan (2019) explain that frame analysis has evolved little over the latter 20th and 21st Centuries, with studies becoming more idiosyncratic, rather than consolidating towards a definitive method. Interestingly, Carnahan et al., (2019) advocate for the

pairing of frame theory with other research approaches in order to "enrich framing theory moving forward" (p.1). This stage of the thesis can be seen to demonstrate such an integration, through the adoption of established qualitative techniques (such as reflexive coding and purposive sampling), in combination with compatible guiding theories that serve to define the subject of analysis (value, values theory) and the lens through which they are analytically interpreted (mediatization theory). These theories help to guide both the conceptualization of a certain type of frame of interest to this research (specifically a values-frame), and the theoretical understanding of their socio-cultural construction.

Furthermore, there has been recent criticism of the use of frame theory as a methodology in sport media research specifically, with Cummins and Hahn (2024) noting confusion over the theoretical position in combination with methodological techniques. Given that I have selected both frame analysis and thematic analysis for stages of analysis in this thesis, it is pertinent here to briefly outline the distinctions of frame analysis compared to thematic analysis, as actioned in the research design. While frame theory and its use as methodology shares an inductive, sometimes reflexive features of thematic analysis, there are clear distinctions between the two. While thematic analysis is laid out in greater detail later in this chapter, the features that distinguish a frame analysis are precisely those that conceptualise a frame, an additional analytical layer of interpretation relating to both what is communicated, how it is communicated, by whom and to whom. Depending on the researcher, these elements of communication analysis may also apply in thematic analysis, but they are essential to frame analysis towards the understanding of the meanings that shape the communication. Unlike thematic analysis, there is no need for agreement in the analysis of frames identified as employed in data, with contradictions in the use of frames offering their own insight into the social conditions that make a frame suitable in one exchange, and unsuitable in another. These distinctions reiterate that the frame analysis approach is defined by its analytical perspective regarding the function and expression of communication, and in this case during a social exchange. How these theoretical and analytical tenets are reconciled as method is an ongoing space for critique, although scholars agree that clear, repeatable steps for the exploration of frames in data and interpretation of results, are essential (Cacciatore et al., 2016; D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010; Gamson, 1975).

Applying Frame Analysis as Method

Seemingly in response to the above critiques, subsequent studies employing frames as an analytical concept have paired frame theory with other more established methods, thus acknowledging framing as an informing theory and not the method itself (Sadri, Gentile, Buzzell & Billings, 2026). Sadri, et al., (2026) describe their study into the communication of sports content during the COVID-19 pandemic, as a content analysis guided by framing theory, positioning framing theory as a guiding theory to the method of analysis. In doing so, Sadri et al., (2026) refer to Boydstun, Card, Gross, Resnik and Smith

(2014)'s analysis of media frames as providing the framework for their integration of framing theory within a content analysis method. Unlike in this thesis, Sadri et al., (2026)'s study is largely a deductive approach to detecting frames, with the frequency of frames detected offering a quantitative measure for their prevalence. Furthermore, the study illustrates another, established aspect of frame analysis integrated into the content analysis - the recognition of thematic and episodic frames, where episodic frames are isolated to a certain issue, and thematic frames represent a widespread framing perspective (Iyengar, 1991).

This distinction between episodic and thematic frames are used widely in media framing studies, helping to describe the function of frames applied to the treatment of particular issues, and as contributing to media narratives (Iyengar, 1991; Scheufele, 2006). Similarly, while Sadri et al., (2026) still refer to Goffman (1974) as the pioneer of frame theory, their study in also grounded in a wider tradition of analysis concerned with media, and particularly, news framing (Scheufele, 2006; Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). This is an established academic sphere, within which news and journalism scholars have curated the application of frame theory to the conditions in which news is produced, with framing serving to promote particular stories and perspectives on certain issues over others (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987; Iyengar, 1991). Studies in this space have proven an effective use of frame theory, applied to understanding the sociological messaging subtly (or overtly) shaping news coverage of issues such as climate change and political polarity (Benford & Snow, 2000; D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010; Hirsbrunner, 2024). While these framing angles could well be applied to the study of mediated athlete interviews, I have chosen to align more closely to Goffman's (1974) theories considering the communication of frames as a function of the interaction between parties, capturing the exchange of values. By focusing on the frames as interactional between the communicating parties, it is possible to identify and track the exchange of certain values, identifying how they are introduced and perpetuated (or not) through the interaction. This approach foregrounds the values shared within the frames as the topics or issues of interest, and not the events themselves featuring within the conversation. In doing so, the research is interested in the framing each party brings to the interaction, as revealing what is of important or desirable to them, and subsequently their perceived audience, given the mediatized nature of the interaction.

This conception of the interactions between journalists and athletes in post-event interviews as mediatized, is a significant theoretical lens over the inquiry into values-framing. By adopting this theoretical position, the inquiry considers the connections between the values framed in the interactions, in terms of the media and societal processes at play that are innate to Games', including: event formats, venues and structures, as well as the professional role of journalists and athletes under the Olympic spotlight. Integrating mediatization theory into the exploration of values-

frames (underpinned by values theory and frame theory respectively) offers both a recognition of the influences stemming from the media side, with frame theory offering complementary weight to the informing processes that make up the societal side of the media-societal mutually-influenced relationship (Frandsen, 2020; Kassing, 2023; Nybelius, 2024). Understanding frames are structures of communication informed by society, culture and context, thus contributes a social grounding of the communication taking place within the mediatized setting.

For this stage of the thesis, the connection between Goffman's frame theory and self-presentation theory is important, combining to further define the context within which the selected interviews between journalists and New Zealand Olympic athletes take place, and the suitability of frame analysis as the methodological approach. Each of the post-competition interviews took place within the media zones of the Olympic venues, dedicated spaces within which licensed media personnel may engage with the athletes (International Olympic Committee, 2021a). By doing so, certain elements of the setting are confirmed by convention - the athlete is the focus of the interaction, dressed in competition uniform (or medal ceremony attire), all venues feature signage bearing the Olympic rings, and in all cases, the journalists are confined behind barriers with only the athletes featuring on camera. At the outset, these elements relatable to self-presentation theory, can be seen to condition the interaction, as well as the roles assumed by the interacting parties (Goffman, 1959). The athlete is the subject of the interview, they are dressed in national uniform, interacting with their own local (national) media, and doing so immediately after competing. Likewise, journalists attend the event to interview the athlete on behalf of their media broadcaster, unsure of the event result (International Olympic Committee, 2021a). These are all self-presentation factors that can (and should) be acknowledged before any analysis of the communication takes place. These contextual and setting elements are acknowledged here, while the frame analysis itself focuses on the communication between the interacting parties, identifying where values underpin the communication, identified through Goffman's conceptualization of frames in communication, described here as 'values-frames'.

Stage Two Research Design

In consideration of the above critiques of frame analysis as method, the following offers an expansion on the selection of qualitative tools for implementing a frame analysis, theoretically shaped by values and mediatization theory. The research design constitutes a novel approach to frame analysis, with the analysis and discussion informed by Goffman's (1974) frame theory alongside values theory and mediatization theory, with design elements aligning to the following outlined principles of inductive coding and purposive selection, established in various qualitative methods such as content analysis and thematic analysis (Naeem, et al., 2023; Patton, 1990; Williams & Moser, 2019).

The initial step of the research process involved transcribing the 18 interviews of the 14 selected athletes from the video's provided by Sky New Zealand, comprising a total of 49 minutes and 42 seconds of footage. This captured the communications of the journalists and athletes respectively for analysis.

Conceptualising 'Values-Frames'

Building on the definition of values offered by Rokeach (1979), and Goffman's (1974) descriptions of frames as socio-cultural structures guiding communication, this stage of the research sought to identify values in the transcripts by the following definition:

> Implicit or explicit communicative language structures that are indicative of preferential or desirable qualities.

By integrating these definitions, the analysis sought to identify a specific use of framing - intuiting the desireable/undesireable- that could apply widely to issues or events discussed between the parties. Thus, a close reading of the transcripts by myself as the sole interpreter identified specific communications (excerpts of text) where the speaker revealed sentiments of preferability or significance, conceptualised as 'values-frames'.

> Journalist: "You just had your first Olympic experience, top 5, can you describe the moment, walking out on that platform and being able to achieve this goal?" (Values-frames: Prestige, Experience, Emotion)

> David Liti: "Nerve-wracking. Um, there's been a lot of hard work that went into this, and I was just nervous I wasn't going to show it"(Values-frames: Effort, Performance, Expectation) (Sky New Zealand, 2021).

The frame analysis angle to this identification process demanded a recognition of the language used to describe that which was preferable or significant, capturing moments where values were implicit to the communication as well as explicit. The frames were recorded relative to the speaker who contributed them, and in the sequential order in which they were communicated within each of the interviews analysed. This is an essential part of the data collection process, ensuring context is maintained coherent to the chronology of the interview transcriptions.

Coding

The values-frames were then re-read, considering the context and subject of value within the frames, towards identification as values-frame codes. This was an inductive, reflexive process, with codes created and revised to best distinguish and interpret the communication of that which was of value within the frames (Williams & Moser, 2019). During this process, it was recognised that values-frames could communicate more than one sentiment of value within as single frame, depending on the context of the communication (as in the example above). It was therefore essential to continue to refer the frame excerpts to the context and moment of exchange within which it took place, in order to best describe and capture the values interred.

Contribution Coding

At the conclusion of coding the values-frames for the values interpreted, a second layer of coding was applied to the values-frames identified, capturing the communication of values in context by the respective speakers (J= journalist, A= athlete) within the interaction as initiated (I= inserted), maintained by subsequent (N= neutral), or if the value appeared as a response, either prompted or in opposition (R= reactive).

At the conclusion of values-frames identification, 526 frames conferring values were identified, with coding interpreting 86 distinct values communicated within the frames. These values-frames were collated in order of frequency by code, revealing an upper quartile concentration of 71.01% of the values-frames collected. Given the scale for the data, and the significance of the upper quartile concentration, Patton's (1990) framework for purposive selection was again invoked (see p.72), selecting only the upper-quartile values as the focus of the subsequent analysis.

Understanding Values-Frames in Context: Frame Groups

Following the coding process, the values-frames assembled were considered for similarity, collecting like values-frames into groups, identifying repetition of values communicated and the specific contexts in which they were invoked. In doing so, two layers of contextual reference were applied: frame group, and context. Here, context recorded a brief description of the topic of conversation in which the values-frames were applied (e.g. competing at the Olympic Games), with the 'frame-group' definition denoting the specific significance of the topic to the conversation where the values-frames were interpreted (e.g. 'Magnitude'). These categorizations thus served the research objectives, operating as a grouping mechanism to aid understanding of the use and salience of specific values-frames, as well as serving as an interpretive mechanism, revealing why and how the values-frames were communicated, with contribution coding denoting the 'who'.

By interpreting and organising the values-frames data in this way, the repetition (or salience) of each of the values-frames identified could be recorded, accounting for the context in which they were communicated, whether or not they were reinforced and shared by both parties, or if they could be determined as a novel values contribution.

Values-Frames Analysis: Mediatized Value-Frames

The descriptions for the context, frame group and values-frame codes for the upper-quartile values - frames are expanded upon in the discussion, alongside supporting examples for how the values-frames were communicated, and the significance of the meanings they reveal as of value to the interacting parties within the mediatized communication. Thus, as with other qualitative approaches, the research design relies on consistent coding and direct examples from the data to support the research findings (Williams & Moser, 2019). The discussion considers the elements of the interview contributed by the contextual description, and the subsequent salience of certain values-frames communicated, interpreting them in terms of the media and societal processes that contribute to their inclusion in the conversation, particularly where value-frames appear repeatedly across the interviews. These examples were considered for what they might intuit about the social roles adopted by each party within the interaction, and the informing processes of the media format and subsequently, the expectation of the media audience. This enabled a broader discussion of the socio-cultural conditioning for both parties that served to prioritise certain values in the mediatized interactions, alongside the media processes shaping the interaction. Finally, and particularly considering the frequency of repeated values across the interviews, the acknowledgement of rare novel frames offered a discussion of the socio-cultural and media conditions that had to be overcome for them to be communicated, the contextual circumstances that shaped their inclusion, and how they were communicated and received.

Overall, the frame analysis approach to this stage of the research captured the interactional communication within the mediatized context of the interviews, which combined with values and mediatization theory and the above qualitative research techniques, proffered robust findings and a theoretically informed discussion as to the communication of values by both athletes and journalists in post-competition interviews at the Olympic Games.

Research Stage Three: Thematic Analysis

While not theoretically informed to the extents of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis and Frame Analysis, Thematic analysis is a widely established branch of qualitative methodology across the social sciences, with distinctions drawn around refinements to the approach (Morgan, 2022). This

stage follows the guidance of Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to TA, which Braun and Clarke (2020) later refer to as "reflexive thematic analysis" (p.39), with themes interpreted from codes, "conceptualised as patterns of shared meaning underpinned by a central organising concept" (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p.39). What makes this approach distinctive, is that the development and organization of themes from the coded data is an iterative and adaptable process in which the researcher is intimately involved. Rather than consigning the initiated codes to their operational definitions, reflexive thematic analysis acknowledges the analytical significance of the researcher in the interpretation of content and coding, enabling an approach in which corrections, adjustments and re-forming of codes and their meanings is encouraged as an integral part of the establishment of thematic meanings. Braun and Clarke (2020) state that the approach foregrounds the role and knowledge of the researcher in the process of coding and subsequent development of themes, stating:

"Themes cannot exist separately from the researcher—they are generated by the researcher through data engagement mediated by all that they bring to this process (e.g. their research values, skills, experience and training). The coding process is unstructured and organic, with the potential for codes to evolve to capture the researcher's deepening understanding of the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p.39).

This statement is illustrative of the significance of the researcher to the research project, a feature of the method that made it suitable for the third stage of this analysis, as the culmination of my own exposure as a researcher to the events, context, discourses and commentaries that surround the media texts selected for analysis (Athlete Facebook posts and audience comments).

Furthermore, Braun and Clake (2022) are firm on their understanding of the results of reflexive thematic analysis describing the themes identified as representing informed meaning-making on behalf of the researcher, and not an exercise in truth-seeking, stating: "We view analysis as a process of meaning-making rather than truth-seeking or discovery. This means subjectivity is a strength, rather than a weakness or a source of 'bias'" (p.55). This is an important distinction of the method, which relies on researcher engagement with and interpretation of the data to present and corroborate the findings, and less so the employ of (quantitative) metrics, although these can supplement findings. In this way, reflexive TA affords a flexibility through which informing theories can be applied to reconciling interpretations of the data, and in support of the determination of themes. For Braun and Clark (2020, 2022), the inductive, reflexive approach to TA is very much strengthened by the researcher's engagement with the data, as that which is done freely with less predetermination than a strictly deductive method, while acknowledging the subjectivity inherent to the role.

Thematic analysis is a widely adopted method across media and sport studies, so much in fact that reliance on it has led some scholars to call for greater methodological diversity (Cummins and Hahn, 2024; Hutchins, 2014). Rather than dispute the point, perhaps what such critiques reveal is that which Braun and Clark (2020, 2022) have attested; that the flexibility of the method and ability for researchers to integrate their approach with additional informing theories, make it a highly versatile and popular choice. Recent example of thematic analysis in media sports studied including Newman, Mahmood and Rumbold (2025)'s analysis via a pragmatist approach, differentiating between bullying and banter in print and broadcast media coverage of sport; and Shah and Williams (2025) analysis, supported by Social Learning Theory, which used thematic analysis to identify themes in viewer connections to Formula 1 racing as enhanced or supplemented through watching the Netflix series' *Drive to Survive*. These studies reveal the diversity of the method, both in application to subject matter, and in combination with theory.

While Braun and Clark (2022) and Morgan (2018) advocate for the reflexive, interpretative features of thematic analysis as a strength, the method has also faced critique over consistency of method and replicability of outcomes (Morgan, 2022; Yanto, 2023). Morgan (2022) argues that some of this contention is born out of confusion over which research method has been applied, citing published studies that poorly describe the research approach. Braun and Clark (2018) contend that "articulating universal quality standards and criteria for TA is challenging" (p.2), and corroborate Morgan's (2022) idea of a method mismatch in advocating for reflexive thematic analysis as strictly a qualitative undertaking, in which the interpretive nature of methods is acknowledged as just that, and not an attempt to objectify truths. Furthermore, Braun and Clark (2018) conceptualise this confusion in the application of TA as partly due to an overlap of quantitative tools into an otherwise qualitative method. To distinguish between such studies and the corresponding fitness of thematic analysis as method, Braun and Clark (2018) draw on Kidder and Fine's (1987) demarcations of small q qualitative and big Q qualitative approaches, where small q qualitative apply quantitative approaches to understanding qualitative data, while big Q qualitative foregrounds the significance of the researcher in interpretating the data, and deriving meanings from it. These big Q approaches, Braun and Clark (2018) attest best describe the reflexive TA, viewing the role of the researcher as a strength to be embraced, and not a limitation. This aligns with Morgan's (2022) commentary on coding and the scientific method, exhibiting how significantly the deductive and inductive approaches to coding impact the research approach. Importantly, both small q and big Q qualitative approaches offer valid methods of enquiry, used widely across the social sciences as dynamic approaches to understanding qualitative datasets (Braun & Clark, 2022). While both have their merits, the inductive, big Q qualitative approach is that which is applied in this research

Furthermore, Morgan (2022) also pushes back on claims that qualitative research is purely subjective, pointing to the need for researchers to document their findings with direct evidence from the data. This is a core element of the final stage of Braun and Clark's (2006) six-step approach to TA, where the themes are synthesised into a cohesive narrative, alongside examples from the supporting data. Morgan (2022) acknowledges that some researchers have sought to bolster the evidence of their claims by counting the frequency of codes, offering a quantitative metric for the inductively developed codes. This inclusion is a matter of debate among scholars, with Joffe and Yardley (2004) cautioning that doing so may risk overstating the importance of code frequency, with the potential that codes may be interpreted out of context. These are valid concerns, especially when paired with deductive approaches to coding in which codes are predetermined. However, I have opted to present frequency counts for codes identified as contributing to themes in the audience comments analysis in Table 3 (p.151). This was due to the vast amount of data analysed (number of comments) in a relatively concise media format (audience comments), by which seven themes were distinguished and an additional group of outliers. Rather than ratify any particular theme over another, the frequency data simply serves to represent the theme in terms of the values associated with it, supporting the coalescing of values around particular themes at a glance, and revealing coding distinctions that saw some values excluded from themes as outliers. Given the codes are underscored by values theory, and thus representing a value and not simply a thematic signifier, this was deemed appropriate, supported by the limited format of the medium in which communications are notably brief. However, given the athlete post formats were longer and the number of texts analysed controlled by the research design (two per athlete), and that no outlying values were interpreted in the content, presenting value-code frequency within the themes was deemed unnecessary. In this way, this stage of the research demonstrates the diversity of the reflexive TA method, affording dynamic nuance in the interpretation of data, while maintaining the consistency necessary for cohesive research design and robust analysis.

Finally, Morgan (2022) also points to key differences in approaches to coding that differentiate researcher's implementations of TA and the development of themes. Here, Morgan (2022) identifies coder reliability approaches as satisfying a quantitative need to provide evidence in support of theme development. In such approaches, a codebook is typically used to deductively identify a selection of features of hypothesised themes, enabling multiple coders to process texts, with consistent and corroborating results (Bingham, 2023; Morgan, 2022). While this approach can be seen to lean into the scientific method, it requires the researcher to adopt a predetermined perspective of the themes they seek to understand in the data. Unlike these deductive coder reliability models, Braun and Clark (2020) refer to coding for the development of themes in reflexive TA as "unstructured and organic",

enabling the researcher to identify features of meaningful themes through exposure to the data. However, that is not to say their approach without process. Rather, Braun and Clark (2006) set out a six-step process for the undertaking of reflexive thematic analysis as method, a framework they have maintained over time, with successive academic commentary supporting, elaborating and justifying elements of the process, rather than restructure them (Braun & Clark, 2018, 2022). Braun and Clark (2022) remain advocates for the interpretative nature of reflexive thematic analysis in the face of critique from supporters of quantitative measures for theme development, emphasising the strengths of the process as born from the researcher's knowledge and immersive engagement with the data. With that in mind, the following section outlines Braun and Clark (2006, 2022) six-step framework for reflexive thematic analysis, noting the requirements of the method at each step, and their implications for use in this stage of the thesis.

Data Familiarization: "A Process of Immersion" (Braun & Clark, 2022, p.34).

Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022) advocate for an intimate understanding of the sample for analysis, prior to the identification of codes and development of themes. This serves to ground the researcher in the context of the content for analysis, affording an initial exposure to potential codes and themes. This stage of the process involved a thorough reading of each of the media texts, and for this research, integrated a refinement of the sample for analysis, settling on the two post per athlete approach (pre and post competition) as well as ensuring the athletes selected offered the require Facebook presence. Athletes such as controversial weightlifter Laurel Hubbard, were excluded from the sample as they did not post on Facebook during the Games period, their accounts weren't public, or they employed managers to undertake their social media engagement on their behalf. Similarly, it was identified that many of the audience comments featured emojis, sometimes exclusively, while others were brief messages only such as 'well done', or 'congrats'. Given the scale of the data (over 8500 comments collectively) and the research objective to identify interpretable values statements, it was decided that only comments of three clauses or more would be included in the analysis. While there were occasional comments that did not meet this minimum that may yet have offered insight into the analysis, the close reading of the sample at this stage was sufficient to determine that the sentiments expressed did not impact upon the potential themes identified, with notes made for reflexive checking later once the themes had been confirmed and defined. This is a strength of the reflexive thematic approach, which Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022) state strengthens the results, holding in mind potential contradictions ensuring outliers are identified and themes remain coherent and true to the data.

Reflexive coding: "Organic, Evolving and Subjective" (Braun & Clark, 2022, p.53).

Braun and Clark (2006, 2022) describe coding as a systematic process, involving close reading and interpretation of the data, for the comprehensive and inclusive identification of codes, signalling meanings relevant to the research objective. For this research, the data sample for coding was split into four sections - athlete pre-competition posts, athlete post-competition posts, audience comments on pre-competition posts and audience comments on post-competition posts. Each sample was examined a second time, with codes for values communication identified by the following operational definition:

> Relative notions of the desirable or undesirable, communicated explicitly or implicitly in the media text.

This integration of values theory through the invocation of the operational definition aligns well to Braun and Clark's (2006) method, with values theory defining the context for coding and theme identification relative to the research objective.

At this stage, the process of values identification and coding involved recording examples of values communication and identifying that which was valued within them (e.g. excellence, legacy, achievement). As per Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2022) guidance, codes were developed iteratively and inductively, in this case by a single coder, interpreting the values in the identified communication fragments, informed by wider exposure to the sample and the context in which the media content was constructed. Given Braun and Clark's (2006) emphasis on the researcher as playing an informing role in the interpretation and understanding of codes (and subsequently themes), this research approach was well placed as the third of my three investigations into values in Olympic media content, with previous exposure to contemporaneous media content backgrounding and supporting my informed engagement with the texts.

Once each of the respective athlete posts and audience comment samples were coded, a cross-analysis of codes between the sample contributed to the refinement of codes, grouping together like-values communications, in some cases uniting multiple codes under a single, broader code, and in other cases diverging into new codes. This ensured consistent interpretation across the texts, and provided the structure from which to begin to interpret patterns towards determining meaningful themes. This process of iteratively identifying codes, then returning, comparing and refining codes across the sample is a feature of Braun and Clark's (2006, 2022) reflexive approach to thematic analysis, in which they encourage ongoing interpretation and introspection by the researcher towards

cohesive understanding of themes interpreted in the data, and their meanings in response to the research objectives.

Searching for Themes: "Exploring Shared Meaning" (Braun & Clark, 2022, p.77).

At the conclusion of the coding process, the codes and their recorded values fragments were examined again for the identification of themes. This stage, according to Braun and Clark (2006), involves an interpretive process of sorting codes into meaningful patterns indicative of a theme. Here, the researcher draws on their earlier familiarization with the data, refined through the process of coding in the previous step, informing their analytical understanding of the relationship between codes, to develop an interpretation of their cohesive thematic meanings.

For this research, I maintained the distinction between the two types of media format - athlete posts and audience comments- and their respective pre and post competition occurrences as categories shaping the analysis of potential themes. This allowed the coded data to be considered in terms of how and when the values identified were communicated. However, as it transpired, the themes developed from the data could be broadly applied to both the pre and post competition samples, with meaningful differences acknowledged between the 'athlete' and 'audience' distinctions of the contributors and their respective media formats. This is a demonstration of the flexibility the reflexive approach to thematic analysis affords the researcher, where meanings in context can be considered in the full scope of their interpretation, in this case respective of differing communicating groups and formats.

Reviewing Themes: "Developing a Richness of your Themes" (Braun & Clark, 2022, p.97).

Braun and Clark (2006, 2022) advocate that all potential themes are reviewed across the sample, to ensure the relevance and consistency of their interpretation respective to the research questions, and to ensure coherence between themes as they are defined by the researcher. Braun and Clark (2006) are clear that themes do not emerge from the data, but rather are produced by the researcher as a descriptive process responding to the patterns identified and defined through their interpretation of the data. As noted in the previous step, for this research this required considering the themes identified per post type and contributor, and acknowledging and organising consistencies and deviations in the coded patterns between the them. This resulted in the values (codes) presented in Tables 2. and 3. (pp.149-150), which contribute to the split in descriptive themes per athlete posts and audience comments, in order to better describe and explain the consistencies and differences between the two.

Defining Themes and Writing the Report: "Telling your Story Well" (Braun & Clark, 2022, p.149).

This stage of the process refers to the coalescing of meaning attributed to each theme into a theme title, that captures its essence and relationship to the research objective. Braun and Clark (2006, 2022) explain that the names given to themes ought to be concise and clear, avoiding overly technical language that might shroud their meaning. Braun and Clark (2006, 2022) describe the iterative process of identifying, naming and explaining themes as an intimate, creative one on the part of the researcher, grounded in their interpretation of meaning in the sample, with the final stage of the analysis - writing the report- uniting the themes in a cohesive narrative responding to the research question. This report should feature detailed description of the themes, examples of their identification in the sample, and links to supporting literature. The aim of the final report is to ground the themes both in the data through which they were interpreted, the wider context of the research objective and the academic field to which it contributes.

Conclusion

Broadly, the theoretical contentions explored in Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, Frame Analysis and Thematic Analysis, are all compatible with the inductive, qualitative approach befitting of the overall objectives of this thesis. Furthermore, given the contentions of mediatization theory, and the inductive application of values theory bridging across the three chapters, these approaches were considered suitable lenses through which to observe the workings of society in the mutually influencing media-society relationship (Frandsen, 2020; Krotz, 2017; Jensen, 2013). Given that each stage of this analysis engages with a different type of media content, the media side of the mediatized relationship is inherent to the samples being analysed - a media construct beholden to media processes, comprising the communication of values in Olympic media content (Billings, 2010; Fowler, 1991; Frandsen, 2020). Upholding a perspective of society in the relationship, Foucauldian Discourse Analysis offered the foregrounding of societal power within Olympic communications, affecting what is written about the Olympics and by whom, matched effectively to press releases and online news articles; Frame Analysis provided a framework for situating the individuals performing the interactions that comprise broadcast interviews between athletes and journalists, as those participating in a social exchange in real time under mediatized conditions; and Thematic Analysis enabled a comparative analysis of the values foregrounded by athletes on social media, and responded to (and with) by their audience across two varied formats. Collectively, the matching of these theoretical contentions to the media content, sharpened the focus on society within the media samples, affording consideration of the mediatized communications from different angles and proffering varied insights into the threads of influence between the two. The combination of these approaches across the three research stages, enabled the thesis to capture a diverse sample, and to interpret those samples both individually by

relevant, customized approaches, and compatibly as a broader representation of Games media coverage.

Finally, owing to the concise parameters afforded to the explanation of theory and method within the following journal articles formats, this chapter has provided additional theoretical grounding and method justification for the selected methodologies and methods applied within the thesis. While the above tenets of the applied methodologies and method are touched upon in the respective articles, the elaborated discussion of theory offered in this chapter as applied to the specific articles and their research designs, may continue to serve as a useful companion to the following articles.

Introduction to Chapter Four: Research Stage One

The following chapter presents the research and findings referred to in the introductory chapter as stage one of the thesis, in the form of a research article titled: *Excellence, Respect and Friendship? Elucidating Olympic Values in Mediatized Discourse Amid the Throes of the COVID-19 Pandemic.* This article is prepared for consideration by *Journal of Olympic Studies*.

In broad terms of this thesis, this paper marks the beginning of the process of identifying the values communicated by press contributors to New Zealand media coverage of the Tokyo Olympic Games, and interpreting their relationship to media and societal processes. Accordingly, this chapter pertains to an analysis of online press releases from contextually applicable institutional Olympic informants - the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the New Zealand Olympic Committee (NZOC) (a total of 173 press releases combined)- alongside prominent online news sources *The New Zealand Herald* and *Radio New Zealand* (a total of 511 articles combined).

The decision to select these two particular types of media sources to comprise the discourse for analysis was two-fold. Firstly, the inclusion of the IOC and NZOC acknowledges that both organizations proclaim to abide by a clear values-mandate (Olympism), which they uphold within an institutional purview that includes influence over media coverage of the Games (Billings, et al., 2018a; International Olympic Committee, 2021c). It is thus rational to speculate that media communications from these sources would invoke the charted Olympic values, and disseminate them to the New Zealand media environment. With this in mind, and considering that press releases are key sources for newswriters; the selection of the stated New Zealand digital news media sources, affords the opportunity to interpret values continuity between the two as suggestive of institutional influence (Sherwood & Nicholson, 2017). By considering these power dynamics in making these media selections, the global influence of the Olympic movement is acknowledged, with the New Zealand media environment also regarded as its own contextual case. To this end, the analysis remained strictly inductive, allowing for divergence, assimilation or variable application of values as may present in the New Zealand media texts.

This paper also demonstrates the application of the first of three research methods applied in the thesis towards interpreting and understanding values in media content. Adapting a guideline by Markula and Silk (2011), Foucauldian discourse analysis was applied as the research method, affording the opportunity to align Foucault's (1972; 1978) conception of discourse as replete with embedded social knowledges, as compatible with theorizations on values as moral languages (Williams Jnr, 1979). Furthermore, in light of the inherent power relations interred between the selected media sources, the method and subsequent discussion embraces Foucault's (2020a) ideas on relational power in society, as applicable to interpretations of the mediatized processes informing

values communication. These methodological and theoretical integrations are a distinction of this chapter, integrating valuable insights into the thesis proper.

Chapter Four: Excellence, Respect and Friendship? Elucidating Olympic Values in Mediatized Discourse Amid the Throes of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Abstract

The Olympic Games are a bastion of sporting values within a global media mega-event. However, Games priorities of *Olympism* and associated values have come under scrutiny for their lack of application to real world issues (Boykoff, 2014; Loland, 2017). Staged amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the Tokyo 2020/21 Games offer a pertinent context for examining values communicated in Olympic media discourse, particularly in New Zealand, a nation renowned for its world-leading COVID-19 response (Beattie & Priestley, 2021; Theunissen & Wolf, 2023). Using Foucauldian discourse analysis sensitized by mediatization theory; this study revealed a robust values system attuned to the Games, proffering a celebration of excellence that effectively insulated the event from ethical concerns. The discussion highlights the confluence of Olympic structures, media processes, and athlete contributions as influences on values communication, and questions the scope for divergence from the values order exhibited in the discourse.

Keywords*: Values, Olympic Games, Olympism, COVID-19, New Zealand, Mediatization*

Introduction

Established in 1894, the modern Olympics were fashioned as a celebration of athletic virility, sportsmanship and excellence, and a response to concerns for social and moral cohesion in Western European countries (Brown, 2012; Scambler, 2005). More than a century later, the Olympics retain a values doctrine indicative of ongoing attempts to inform social behaviour and practice, stating "excellence, respect and friendship" as core values within the philosophical framework of Olympism (International Olympic Committee, n.d.a, p.1). However, with the Games now an international sporting behemoth, the Olympic movement has attracted criticism for its lack of priority to ideals of Olympism and its stated values, citing commercialism, mediatization and globalization as factors contributing to a degeneration in the authenticity of Games values (Boykoff, 2014; Maguire, Barnard, Butler & Golding, 2008; Rahman & Lockwood, 2011).

Furthermore, in 2020 the global COVID-19 pandemic posed an unprecedented challenge to the ethical leadership of the Olympic movement. That the Games would ultimately go ahead in 2021, despite an ongoing health crisis in the host city, Tokyo; presents a significant historical moment within which to examine the values communicated in institutional and news media discourse surrounding the Games, and the relative dissemination of these values as foregrounded amid ethically questionable circumstances (Shimokubo, 2023; Yoneoka, Eguchi, Fukumoto, Kawashima, Tanoue, Tabuchi, Miyata, Ghaznavi, Shibuya & Nomura, 2022). Given the immense global scale of the Games, New Zealand - a proud sporting nation and COVID-19 response leader- was selected as the socio-cultural context

within which to examine values communicated in the Games discourse (International Olympic Committee, 2021d). By combining Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) with mediatization theory as a sensitizing lens; this study considers the intersections of media and societal influences towards the determination, construction and dissemination of the values communicated, and the power structures inherent to Games production and mediation (Frandsen, 2020).

Literature Review

An idealised revival of the ancient Greek games, imbibed with the sporting values of aristocratic British boarding schools including Christian masculinity, sportsmanship, and amateurism; the Olympic movement was established in 1894 with the governing body, *The International Olympic Committee* (IOC), acting as custodians of both the Games and it's associated values of Olympism (International Olympic Committee, n.d.a; Koulouri, 2006; Scambler, 2005). Today, Olympism remains a cornerstone of the IOC's Olympic Charter wherein 'excellence, respect and friendship' are heralded as the values of the movement, within a wider framework celebrating global peace and solidarity (International Olympic Committee, 2021c).

Despite the intentions of Olympism, the ways in which Olympic sport arguably transgresses upon its purported values have been extensively catalogued, underscoring contentions regarding sporting mega-events as embodiments of symbolic goods (Boykoff, 2014; Maguire et al., 2008). At a procedural level, Sesa, Borry, Loland & Camporesi (2024) illustrate that the ethics over health and safety of athletes have been compromised at the Games, particularly surrounding water quality in aquatic events (Beijing 2008 and Rio 2016), where competition went ahead despite potential for health risks, disrespecting athlete wellbeing. On a macro level, Milton-Smith (2002) reflects that the Games alignment with perceived values of globalization resulted in associations contrary to their promotion of moral development, including: "winning at any price, commercial exploitation by MNC's, intense national rivalry, cronyism, cheating and corruption" (p.131). These tensions suggest that values adopted by the Olympic movement are not necessarily consistent with those experienced or interpreted in the Games. Yet, it is unclear the extent to which such critiques are foregrounded by media in relevant discourse during Games time. By inductively investigating values in Games media coverage, this study offers the scope to capture the degree to which such concerns or critiques may emerge in the discourse, and by whom they are raised.

COVID-19 and Tokyo 2020/21

The Tokyo 2020 Games offer a particularly pertinent context in which to examine the communication of values in Olympic media discourse, with the COVID-19 pandemic presenting an unprecedented question for the Olympic movement - whether to host the Games amid an ongoing global health crisis. The initial postponement of the Tokyo 2020 Games to 2021 testifies to the severity of the situation, yet come 2021 there remained serious concerns (Siddiqui, Alhamdi & Alghamdi, 2022; Yoneoka et, al.

2022). The city of Tokyo was officially under a state of emergency when the IOC and organizing committee greenlit the Games to go ahead, raising questions over the health and safety of those involved, and the host population at large (Shimokubo, 2023; Yoneoka, et al., 2022). Shimokubo (2023) reports that opinion polls of Tokyo residents taken in July 2021 indicated 30% thought the Games should be cancelled, with a further 63% unconvinced by official explanations as to the necessity of hosting the Games during a national state of emergency. That a spectator-free Games (entirely reliant on media coverage), heavy with restrictions on access, mask-wearing and hygiene measures would still go ahead; situates the Tokyo Games as a significant event within which to investigate values communication (Radio New Zealand, 2021a; Yoneoka et, al. 2022). This study does not seek to weigh the ethics of hosting the Games, but rather to understand the values communicated within the Games and disseminated through national media discourse, as premised by global health concerns muddying the staging of the Games.

New Zealand

To investigate the communication of values in media discourse surrounding the Olympics, it is important to engage with the cultural context in which the discourse resides, relative both to the Games and the pandemic (Cheng & Fleischmann, 2010; Foucault, 1972). In 2021, New Zealand was ranked no.1 in the world for its COVID-19 response, owing to a strict elimination strategy that included the cessation of international travel and periodically enforced lockdowns (Theunissen & Wolf, 2023). The response operated on a four-tier alert-level system, with level one enabling most domestic freedoms, while level four instituted nationwide lockdown (Rajan, 2022). The alert levels were adjusted based on the rate of new cases of COVID-19 and the extent to which they could be contained, either regionally or nationally, with daily press conferences communicating cases and responses coalescing the public response and fostering national unity (Beattie & Priestley, 2021; Jamieson, 2020). At the time of the Tokyo 2021 Games, New Zealander's enjoyed freedoms at Alert level 1 uncommon around the world, although a recently instated free-travel bubble with Australia was paused due to increased transmission in Australia and detections at the border (New Zealand Royal Commission, 2024). Shortly after the Games, on August 17th the country's largest city, Auckland, was placed on alert level 4, following a positive test unrelated to the border (New Zealand Royal Commission, 2024). This overview offers a brief illustration of the COVID-19 social context in New Zealand in 2021, in which awareness of the pandemic and its impact on national health and civic freedoms was high, and the societal response largely cooperative with government mandates (Beattie & Priestley, 2021; Rajan, 2022).

Although most New Zealanders in 2021 did not have the freedoms of travel and early access to vaccines afforded to their Olympic team, it is unclear the degree to which this privilege was contested in public discourse (New Zealand Olympic Committee, n.d.). Rather, to encourage support for the

pandemic response, Theunissen and Wolf (2023) note that the New Zealand government invoked a rhetoric of collective identity, including references to the 'Team of Five Million', reliant on notions of community, solidarity, and shared national identity (Hafner & Sun, 2021). Additionally, the response motto 'Go Hard, Go Early' evoked a collective sense of effort, galvanising New Zealanders to take a proactive position in the national defence against the virus, wherein everyone could play their part (Rajan, 2022; Theunissen & Wolf, 2023). Interestingly, these notions of national solidarity and collective effort are also existing tenets in scholarship regarding sport in New Zealand society and thus present an intriguing parallel in the context of the Tokyo 2021 Olympic Games (Bruce, Falcous & Thorpe, 2007; Kohe & Warren, 2019).

New Zealand is noted as exalting sport in society (Bruce, et al., 2007; Kohe & Warren, 2019). Kohe and Warren (2019) reveal insights into the national psyche regarding the nation's sporting history, testifying to the potency of sport and the Olympics as a staging of national pride:

> Sport defines New Zealand on the world stage…Sportsmen and women place higher expectations of themselves in New Zealand because of the importance New Zealand society places on sport (p.1239).

Here, Kohe and Warren (2019) describe sport as an important mechanism for showcasing the nation internationally, embodying values representative of the country and its people. Importantly, Bruce et al. (2007) testify to the significance of media sport in New Zealand society stating:

> The processes through which media sport influences our ideas about the world may be more powerful here than in many other nations because of the importance that New Zealanders place on sport (p.164).

Furthermore, Kohe and Warren (2019) also describe that New Zealand Olympian's are perceived as leaders in society, invoking a sense of social responsibility:

> The value of role models, fair play, and effort are important and is what the Olympic movement tries to teach. There is an obligation to do more than just be the sportsperson as there is an education aspect (p.1243).

These scholars collectively testify to the significance of Olympic athletes in New Zealand society as embodiments of values on the mediated Olympic stage. Further, it is pertinent to note that scholars of sporting mega-events have identified the Olympics as a significant platform for the foregrounding of nationalism and expressions of national identity before an international audience (MacArthur & Reichart Smith, 2021; Licen et al., 2022a). Given these understandings and the established context for sport in New Zealand society; the selected New Zealand media coverage of the Games can be expected to reflect not just international Games values, but also culturally contextual values associations with the Games in the nation. By analysing IOC and NZOC press releases alongside national news content, this study captures institutional Games values messaging during Tokyo 2020/21, and their dissemination or divergence in the New Zealand socio-cultural setting.

The Olympic Games: Media and Mediatization

The Olympics are reliant on media outlets for distribution and prominence in a competitive global sporting market (Horne & Whannel, 2020; Fernández Peña, 2024). This dynamic typifies the interconnected relationship between media and sport described in sports media scholarship, coined by Wenner (1998) as MediaSport, and referred to by Nicholson, Kerr and Sherwood (2015) as the 'sport media nexus'. Furthermore, Rowe (2003) widely appropriates the significance of sport via media in society, describing it as "an omnipresent part of our lives whether we like it or not" (p.2). Similarly, Bruce, et al., (2007) specifically refer to the powerful combination of media and sport as a vehicle for values communication stating: "MediaSport is not an innocent player in society - the ideologies, attitudes and values that are present in MediaSport production powerfully shape our understandings of ourselves and of others" (p.164).

The inextricable connection between sport and media has been conceptualized by scholars in terms of mediatization theory (Frandsen, 2020; Tomlinson, 2017). Frandsen (2020) describes the aims of mediatization as a concept and analytical framework towards understanding: "the mutual interrelations between changes in media on one hand, and changes in sport on the other" (p.16). As such, the Games and meanings embedded in them via media, can be seen as shaped by various societal and media processes (referred to by Altheide & Snow (1979) as media logics) that ultimately condition the construction of media production and content (Frandsen, 2020; Hjarvard, 2013; Tomlinson, 2017). By applying mediatization as a 'sensitizing lens', this research adopts a theoretical framework for analysing values in media discourse covering the Olympics as indicative of formative media and societal influences, impacting their media construction (Billings & Wenner, 2017; Frandsen, 2020; Tomlinson, 2017).

Methodology

Seminal values researcher Milton Rokeach (1973, 1979) is credited with bringing together transdisciplinary conceptualizations of values, which he referred to as 'human values', and defined accordingly:

> An enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence (Rokeach, 1973, p.5).

While Rokeach (1873, 1979) famously conducted values research through a survey approach, latter scholars have been critical of survey designs due to the need for subjective imposition of values orders, and lack of socio-cultural context afforded to understanding what the selected values represent (Cheng & Fleischmann, 2010; Lee, Whitehead & Balchin, 2000). Alternatively, Cheng and Fleischmann (2010) advocate for an inductive, content analysis approach, thereby retaining the socio-cultural context in which the values operate. These suggestions are upheld in the selection of

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis as the methodology for this research, towards analysing values as they are communicated and understood in time and place.

Theoretical Foundations

In his approach to discourse, Michel Foucault (1972; 1978) conceives of discursive practice as extending beyond language to inhabit a deeper level of knowledge and understanding, central to the function of discourse in society. As Markula and Silk (2011) state: "In a Foucauldian sense, discourses are ways of knowing and everyone using language participates in the circulation and creation of these knowledges" (p.130). Discourse as defined by FDA, is communication issued and structured through language, conveying both a literal understanding and a deeper introspection on the society, customs and values relevant to the content, and the world in which it takes place (Bastalich, 2009; Khan & MacEachen, 2021). This understanding of discourse as applied to this analysis of values in the media texts conceptualizes values as social knowledges, intuiting the desirable and preferable as conditioned by the relevant society (including media) (Lee, et.al., 2000; Rokeach-Ball & Loges, 1996).

Foucault's conceptions of power in discourse also endear FDA to this research. Foucault (2005) assigns values in society to the cultural domain, a space where power can be exercised through relational interactions, with culture denoting: "A hierarchical organization of values, accessible to everybody, but at the same time the occasion of a mechanism of selection and exclusion" (p.173). Values as expressions of social knowledges are thus also a vehicle for social power transmission, effected or reinforced through relational power exchanges (Foucault, 1982; Markula & Pringle, 2006; McHoul & Grace, 1993). This approach therefore affords an awareness of the power relations invested in the Games and their coverage in the media, towards understanding the communication of values as it appears in the media texts from both institutional (IOC, NZOC) and media sources. Furthermore, by invoking mediatization theory, the workings of both society and media in contribution to the observed values communication may also be interpreted (Krotz, 2009; Lundby, 2014; McHoul & Grace, 1993).

Finally, Foucault (1972) advocated a contextual and historical understanding of knowledges in discourse and their links to power relations, describing a genealogical process where objects of discourse are excavated and examined over time (Bastalich, 2009; Schirato & Danaher, 2020). Foucault (1972)'s concept of archaeology conceptualized the location of objects of discourse as that which is brought forward by the knowledges that confer to define it in the discourse. From there, Foucault (1972, 1978) refined his genealogical approach as an analytical process seeking to understand the power relations and influences that serve to define the knowledges surrounding the object (Bastalich, 2009; McHoul & Grace, 1993). In doing so, the knowledges as they are communicated can be understood in connection to the socio-contextual power dynamics that inform them over time (Markula & Silk, 2011, Foucault, 2020b). Aligning with these elements of Foucauldian theory, the

object of this research is the Olympic Games, with values conceptualized as knowledges that confer meanings and social understandings of the Games, supported by values theory (Rokeach, 1979; Williams Jnr, 1979). While this research is interested in a concise temporal setting - the Tokyo 2020/21 Olympic Games- and thus not a far-reaching genealogical excavation, Markula and Silk (2011) state that "the principles of Foucault's work…to analyse smaller samples of text"(p.130). Accordingly, this research understands the values communicated in media coverage of the Tokyo 2020/21 Games as both relating to a singular historical moment, and as a product of societal understandings of the Olympic Games in society over time.

To apply these elements of Foucauldian theory, Markula and Silk's (2011) approach to Foucauldian discourse analysis were adopted in the following research design, with the final theoretical discussion incorporating a focus on the interconnections of media and society as influences underpinning the media sample, as proffered by mediatization theory (Frandsen, 2020; Krotz, 2009).

Research Design

The research design was determined in line with the following objectives:

- Identify and understand the values communicated in the media discourse within the socio-cultural context of New Zealand.
- Analyse and compare the communication of values in the discourse towards understanding the dissemination and/or divergence of values from institutional Olympic powers (IOC), through to domestic arbiters of the Olympic movement (NZOC) and New Zealand news media.

Markula and Silk (2011) explain their FDA framework as a sequential process involving: the identification of objects or topics of interest, determining the enunciations in which they reside, followed by a textual analysis considering how objects are talked about (concepts) and commonalities and differences between statements (individualizable groups of statements), before finally, interpreting informed theories and links to power.

Defining Enunciations: Media Sources

Press releases and online news articles were selected as key outlets for the dissemination of Olympic values through New Zealand media. Press releases produced by the IOC and NZOC, serve to promote or respond to events and issues, and are thus embedded with institutional values, intended for reproduction in the news space (Rokeach-Ball, & Loges, 1996; MacNamara, 2012). Conversely, online news articles are produced by journalists reporting on issues and events deemed relevant to the news audience, considered both a reflection and reconstruction of reality (Schudson, 2011; Richardson, 2007).

Press releases can contribute to news stories and are noted as influences on narratives in sports coverage (Sherwood & Nicholson, 2017). The relationship is further complicated by the 24-hour news cycle demanding journalists make efficient content decisions, wherein press releases can become adopted out of convenience (Hargreaves, 2014; Rowe, 2005; Zelizer, 2004). Accordingly, press releases produced by the IOC and NZOC could reveal important insights as to the distribution of institutional Olympic values within the news discourse.

News articles from online outlets *Radio New Zealand* and *The New Zealand Herald* were selected, contributing a significant share of the New Zealand news ecology. *The New Zealand Herald* incorporates a portfolio of several contributing regional newspapers, with a combined print and digital audience of 2.26 million (New Zealand Herald, 2022). Additionally, publicly-funded *Radio New Zealand* is a primary independent, non-commercial media outlet in New Zealand, also broadcasting across the wider pacific region (Radio New Zealand, 2021a). Although foremost a radio station, RNZ online news is a well-established supplementary publication to the station's radio news content, with over 1 million visitors to the website per month in 2021, a significant number in a nation of 5 million people (Radio New Zealand, n.d.). Collectively, these two sources comprise a considerable contribution to the national media ecology in New Zealand, offering a robust representation of the national media discourse for analysis.

Articles for analysis were retrieved and saved from the following websites for analysis:

- IOC website press archive
- NZOC website press archive
- New Zealand Herald online news archive
- Radio New Zealand online new archive

Selecting Enunciations

The Olympics are held over two weeks, with various sports, results and peripheral stories capturing media attention. It was therefore necessary to make an informed selection of enunciations (texts) as representative of Olympic media contributing to the national discourse. To this end, Patton's (1990) criterion for purposeful (purposive) selection proffers: "those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the enquiry" (p.169). This criteria was applied at several levels: the selection of media sources, categorization of articles on contextual grounds (macro-categorization), categorization of articles on subject grounds (micro-categorization), and values selected for discussion following interpretive grouping ('Descriptive Groups').

Data Period

The data period spanned the complete Games schedule, including one week prior and post the Games, to capture the surrounding discourse (16th July 2021 – 15th August 2021). Notably, the texts were accessed for analysis almost two years later (between 7th June and 1st July, 2023).

The articles retrieved and their distribution per publication is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1.

Total texts per publication.

Publication	Total Number of Texts
IOC	12
NZOC	151
RNZ	186
NZH	325
Total Number of Articles: 674	

Notably, the sample was cleaned of multi-media formats that lacked sufficient text, and those supplied by international media outlets. At the conclusion of cleaning, a total of 674 texts (table 1.) were identified for analysis. Each text was analysed to identify the topic, towards grouping the discourse into macro-categories indicative of consistencies in content, establishing the overall contextual grounds for the analysis. The analysis was an inductive process producing nine foundational macro-categories, listed in Table 2.

Table 2.

Macro-categories identified with number of texts.

Macro-Category	Total Number of Texts
COVID-19	51
Athlete/Sport	184
Results	248
Nations	55
Progress, Discussion, Change	50
IOC/Games Programme and Production	35
Values Discussion	2
Article Type (multi-topical audience submissions)	35
Other	14

Texts per macro-category were reassessed and grouped into specified micro-category allocations, indicative of the dominant, specific application of content in each text, offering a closer analysis of the communication and application of values as concepts between the texts. The macro-category COVID-19 is presented as an example in Table 3., with the four corresponding micro-categories identified.

Table 3.

Macro and Micro category examples- COVID19.

Macro-Category:	Micro-Categories:
COVID-19	COVID-19 Pandemic (global)
	COVID-19 in Japan (national)
	Controversy surrounding the Games regarding COVID-19
	COVID-19 at the Games

At the conclusion of the categorization process, seven micro-categories were distilled from five macro-categories and selected for values analysis, displayed in Table 4.

Table 4.

Micro-Categories selected for analysis, including relative macro-categories and volume of articles per publication.

Macro-Category	Micro-Category	Number of Articles				
		IOC	NZOC	RNZ	NZH	Total
COVID-19	Controversy Surrounding the Games re. COVID-19	0	0	2	17	19
IOC/Games Programme and Production	Opening Ceremony	3	2	3	2	10
Results	NZ Medal	0	19	19	37	75
Results	Athlete/Team Negative	0	15	2	13	30
Results	Games Summary	0	1	4	5	11
Progress/Discussion, Change	LGBTQ+	0	1	9	16	26
Values Questioning/Discussion	Olympism/Olympic Values	1	0	0	1	2
Totals:		4	38	57	73	172

The selection of micro-categories was guided by the following criterion, inductively assessed from the results of the macro and micro-category assignments (Patton, 1990):

- A selection that collectively spanned the duration of the discourse.
- Representation of the most prominent contexts of the discourse.
- Inclusion of texts with dedicated or explicit focus on values communication.

Identifying Values

In Foucauldian terms, this research stipulates values as a form of object knowledge, aligning with Markula and Silk's (2011) framework as 'concepts'. Given this is an inductive inquiry interested in a specified concept (values), it is important to define what is considered indicative of a 'value' within the

discourse. The following definition of values was operationalized for this purpose, derived from those of Rokeach (1973) and Williams (1979):

> Presentations or understandings of preferability, including relative designations of the desirable and undesirable, either explicitly or implicitly in the text, including priority, repetitiveness and/or range and variability as designated in the text.

Accordingly, a coding process by a single coder sought excerpts within the texts identified as conferring meanings of 'value', which were recorded for interpretation and analysis alongside their contextual macro and micro categorizations. This was a reflexive process, in which excerpts were collected and grouped by codes and context, with the option to add or adapt codes to best represent the interpretation of value (Bingham, 2023; Williams & Moser, 2019). The final 83 values codes thus represent a linking of concept statements to the general domain of statements (883 values occurrences), as stipulated by Markula and Silk (2011), with the subsequent step considering these values codes respective of their macro and micro category groupings, by organizing ten 'descriptive groups (described in the findings section). The process aligns with Markula and Silk's (2011) step for refining concepts by 'individualizable groups of statements', contextualizing their communication in the discourse for the final stage of analysis, theorizing links to power, which is presented in the discussion section following the findings.

Findings

The analysis identified 85 distinct values, variably repeated in 883 occurrences. Examination of this extensive list of values generated ten descriptive groups, indicative of commonalities between values as communicated within the discourse. These descriptive groups and the number of values expressions identified (/85) are detailed in Table 5., alongside the total number of values identified per group.

Table 5.

Descriptive Groups of Common Values, Number of Distinct Values and Total Values Occurrences.

Descriptive Group	Number of Distinct Values	Total Number of Values Occurrences
Athlete Qualities	36	384
Olympic Excellence and National Applications	5	215
Abstract Values	6	74
Social/Interpersonal Networks	6	69
Media Product/Entertainment/Audience	12	57
Athlete Outcomes	6	30
Elements of Competition	4	26
Safety and Wellness	3	16
Commercialism and Amateurism	4	6
Social Justice	3	6

Total Number of Values Occurrences:	883

Table 5. shows a significant concentration of values in the descriptive groups 'Athlete Qualities' and 'Olympic Excellence and National Applications', which comprised a combined total of 71.9% of the total value occurrences across the discourse (384 (43.5%) and 215 (24.3%), respectively). These proportions are significant, with the next largest group, 'Abstract Values', comprising just 8.4%.

Given the concentration amid the density of the data, these two descriptive groups were selected for analysis. The data reveals that 'Olympic excellence', 'legacy', 'national pride', 'athletic excellence', 'effort', 'consistency', and 'resilience' contributed a significant portion of the total values occurrences across the discourse (67%), as displayed in Table 6. below.

Key for Table 6:

Micro-Category Number	Publication Key
1= Controversy surrounding the Games re. COVID-19	I= IOC
2= Opening Ceremony	N= NZOC
3= Athlete/Team Negative	R= RNZ
4= NZ Medal	H= NZH
5= LGBTQ+	
6= Games Summary	
7= Olympism/Olympic Values	

Table 6.

Values Recorded by Descriptive Category 'Olympic Excellence and National Applications' and 'Athlete Qualities', Including Total Number of Values Recorded, Values as Percentage of Texts per Micro-Category, and Values as Percentage of Texts per Publication.

Rank	Values by descriptive group	Total Number Values/ Articles per Value	Value/Article (%) per Micro-Category (incl. % of micro-category corpus)							Value/Article(%) per Publication (incl. % of publication corpus)			
			1 (11.0)	2 (5.8)	3 (17.4)	4 (43.6)	5 (15.1)	6 (6.4)	7 (1.2)	I (2.3)	N (22.1)	R (33.1)	H (42.4)
	Olympic Excellence and National Applications												
1	Olympic Excellence	83	21.1	50.0	30.0	64.0	42.3	45.5	50.0	**75.0**	**55.3**	**43.7**	**46.6**
3	Legacy	61	5.3	10.0	10	52.0	53.8	36.4	-	-	**36.8**	**42.1**	32.9
4	National Pride	58	26.3	30	23.3	48.0	11.5	11.5	50.0	-	31.6	**28.1**	**41.1**
13=	NZ Māori/Bi-cultural identity.	11	-	20	-	8.0	9.1	18.2	-	-	10.5	7.0	4.1
22=	Tradition	2	-	-	-	-	-	18.2	-	-	-	-	2.7
	Athlete Qualities		1 (11.0)	2 (5.8)	3 (17.4)	4 (43.6)	5 (15.1)	6 (6.4)	7 (1.2)	I (2.3)	N (22.1)	R (33.1)	H (42.4)
2	Athletic Excellence	71	26.3	40.0	56.7	45.3	9.1	81.8	50.0	**50.0**	**82.1**	12.3	**53.4**
5	Effort	48	-	10	16.7	52.0	9.1	18.2	-	**50.0**	34.2	26.3	24.7

6	Consistency	45	-	-	50	30.7	19.2	18.2	-	-	39.5	21.1	24.7
7	Resilience	36	-	10	-	5.3	7.7	27.3	-	25.0	13.2	22.8	23.3
8	Composure	25	-	-	-	42.7	-	9.1	-	-	15.8	10.5	17.8
9	Leadership	22	-	20	10	8.0	23.1	27.3	-	-	10.5	10.5	13.6
10	Perseverance	21	5.3	10	50	5.3	-	-	-	25.0	18.4	3.5	15.1
11	Gratitude	14	-	10	-	8.0	26.9	-	-	-	10.5	7.0	8.2
12	Teamwork	13	-	-	-	17.3	-	-	-	-	7.9	5.3	9.6
13	Candour	11	-	-	-	9.3	-	36.4	-	-	2.6	3.5	11.0
14	Courage	10	-	-	3.3	5.3	15.4	9.1	-	-	2.6	1.8	11.0
15	Sportsmanship	8	10.5	-	-	4.0	-	27.3	-	-	2.6	3.5	6.8
16	Humility	8	-	-	-	9.3	-	9.1	-	-	7.9	1.8	5.5
17	Dominance	8	-	-	-	8.0	-	18.2	-	-	5.3	3.5	5.5
18	Sacrifice	6	10.5	-	-	4.0	9.1	-	-	-	2.6	1.8	5.5
19	Vulnerability	6	-	-	-	2.7	-	36.4	-	25.0	-	3.5	4.1
20	Determination	4	-	-	-	4.0	-	9.1	-	-	7.9	1.8	-
21	Dignity	3	-	-	-	-	9.1	18.2	-	-	-	3.5	1.4
22=	Empathy	2	5.3	-	-	-	-	9.1	-	-	-	-	2.7
22=	Exuberance	2	-	-	-	1.3	-	9.1	-	-	-	1.8	1.4
22=	Maturity	2	-	-	-	-	-	18.2	-	-	-	-	2.7
22=	Tolerance	2	-	-	-	1.3	-	9.1	-	-	-	1.8	1.4
22=	Confidence	2	-	-	6.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.7
22=	Preparedness	2	-	-	-	2.7	-	-	-	-	-	1.8	1.4
22=	Execution	2	-	-	-	2.7	-	-	-	-	2.6	1.8	-
30=	Mana	1	-	-	-	-	-	9.1	-	-	-	-	1.4
30=	Competitiveness	1	-	-	-	1.3	-	-	-	-	2.6	-	-
30=	Eloquence	1	-	-	-	1.3	-	-	-	-	2.6	-	-
30=	Professionalism	1	-	-	-	1.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.4
30=	Intelligence	1	-	-	-	1.3	-	-	-	-	2.6	-	-
30=	Approachability	1	-	-	-	-	-	9.1	-	-	-	-	1.4
30=	Optimism	1	-	-	3.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
30=	Commitment	1	-	-	-	-	-	9.1	-	25.0	-	-	-
30=	Humour	1	-	-	-	-	-	9.1	-	-	-	-	1.4
30=	Risk Tolerance	1	5.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.4
30=	Participation	1	-	-	-	-	-	9.1	-	-	-	-	1.4

These seven values are thereby foregrounded for analysis and discussion, owing to their consistency in representation between the media publications, and cohesion between the descriptive groups (Patton, 1990; Williams & Moser, 2019).

Olympic Excellence

'Olympic excellence' (83) referred to notions of unparalleled prestige afforded to the Games, with the Games as a 'staging of excellence' repeated frequently throughout the discourse. However, 'Olympic excellence' could also be applied to other values, as in the following example from IOC President Thomas Bach's opening ceremony speech:

> We are standing in solidarity to make the Olympic Games happen and to enable all of you, the athletes from all National Olympic Committees, whether big or small, whether rich or poor, and from all Olympic sports, to take part in the Olympic Games (International Olympic Committee, 2021f).

Here, 'solidarity' becomes a secondary value to the priority of the Games, wherein the act of undertaking the Games, as the pinnacle of excellence, is ultimately desirable. 'Solidarity' then, is an achievement of the Games, but not the prize itself.

Similarly, 'Olympic excellence' was applied to athletes' journeys to the Games, particularly relative to the challenges brought by COVID-19, in which values of 'perseverance' and 'resilience' are rewarded with the gift of the Games: *"You struggled, you persevered, you never gave up, and today you are making your Olympic dream come true"*(International Olympic Committee, 2021f). The celebration of the 'Olympic dream' speaks to an agreement on the unparalleled excellence of the Games, itself a victory in the face of adversities- including the pandemic.

Furthermore, applications of 'Olympic excellence' included various features and symbols of the Olympic stage and structure. As Bach further states: "We are united in sharing this moment together. The Olympic flame makes this light shine brighter for us all" (International Olympic Committee, 2021f). Here, the Olympic flame acts as an enhancer of the values associated with the joining of nations within the opening ceremony, imbibing the Games with a transcendent, unifying significance.

These examples illustrate a pervasive description of the Games in the discourse as constituting a supremely desirable higher excellence, aggrandizing both the event and the athletic performances taking place within it. Applications of 'Olympic excellence' towards such performances were frequent, individually and collectively, such as the following:

> Tokyo 2020 proved to be an impressive year for New Zealand's female athletes who won 11 medals- eclipsing the nine won by our male athletes (Radio New Zealand, 2021h).

It is significant that the results extolled within the Tokyo 2020/21 Games are considered definitive of female athletic performances in an entire year of sporting competition, signalling that results at the Olympics are singularly important. This aspect of 'Olympic excellence' wherein athlete performances are revered on an unparalleled level, impacts upon athletes presentation and value in the discourse. The following athlete quote reveres the exalted position of the Games, demonstrating what the Games represent to New Zealand athletes:

> I'm just incredibly proud, we had an awesome race - we absolutely did our best and I'm stoked to have an Olympic medal. I've been thinking about this moment every day for the past two years....and even longer every session for the past eleven years so to be finally done is crazy (Radio New Zealand, 2021b).

Although subject to editorial discretions, such athlete expressions of pride and disbelief in their Olympic achievements, were frequent in the discourse contributing to 'Olympic excellence' as a value, echoing Bach's 'dream fulfilment' in the opening ceremony, and reinforcing the supreme status of excellence interred in the Games.

The density of the data and diversity of applications of 'Olympic excellence' in the discourse- contributed to by all publications and by a range of voices- operated as a precedential influence, underpinning other values communicated in the discourse, evidenced in the continued analysis .

Pride and Legacy

The discourse featured a significant number of articles covering performances of New Zealand athletes (Table 2. and Table 6). The micro-category data shows a nexus between 'national pride', 'legacy' and 'Olympic excellence' in the New Zealand media sources, forming a sub-discourse of national excellence predicated upon athletes' success on the Olympic stage. 'Legacy' (61) and 'national pride' (58) featured frequently in the New Zealand media samples, particularly in the 'NZ Medal' micro-category (43% of sample, 52% and 48% respectively), indicative of their application to athlete achievements.

'National pride' referred to achievements deemed to be of national significance, either by the athlete's themselves, their supporters or the media, including the following:

> New Zealand has a new pair of tennis heroes after Michael Venus and Marcus Daniell claimed a memorable Olympic bronze medal on Friday (Burgess, 2021).

Here, the athletes' Olympic exploits elevate them to national hero status, while in other applications, 'national pride' manifested in the superseding of the collective 'New Zealand' over the respective athletes: "New Zealand wins silver medal in double sculls" (Radio New Zealand, 2021f). Athletes themselves were also recipients of national pride, including boxer David Nyika who received: "The pride and love of so many New Zealanders"(New Zealand Olympic Committee, 2021d), while sailor Peter Burling expressed his own pride to have "won another Olympic medal for our country"(Radio New Zealand, 2021g). These examples testify that Olympic achievement makes the nation proud, further supporting the elevation of 'Olympic excellence'.

'Legacy' appeared in the discourse conferring historical relevance upon New Zealand's collective performance in Tokyo, and individual achievements. Various plaudits of the Games as New Zealand's most successful were evident, such as NZH's "a bullion record of 20 medals."(Alderson, 2021); and NZOC's headline praising "New Zealand's Most Successful Games Team Ever"(New Zealand Olympic Committee, 2021e). However, 'legacy' also celebrated athletes in sport-specific contexts, such as Tennis players Michael Venus and Marcus Daniel, who:

> ...created a bit of New Zealand history today when they won the Olympic tennis men's doubles bronze medal...They are the first New Zealanders to win an Olympic medal for tennis since Anthony Wilding...in Stockholm in 1912 (New Zealand Olympic Committee, 2021b).

Here, 'legacy' redefines the athletes' success by appealing to the national significance of New Zealand's tennis history, thereby relating the achievement to standards of excellence regarding the Games at home. Similarly, 'legacy' was applied to unprecedented success in specific sports, such as rower Hamish Bond becoming: "The first New Zealander to step on the top step of the dais in three successive games"(Cleaver, 2021). Further, the exceptional circumstances of Laurel Hubbard's participation as the Games' first openly transgender Olympian also prompted notes of her having

"made history" (New Zealand Herald, 2021b; Radio New Zealand, 2021e). These examples show a relativisation of athlete achievements, accounting for national context in terms of the history and precedent of the performances within a scale of Olympic excellence, contextualizing and specifying the manner in which they can be valued. Attaching 'legacy' as a value of Olympic achievement, afforded athletes and their performances a sense of lasting reverence within a curated record of national Olympic excellence. Thus, 'Olympic excellence' acquires a local relevance, distinguishing performances on the nation's own terms, while relying on the institutionalized determinant of excellence worthy of 'Olympic' standard.

Athletic Excellence

It is within the outlined premise of 'Olympic excellence' that athletic competition takes place (reflected by the micro-category data), underpinning a prominence of athlete qualities as values in the New Zealand media samples.

'Athletic excellence' describes praise afforded to athletic skills, and descriptions of athlete's physical performances. Second only to 'Olympic excellence' in representation across the sample (71), 'Athletic excellence' is largely concentrated in the 'NZ Medal', 'Athlete/Team Negative' and 'Games Summary' micro-categories, and is represented across all publications, although particularly in the NZOC sample (82.1%). These figures are consistent with the number of articles dedicated to micro-categories three and four, as categories focused on athlete performances. It is worth noting that RNZ recorded less coverage of negative performances than the other sources, contributing fewer overall references to 'athletic excellence' (Table 4.).

The prominence of athlete performances and 'athletic excellence' is supportive of a broad emphasis on excellence uniting 'athletic excellence' and 'Olympic excellence'. Cohesion between these values, wherein 'athletic excellence' relies on a context of *Olympic* competition, is evidenced in the following description of rower Emma Twigg:

> Emma Twigg completed an Olympic fairy-tale today when she won the women's singles sculls in emphatic fashion. Twigg, 34, utterly outclassed a strong field and finished more than four seconds ahead (New Zealand Olympic Committee, 2021c).

Here, the skill of the athlete is praised within an established context of 'Olympic excellence', underscoring the significance of the achievement. These values effectively reinforce each other, with athletic achievement the ultimate goal of the Olympics, which in turn embodies excellence. The impact of this combination of 'excellence' values is a narrow scope of 'excellence' from its broad application in the Olympic Charter, whereby 'excellence' is seldom regarded outside athletic performances and the Olympic stage on which they take place.

Athlete Qualities

Further to the prominence of 'athletic excellence' in articles regarding athlete performances, a significant proportion of the discourse is devoted to regarding athletes within a certain set of values- the 36 grouped as 'athlete qualities' in Table 6. These qualities celebrate athletes within the discourse, and venerate the role they play as exemplifications of 'Olympic excellence', as encapsulated below:

> In ancient Greek mythology there were 12 Olympians. How times have changed; we get to laud so many more (New Zealand Herald, 2021a).

In this case, the Greek Olympian gods are evoked as historical embodiments of the Games, for whom the athletes are rendered contemporary equivalents worthy of respect and celebration. Accordingly, the values attributed to athletes in the discourse can be considered indicative of qualities deemed worthy of 'Olympians' within the context of 'Olympic excellence'.

Athlete values 'effort'(48), 'consistency'(45) and 'resilience'(36) are significant recurring qualities, appearing as requirements of being a New Zealand Olympian. Here, 'effort' was most often associated with achievement: "It was a hard race. We were just heads down and go - and it was going really fast,"(New Zealand Olympic Committee, 2021a). However, 'effort' could also be applied respective of the training required to perform on the Olympic stage, such as the following comment about triathlete Hayden Wilde: "This medal isn't something that's just been given to him. He's earned it. He's worked hard for it" (Hunter, 2021). Together, these examples acknowledge effort in training and competition respectively as necessary for athletes' success. Similarly, 'resilience' could refer to athletes' actions in-competition, but also their ability to overcome adversity in training such as disappointment or injury: "His preparation for Tokyo didn't go to plan. Injury and surgery kept him out of competition through 2018" (Radio New Zealand, 2021d). Thus, resilience and effort are qualities necessary for Olympic success, but also layer significance upon 'Olympic excellence' by emphasizing the exceptional qualities of those who reach the Games.

Finally, 'consistency' referred to athletes' abilities to perform within parameters of expectation based on previous performances, such as the following description of Canoeist Lisa Carrington: "The win came just over an hour after Carrington won a hattrick of K1 200 Olympic titles - having won in London in 2012 and Rio in 2016" (Radio New Zealand, 2021f). Past performances are thus invoked as a means to qualify the present, with athletes' whose success aligned with previous performances praised for their consistency in the Olympic arena.

Collectively, 'athlete qualities' values illustrate two important aspects regarding the treatment of athletes in Games discourse: As embodiments of qualities indicative of Olympic excellence through their application in competition, and in delivering external narratives proffering values applied towards reaching the Games. It can be considered that such extended narratives also imbibe 'Olympic excellence' with a power of resolution, wherein the Games are the ultimate stage for athletic fulfilment

or redemption. Thus, in Rokeach (1973) terms; these values are emphasized as encapsulations of athletes' *instrumental* qualities for achieving success on the *terminal* Olympic stage.

COVID-19

Table 2. shows that macro-category COVID-19 (51) was largely eclipsed in the discourse by articles pertaining to athletes and events. Despite the analysis including the micro-category 'Controversy Surrounding the Games re. COVID-19'(1), articles questioning the Games remained scarce (19).

Interestingly 'national pride' (26.3%) and 'Olympic excellence' (21.1%) both featured prominently in this micro-category, surpassed only by 'spectacle' (57.9%), referencing concerns over the absence of spectators. In this context, 'national pride' served to revere the New Zealand team travelling to Tokyo, even amid reservations over the hosting of the Games:

> There's only one story here and it's not New Zealand's flagbearers or the Football Ferns' 2-1 loss to Australia, it's the folly of holding an event in completely unsuitable circumstances. I don't wish any New Zealand athlete or official harm. I hope they're glad to be in Japan and can stay safe and well and feel great pride at representing their country (Radio New Zealand, 2021a).

This statement illustrates a dichotomy in the discourse, wherein the Games themselves are questionable, but not New Zealand's participation in them. Furthermore, positioned within an athlete-centric discourse and amid celebration of athletes' resilience and perseverance in making their "Olympic dream(s) come true"(International Olympic Committee, 2021f); the pandemic becomes an additional adversity on an expectedly difficult athlete journey to the Games, as poignantly captured in the discourse by New Zealand high jumper Hamish Kerr's justification of his decision to attend the Games:

> Our jobs as athletes are to put plans in place, prepare for the 'worst case scenario', and control the controllable factors that lead to our desired result (Kerr, 2021).

While the very question Kerr is responding to regards the controversy of hosting the Games due to the pandemic, his positioning of the conditions of the pandemic as 'uncontrollable factors' akin to others faced in the role of 'athlete', contribute to a discourse that is notably protective of athletes' rights to compete. This is a cohesive position in the international and national media, effectively justifying the Games without engaging with broader ethical concerns.

Discussion

By adopting mediatization theory's conceptualization of social and media processes as contributing to the construction and mediation of the Games; links can be interpreted between the values established and the 'Foucauldian' power dynamics of the processes, voices and media that inform the discourse.

‘Olympic excellence’ was ubiquitous in the discourse, with iterative repercussions informing values of ‘national pride’, ‘legacy’ and ‘athletic excellence’, alongside befitting athlete qualities in the national context. ‘Excellence’ is of course a primordial value of Olympism, which the findings show remains the single most evident value in the Games media discourse. In terms of societal processes, it is significant to recognize that the emphasis on excellence is at the discretion of the IOC, and is embedded in the Games through the exclusive nature of the competition, condensed intensity of multiple sports competing, and the grandiose symbolism surrounding medal-winning performances (Billings, Angelini & MacArthur, 2018a; Chu, 2024). That the IOC also reside over media access and rights to the Games, effectively directs media attention towards competition venues and the exhibitions of excellence therein, as revealed in the micro-category analysis . In terms of mediatization theory; the media processes pertaining to a crowded Olympic program featuring multiple events in various venues across the host city, likely required shrewd dedication of media resources to events of the highest interest to the audience- revealed in the findings to be national medal-winners. It is pertinent to recall that international athletes were features of media coverage in both the RNZ and NZH samples. However, these were excluded from the sample due to the entirety being supplied by international contributors, supporting the above claims regarding media delegation of resources owing to a saturated Olympic program. Ultimately, these processes appear to ensure that Olympic competition and associated embodiments of excellence values remain central to Games discourse above all else. Furthermore, that the IOC require preceding protections of excellence within these spaces (e.g. qualification processes) not only dictate that athletes reach a desired level of competency before admission to the haloed space, but also pave the way for background narratives celebrating values instrumental to athletes Olympic success. Here, the prominence of ‘effort’ and ‘resilience’ in particular, reinforce the significance of Olympic performances.

Considering Foucault’s reference to values as vehicles for power transmission through mechanisms of ‘selection and exclusion’, these highly selective processes can be seen to demonstrate the power of the IOC in shaping values priorities within Olympic discourse, assuming a mandate to determine the cultural constitution of ‘excellence’ through the Games (Foucault, 2020a). However, considering the omnipresence of ‘Olympic excellence’ throughout the discourse in terms of its mediatization, it is also pertinent to speculate that the credibility of the Games as an arbiter of excellence rests on its ability to communicate a representation of excellence acceptable to its audience. Although ‘Olympic excellence’ is cohesive across the discourse, it’s credibility presents as an ongoing challenge for the Olympic movement, as it navigates changes such as shifting audience demographics, sustainability, and the introduction of new sports (Vasquez, 2024). Indeed, are the Games themselves sufficient to confer excellence upon any sport admitted to the Olympic stage? Further investigation of these issues may reveal significant insights into IOC and media use of values as mechanisms for attracting and influencing the global Olympic audience.

It is clear that the power to influence Games media discourse resides within mediated competition spaces, largely concentrated on athletes. Consequently, the Olympic stage can be seen to offer athletes' significant power, although tempered by IOC conditions of participation (International Olympic Committee, 2021d). This makes the frequency of the values of 'Olympic excellence', 'athletic excellence', 'effort', 'resilience' and 'consistency' all the more significant, indicating that athletes occupy a central position within which to deviate from these values, although largely reinforce them. That the application of these values are so consistent, suggests considerable saturation of these values in the social meanings associated with the Games and the role of athletes therein, effectively committing athlete commentary in line with IOC and media priorities. Foucault's (2020a) descriptions of power in society as bound by the structures and expectations of social context can be applied here, with values associated with the Olympics proving powerful influences on what is expected of athletes within the Games; what they believe themselves and their performances to represent; and what their status within the Games entitles them to (Foucault, 2020a). Further research focusing specifically on the communication of values via athletes, could confirm the role of values as mechanisms of power. This study contends that athletes communication of values is central to the constitution of values communicated to the Olympic media audience, as they occupy the attention space that is the nexus of power between the IOC, institutional powers, media and audiences.

The New Zealand example demonstrates a cohesive dissemination of institutional values into the national discourse. That these are resounding messages across the sources - including contributions from athletes- further speaks to the role of media in reconciling Olympic values within the national context. Moreover, Bruce et. al. (2007)'s description of New Zealand as a nation significantly socially invested in sport as a mechanism for the construction and celebration of national identity, further supports the prominence of 'Olympic excellence' regarding athlete achievements. Importantly, the unprecedented success of the New Zealand team in Tokyo provided considerable fodder favouring athlete coverage, seemingly dominating coverage of other aspects, including COVID-19. That the established academic scholarship denote the Games as a platform for nationalism, such socio-cultural attachments to 'Olympic excellence' may widely transcend socio-cultural attitudes towards the Games, consistent with a global influence of Olympic institutional and media processes (Licen et al., 2022a; MacArthur & Reichart Smith, 2021). However, the degree to which this results in the ubiquitous communication of Olympic values across varied socio-cultural discourses remains unclear.

Within the New Zealand context, Bruce at.al. (2007) and Kohe and Warren's (2019) descriptions of society's reverence of sport generally, invokes the question- to what degree do these values particularly associate with the Olympic context? In Foucault (1972) terms, the archaeology of New Zealand national sporting values certainly intersect the roots of De Coubertin's modern Olympics,

with the formative years of the nation coinciding chronologically with the British cultural antecedents of Olympism, proactively exported throughout the colonial empire (Hokowhitu, 2007). Since then, New Zealand's cultural identity has continued to evolve in its own right, jostling European, Māori and various multi-cultural influences in an increasingly globalized world (Palmer, 2007). Further research is required to trace the relative consistencies in New Zealand sporting values and those extolled by the Olympic movement in the interceding years. However, the ubiquitous entrenchment of the values identified as supported by Olympic institutional and media processes, suggests a reinforcing, if not decisive influence on values communication in the national Olympic discourse.

Regarding the pandemic, it is stark to note the priority of excellence values in the national discourse, as seemingly inattentive to the risk-averse, isolationist structures of the nation's COVID-19 response. Yet, given Beattie and Priestley's (2021) and Theunissen and Wolf's (2023) descriptions of New Zealand's encouragement of national cohesion within COVID-19 discourses, it can be considered that values of 'national pride' and 'legacy' as collectivist ideals, proffered cross-over relevance to the government's COVID-19 response rhetoric. A purposive investigation of the relationship is required to examine such consistencies, and the possible contrived political and ideological outcomes. However, taking a Foucauldian approach to this relationship, it can be considered that the power of the Olympic Games as a determining embodiment of social values, supports a relational exchange of power when adopted into the national COVID-19 discourse, promoting these values as evocative of the Olympic context to which they are contemporarily associated, towards implicitly inferring a venerable status (Foucault, 2020a; Foucault, 2020b). In this arrangement, New Zealand's involvement in the Games becomes enmeshed in a values-hierarchy which both supports and contradicts (isolation/nationalism) the directives of the government relative to the pandemic. The symbolic power of the New Zealand team at the Games, and the nationalist discourse that follows both in the Olympic and pandemic discourses ('Team of 5 million', 'Go hard, Go Early'), can thus be considered as exalting these as united values, rather than foregrounding their contradictions. Furthermore, the wielding of values as they relate to the Olympics raises questions as to the power of the Games as an arbiter of values, projecting on new or divergent values should they appear on the Olympic media stage. Principally, to what extent does the adoption of values in Games production play an informing role across the global audience? Similar examination of values in Games discourse across diverse cultural contexts may yet yield further, nuanced insights towards illuminating this aspect of the relationships between the Games, media and society.

Limitations

As an inductive analysis of discourse, this research innately relies on the experience and knowledge of the researcher for the identification and interpretation of values. In order to ensure consistency and reliability of results, the analysis was conducted by a single researcher with consistent application of

the stipulated method and operational definition of values. Furthermore, as an analysis of selected media over a concise data period, this research presents the communication of values therein, and may therefore exclude peripheral discussion pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact upon the Games. However, this was justified by the decision to focus the research on the values communication during the Games, specifically in terms of the event itself as mediated to the viewing audience.

Conclusion

Taking a Foucauldian approach to understanding power in society; the power exercised within a confluence of contributors- Olympic institutions, media and athletes, appeared central to determining the values communicated in Tokyo 2020/21 Games media discourse. Weighted in favour of the IOC, captured and disseminated by media; the findings reveal a robust Olympic values order prioritizing conceptions of excellence wherein a focus on athletic performances and associated qualities, largely dispensed with already scant pre-games discourse regarding the pandemic. The findings foreground a celebration of excellence in the discourse, particularly of the Games themselves, as the ultimate encapsulation of global sporting significance and arbiter of 'excellence'. In viewing these findings through the lens of mediatization theory, it is suggested that Olympic staging and structure bore considerable influence on the projection of 'excellence' in the discourse, along with associated media processes serving to foreground competition spaces, with athletes and their performances serving as conduits for values communication. Significantly, that athlete contributions to the discourse largely reinforce these values, raises important questions surrounding the influence of Olympic values as entrenched in society, their transcendence or evocation in external discourses, and the degree to which there is scope to challenge the institutional values order in media discourse.

Introduction to Chapter Five: Research Stage Two

The following chapter presents the research and findings referred to in the introductory chapter as stage one of the thesis, in the form of a research article titled: *Mediatization of Two worlds: A Goffman-Inspired Frame Analysis of Values Communicated in Broadcast Athlete Interviews at the Olympic Games*. This article is prepared for consideration by *International Journal of Sport Communication*.

This paper analyses an understudied format of Olympic media coverage: post-competition broadcast interviews between athletes and journalists in competition venues at the Games. Fortuitously, the paper thus expands on two key insights from stage one, contributing to media values communication: The significance of Olympic competition and the athletes participating in it.

During this stage of the research, it became apparent that one explanation for the relative absence of literature on broadcast (mixed zone) interviews is the difficulty of obtaining a sample for analysis. In my experience, this first required the permission of the New Zealand Olympic Committee before approaching regional broadcast holders *Sky New Zealand* for access to archived content. I was fortunate to receive support from both these entities, with further insights into this process elaborated further in the final discussion chapter (chapter seven). However, my reflection here is to consider that such access may not always be granted so freely or without conditions, endowing this paper with somewhat of a special privilege.

Furthermore, the selection of interviews between 14 New Zealand athletes and journalists at the Games are herein conceptualized as mediatized interactions, wherein both parties are aware of their mediated environment and roles, while also responding unscripted to each other. In order to capture the nuances of this dynamic as both a social interaction and a mediated performance; Goffman's (1974) theories on frames as "the organization of experience" informed a methodological application of frame analysis, conceptualizing values as embedded in communicated frames (p.1). Goffman's (1959, 1974) theories supported a contextual understanding of the frames invoked by each party in these communications and the values underpinning them. By doing so, I consider whether the values as framed are adhered to as those embedded in the Olympic context and upheld by those immersed in it, and examine the possibility for diverging or novel values in the frames.

Importantly, in this paper I conduct a novel application of frame theory as methodology, integrated with values theory and sensitized by mediatization theory. Goffman's (1979) theoretical steering can be observed in the devised operational definition applied towards identifying and interpreting 'values-frames', as language features structuring communication wherein knowledges of desirability are exchanged. The research design is carefully stipulated to allay concerns over continuity and

repeatability raised by critics of frame analysis as methodology, and bolstered by the compatibility of supporting values and mediatization theoretical perspectives.

Chapter Five: Mediatization of Two Worlds: A Goffman-Inspired Frame Analysis of Values Communicated in Broadcast Athlete Interviews at the Olympic Games.

Abstract

While mediation of athletes on the Olympic stage has been a focus of recent sport media scholarship, broadcast interviews between athletes and journalists are a relatively understudied feature of Games coverage (Hutchins & Sanderson, 2017; Hua & Tan, 2012; Smith & MacArthur, 2026). Competition aside, interviews with journalists in competition media zones deliver important connections between audiences and athletes under the Olympic spotlight, including in the communication of values (Licen, et al., 2022a; Loland, 2022). Conceptualizing these values communications as relational to mediatization processes shaping the Games; this study utilizes a novel integration of mediatization theory and values theory within a Goffman-inspired frame analysis, to examine post-competition interviews with New Zealand athletes at Tokyo 2020. The findings reveal the Games are associated with a concerted set of values in New Zealand interview coverage, consistently reproduced and compounded by the logics of media processes and Games structures. However, it is also clear that athletes retain the capacity to diversify values-framing, especially when encouragement to do so is expressed by journalists. In such cases, athletes are shown to reveal insightful socio-cultural context within the otherwise ubiquitous values-framing, grounding the Games as a mediatized production indicative of time and place.

Keywords: *Mediatization, Frame Analysis, Olympic Games, Athletes, Values*

Introduction

Much has been made of the scale and status of the Olympic Games and its conflation through commercialization, media coverage and its diverse mediatization across emerging digital platforms (Billings, Angelini & MacArthur, 2018a; Horne, 2017; Licen et al., 2022a). The Games have been identified as representing the pinnacle of athletic excellence, the solidarity of nations coming together to compete on peaceful terms, and the doctrine of Olympism first established at Sorbonne in 1894 (Chatziefstathiou & Henry, 2012; Scambler, 2005). Studies have examined the brand power of the Olympics, the lucrative authenticity they promote as a beacon of sporting excellence, and the qualities of athletes participating - including by advertisers who proliferate athlete profiles (Rahman & Lockwood, 2011; Real, 1998). Scholars have also interrogated how the Olympic movement has fallen short of its ideals; the shift away from amateurism in the 1980's, the problems faced by doping, the difficulties associated with political neutrality, and the cost and impact on host nations (Boykoff, 2022; Horne & Whannel, 2020; Real, 1998). Despite the validity of these challenges (or rather, because of them); the resilience of the Olympics is remarkable, and thus worthy of interrogation as to what the Games continue to represent in contemporary media, and more importantly, how certain

understandings associated with the Games- conceptualised here as values- are constructed and communicated (Wenner & Billings, 2017).

The Tokyo 2020/21 Olympic Games is a pertinent example within which to pursue these questions, as a Games successfully enacted despite criticisms and concerns related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (Boykoff, 2022). The communication of values in broadcast coverage of the Tokyo Games had the potential to reflect and shape audience perspectives, although what and how these values were communicated across the various national socio-cultural contexts of participating nations is unclear (Loland, 2022; Wenner & Billings, 2017). Furthermore, due to the careful curation and control mandated by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), broadcast coverage of the Games in its entirety is consistent across the world. However, interviews with athletes in accredited media zones present a significant opportunity for rights holder broadcasters (RHB's) to distinguish their coverage towards national audiences (International Olympic Committee, 2021a; Li, Scott, Sharpe, Stokowski & Zhong, 2022). While Trunecka (2021) and Li et al. (2022) have noted the historical relevance of press conferences in traditional Olympic media, there is little research on interviews with athletes within the Olympic broadcast, a relative absence in the scholarship this research contributes to redressing.

Furthermore, recent mediatization studies applied to the Olympic Games have focused on the dynamic range of coverage proliferating across emerging platforms, probing how shifts in the media and socio-cultural landscapes have impacted the Games and the ever-deepening interconnections between sport and media (Frandsen, 2020; Hutchins & Rowe, 2012; Wenner & Billings, 2017). Alternatively, this study considers the enduring relevance of broadcast media to the Games in terms of mediatization as it pertains to the communications of values. The confluence of factors inherent to broadcast interviews: the Games environment, regional/national media correspondents, and athletes representing their nations; situate the communication between parties as heavily mediatized- reflecting both media processes and socio-cultural understandings of the Games, and their meanings to and in society (Nölleke, Scheu & Birkner, 2021).

Taking New Zealand athlete post-competition interviews in Tokyo 2020 as the sample, this research offers a novel conceptualization to elucidate the values communicated, utilizing William's (1979) descriptions of values as underlying moral languages as compatible with Goffman's (1974) theory of frames as "the organization of experience"(p.1). Viewed through a 'sensitizing' mediatization lens, 'values-frames' are thereby examined in their connection to media and socio-cultural processes inherent to the media content, reconciling them as both a socio-cultural and media construction, reflective of the meanings associated with the Games via these influences (Frandsen, 2020; Goffman, 1974; Williams, 1979). The resulting values-frames exchanged between athletes and journalists identified in the findings appear largely ubiquitous, aligning with institutional Olympic priorities and effectively moderated by the pressures of Games structures and media logics. However, athletes are

also observed diverging from these entrenched values associations, revealing scope for the communication of contextual socio-cultural values priorities, indicative of the dynamic mediatization of national-Olympic interview discourse.

Literature Review

The recording and distribution of Olympic television coverage to RHB's is undertaken by Olympic Broadcasting Services (OBS) a subsidiary of the IOC, with the effect of ensuring that event coverage around the world is identical, oriented around best representing the competition, significant features of the event, and the Olympic brand in accordance with IOC prerogatives (International Olympic Committee, 2021a; Olympic Broadcasting Services, 2025). The media value of the right to broadcast the Games is underscored by the significant expense networks pay to ensure rights to broadcast coverage, accreditation for media personnel, and structured access to athletes, either via press conferences or within competition venues (Billings, et al. 2018a; Li, et al. 2022). Accordingly, the IOC goes to considerable effort to accommodate athlete-media interaction opportunities, through the servicing and scheduling of press conferences, and the seclusion of media zones at competition venues (International Olympic Committee, 2021a; Li, et al. 2022). Media interviews shouldering Games coverage have been identified as key mediums by which RHB's distinguish their coverage from international media counterparts, constructing and ascribing their own meanings (Billings, et al. 2018a). These connection points are significant to national broadcasters, who have no guarantee that athletes of national interest will be a focus of event coverage (Arth, Angelini, Gentile & Hard, 2024; Eljand-Kärp & Harro-Loit, 2020). Thus, in the Olympic media environment, athlete interviews are an important feature linking national audiences to their athletes, both when the athlete has been a feature of international coverage, and when they have not (Fernández Peña, 2024; Hua & Tan, 2012).

Importantly, the extent to which athletes and journalists use interviews at the Games to deviate from institutional Olympic narratives is unclear. On the one hand, interviews are only afforded to accredited RHB's, who agree to conditions of coverage with the IOC, in protection of the Olympic brand, inferring a restricted scope of appropriate interview content (Billings, 2010; International Olympic Committee, 2021a; 2021b). Yet, values communication need not necessarily undermine the Games or Olympism values in order to be socio-culturally significant- or valuable to media. While Mirer (2025) has questioned the relevance of journalists in the contemporary media sport information system, Li et, al. (2022) and Trunecka (2021) note that athlete interactions with journalists remain important to media coverage, contending that athletes see interviews with journalists as an opportunity to expand their audience, broaden their own personal brand, fulfil sponsorship obligations and possibly attract new benefactors (Kovacs & Doczi, 2020; Nölleke, et al., 2021). Trunecka's (2021) study also considers athletes awareness of their role in inspiring young people to take up their sport, collectively attesting that athletes construct their performance in media interviews in terms of their desired communication

regarding their personal identity, and their perceptions of their social role before the television audience (Rahman & Lockwood, 2011).

Furthermore, to the point on the enduring relevance of traditional media; Brice (2023) and Hartmann (2019) speak to the willingness of athletes to use the Olympic media platform to make ideological statements, signalling their own values to the Olympic audience. As Brice (2023) points out, athletes do not always communicate messages verbally, with the black power salute on the 1968 100m sprint podium a particularly evocative example, while noting that more recent athlete messaging has been subtle, utilizing signs and symbols on athletes' bodies, apparel and equipment (Boykoff, 2023). Similarly, Hartmann (2019) describes a new wave of athlete activism incorporated into professional leagues as well as the Olympics, with athletes leveraging sports events to raise awareness and signal messages. Importantly for the context of this study, such protests received increased sanctions in Tokyo 2020, owing to the expansion of IOC rule 50, permitting gestures of protest outside the field of play and relevant ceremonies, in accordance with local laws (Brice, 2023; International Olympic Committee, n.d.c). Although rule 50 remains strictly protective of Games' intended neutrality and freedom from political, religious or racist expression; press conferences and athlete interviews are permitted spaces wherein athletes are free to express their own opinions (International Olympic Committee, n.d.c). Thus, there is a tension apparent here, with athletes aware of both the scale that the mediated Olympic stage offers to communicate values, and of the privilege of their Olympic position and related social expectations (Nölleke, et al., 2021). Yet, communication between journalists and athletes in the construction of values messaging in interviews remains an underexamined aspect of Olympic mediation, an absence towards which this analysis makes an important contribution (Roberston, 2024).

Communicating Values: The Olympics in Society

This study conceptualizes values communicated in Olympic interviews as indicative of the normative moral underpinnings of the communicated interaction (Rokeach, 1973; Williams, 1979). Values theory stipulates that values play a role in the social conditioning of society, serving in a hierarchy that informs actions, behaviour and beliefs (Maio, Olson, Bernard & Luke, 2006; Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992). As such, values in society are conditioned through upbringing, social experiences, formal education and importantly- sport and sports media (Loland, 2022; Maio, et al., 2006). Significantly, the Olympic Games and associated qualities of Olympism have long been utilized for values communication through sport, perhaps best evidenced by explicit values statements: "Excellence, Respect and Friendship" and the Olympic motto "Faster, Higher, Stronger- Together" (Chatziefstathiou & Henry, 2012; International Olympic Committee, n.d.a). Importantly, these values provide a framework for RHB's coverage of the Games, as moral figureheads for Games competition and the Olympic movement (International Olympic Committee, 2021). However, as members of society

journalists and athletes participating in communicated constructions of values also bring their own values to the conversation, reflective of their socio-cultural background, environment and experiences (Rokeach, 1973, Williams, 1979). In acknowledging this belonging- both to the Olympic media space and to that of the national socio-cultural context to which they are communicating- values communicated in Olympic interviews can be considered reflective of both these influences.

The New Zealand Team in Tokyo

By selecting New Zealand as the national socio-cultural context in which to analyse the communication of values, this research examines a country noted for its adoration of, and commitment to sport (Bruce, Falcous & Thorpe, 2007; Pierce et al.,, 2017). The Olympics are considered highly significant to the assertion of New Zealand national identity internationally, with Kohe and Warren (2019) stating:

> Sport defines New Zealand on the world stage…Sportsmen and women place higher expectations of themselves in New Zealand because of the importance New Zealand society places on sport (p.1243).

Kohe and Warren (2019) go on to describe attributes of fair play and effort as cornerstones of New Zealand Olympic role modelling, with Knight, MacNeill and Donnelly (2005) adding that 'toughness' and 'achievement' became rhetorical drivers in coverage of New Zealand athletes in Sydney 2000. These scholars catalogue the significance of Olympic performances to New Zealand society and across national sports media, which can be seen as consistent with international studies acknowledging expressions of nationalism on the Olympic stage (Billings, et al., 2018b; Licen et al., 2022a ; MacArthur & Reichart Smith, 2021). However, while the Games are widely acknowledged as a platform for the assertion of national narratives, viewing communications in national Olympic media strictly through the lens of nationalism, risks narrowing understandings of foundational socio-cultural building blocks determining *what* is celebrated nationally, and *how* it is communicated (Billings, et. al, 2018b; Rider & Llewellyn, 2015). Few studies of Olympic nationalism have examined the media and socio-cultural micro-nuances that contribute to performances of nationalism and other values priorities in athlete-journalist media interactions, as undertaken here using a frame analysis approach.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that New Zealand is a multi-cultural society with a bi-cultural history, wherein sport has served to unite people of diverse cultural backgrounds and enforce societal norms- including those detrimentally reflective of colonialism (Palmer, 2007). Importantly, the New Zealand Team in Tokyo featured 211 athletes, including 15.6% of Māori descent (just below the national population 17.1%) amid a team a near equitable 101 women and 110 men (ANOC, 2021; Stats NZ, 2021). It is important to acknowledge the ethnic and gender fabric of the New Zealand team, towards an awareness of socio-cultural dynamics that may prove revealing in the analysis, and in ensuring a robust, culturally representative media sample.

Methodology

This study combines conceptualizations of values put forward by values theorists, with compatible tenets of Goffman's (1959, 1975) frame theory- sensitized by mediatization theory- as a novel, comprehensive approach to identifying and understanding values as they are communicated between individuals in mediated interactions.

Erving Goffman (1959, 1974) is widely considered the pioneer of frame theory, establishing the precedent for frame analysis (Dolezal, 2017; Scheff, 2005). There is no definitive methodological approach for conducting a frame analysis (a limitation for some scholars), with framing-informed analysis in communication studies broadly hinging on theoretical grounds regarding what frames are and how they can be conceived of in communication (Cummins & Hahn, 2024; Entman, 1993; Persson, 2019; Winslow, 2018). For Abeza and Sanderson (2022) and other advocates of frame theory in media analysis, media framing essentially involves selection and salience, informing what is reported and what information is provided (D'Angelo and Kyupers, 2010; Entman, 1993). These aspects are certainly pertinent to understanding frames in media content as deliberate, constructed functions of communication; however, referring to Goffman's (1974) description of frames as the organization of experience, the issuing of frames in communication should also be perceived within the social interplay in which frames are performed between people (Persson, 2019; Zerubavel, 2024). As Goffman (1974) stipulates, frames are how individuals structure their actions, behaviour and communication, informed by their experiences as members of a shared society. Goffman's (1974) frames denote expectations of meaning, underpinning the intention behind communication and how it should be received on a social level; theory that has been applied to the study of media content (Entman, 1993; Persson, 2019). Zerubavel (2024) describes Goffman-esque frames as acting as an epistemic fence wherein we learn "what is supposed to be considered socially relevant and thereby attended as 'noteworthy', and what is socially considered irrelevant and can, or even should, therefore be casually inattended or deliberately disattended" (p.8). These aspects of a frame can be observed through various facets of communication (both linguistic and visual), with the use and structure of language a particular focus for identifying the intentional construction of shared meanings in communication (D'Angelo & Kyupers, 2010; Scheff, 2005). However, it is significant to note that Goffman's (1959; 1974) frames as structures of interacted performances communicated between individuals is particularly relevant conceptualization for the examination of values exchanged between athletes and journalists, as performed to each other while cognisant of the media audience.

Goffman's (1974) conception of frames as engrained in collective social experience and awareness, establishes a basis upon which to unite frame theory with values theory. Values act as a moral language, understood between individuals who share a social context in which they apply, while frames are considered a structure for communicating and interring mutual understandings in social

contexts (Goffman, 1974; Williams, 1979). Scheufele (1999) names values as having a significant influence on framing, indicating a conceptual compatibility between frames and values in communication (p.109). Furthermore, Scheufele's (1999) description of frames in media content essentially positions values as social knowledges intuited through frames, which are subject to influence by the conditions of the media format, that is (collectively)- media logics and societal processes (Krotz, 2009). Thus, by assuming a definition of values as normative understandings of the desirable or preferential, this research considers the use and selection of language as frames encapsulating such communications as 'values-frames' (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992). Furthermore, the additional application of mediatization theory towards understanding the selection and salience of 'values-frames' and their interred meanings, is also consistent with scholarship regarding the construction and influence of media frames (Billings, 2010; Scheufele, 1999).

Applied to 'values-frames', mediatization theory offers an important lens within which to reconcile possible influences on journalists and athletes within the media content, and their impact on values communication therein. Mediatization theory conceptualizes the consumption, construction and technological advance of media in society as a result of mutually-influencing processes. (Licen, Frandsen, Horky, Onwumechili & Wei, 2022b). While scholars differ over whether mediatization processes are socially constructed, reciprocated or responded to by media, or guided by institutional media logics inherent to media production and dissemination; both sides agree that the interplay is mutually affecting (Couldry & Hepp, 2017; Hjarvard, 2013). Importantly, mediatization has been increasingly conceptualised towards understanding the extensive interconnections between sport and media, with Hutchins and Rowe (2012) going so far as to consider "sport as media"(p.10). Furthermore, Frandsen (2020) encourages the use of the theory as a sensitizing lens, by which the processes guiding mediatization of sport and media can be considered towards understanding the intersection of these influences in their extensive range and nuance (Licen, et al., 2022b; Jensen, 2013). In the case of media-sport, a mediatized awareness of both socio-cultural prerogatives and media logics as informing processes, can be applied towards understanding the construction of sports media content- and the values communicated therein (Hepp, Hjarvard & Lundby, 2015; Stanley, 2021). In applying mediatization theory to understanding 'values-frames' as deliberate communications of value informed by shared expectations and experiences; this study conceptualizes communication in the selected interviews both on socio-cultural grounds pertaining to the interacting individuals, and in terms of the media as conditioning, facilitating and disseminating the interaction to the national audience.

In-line with the described methodological and theoretical frameworks, this research analyses the values communicated as interpreted within the frames structuring the interaction between athletes and journalists in post-competition interviews at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. Accordingly, *how*

and *by whom* the values-frames are contributed is examined, with the results sensitized through the lens of mediatization theory towards interpreting the mediatized processes that shape their communication in the media content.

Research Design

Post-competition interviews between New Zealand athletes and *Sky*[6] journalists were selected as the media sample. *Sky* were the broadcast rights holders for Olympic coverage in New Zealand and the only broadcaster to send journalists to Tokyo. This study had intended to also include coverage from publicly funded, free-to-air broadcaster, *Television New Zealand* (*TVNZ*). However, TVNZ did not send reporters to Tokyo, and all relevant content was in fact repatriated from *Sky* as the regional RHB. It is worth noting that access to the requisite media content was not easily forthcoming, with both *Sky* and *TVNZ* requiring express permission from the New Zealand Olympic Committee.

Post-competition interviews take place within a designated media space within Olympic competition venues, and within a concise availability of the athlete to the accredited journalist upon the completion of their sport (International Olympic Committee, 2021a; Mirer, 2025). Thus, they present an interesting context within which to view values communication, capturing the first glimpses of athlete interaction with media (traditional or social) post-competition, at a somewhat unpredictable moment for the journalist amid the initial emotions of a just-confirmed sporting result (Roberston, 2024). In establishing the grounds for the mediatized interaction (described above), the research recognizes Goffman's (1974) supporting theories on social interaction and self-presentation, regarding visual features of the constructed media space as ceremonial "sign equipment" (p.13). Accordingly, backdrop, branding and athlete uniforms can be considered exceptional cases "unique and specific, used only for the performances of a single type of routine", denoting meanings of conduct within the space (Goffman, 1959, p.13). These aspects of the interview structure thus shape the contextual expectations of both parties (and the audience) considerate of the post-competition Olympic interview and, as compulsory features, set the scene for the social interaction taking place.

Athlete Selection

14 New Zealand athletes were purposively sampled for analysis, with the following considerations ensuring a robust sample, representative of the New Zealand Olympic team:

- Gender equality (male/female categories).
- A diverse selection of sports.
- Various competition outcomes: won a medal, competed in a final, or participated.

[6] *Sky New Zealand* is a subscription broadcaster and broadly the predominant sports broadcast rights holder in the New Zealand media ecology, including Olympic broadcasting rights since 2010 (International Olympic Committee, 2007).

- Previous Olympians and those who debuted in Tokyo.
- A sample representative of New Zealand's bi-cultural/multi-cultural society (Palmer, 2007).

The final athletes selected were:

Emma Twigg (Rowing), Hamish Bond (Rowing), Lewis Clareburt (Swimming), Erica Fairweather (Swimming), Hayden Wilde (Triathlon), Ruby Tui (Rugby), Tim Mikkelsen (Rugby), Valerie Adams (Shot Put), Nick Willis (Track), Lisa Carrington (Canoe), Laurel Hubbard (Weightlifting), David Liti (Weightlifting), Aaron Gate (Cycling) and Lydia Ko (Golf).

18 interviews spanning a total of 49 minutes and 42 seconds of content were returned by *Sky,* with multiple interviews for some athletes. All were included in the analysis, understanding that media exposure during the Games is not necessarily even, with some athletes garnering greater media attention for various reasons (success, event progression, multiple events etc.). Athletes with greater media presence thus have multiple opportunities to influence and solidify values-frames, all valid contributions to the analysis. All interviews were observed visually and subsequently transcribed to aid the identification of frames in the language of the interaction. The frame identification, values interpretation and contribution coding processes presented in the following section were undertaken by a single coder from October 2024 to February 2025. This singularity allowed for continuity and refinement of the frame and values identification and categorization.

Application of Frame Analysis

David, Atun, Fille and Monterola (2011) contend that essential to the application of frame analysis as a method is a research design that is robust and repeatable, ensuring the validity of results. The reliability and consistency of frame analysis methods is a point of contention in the literature, wherein the appropriateness of variable methodological applications have been questioned, with repeatability of results a core concern (Cummins & Hahn, 2024; Van Dijk, 2023). However, it is also clear that methodological approaches informed by frame analysis are widely considered to be valid (David, et al., 2011; Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999). With the above theoretical frameworks directing the application of frame analysis as method; the following research design section explains the application of frame analysis theory as method in this study, with validity and repeatability of results a key consideration.

Frame Identification and Values Interpretation

Considering Rokeach's (1979) definition of values, supported by Cheng and Fleischmann's (2010) call for variations of content analysis as a means of contextually investigating values, and Scheufele's (1999) linking of frames to values; this study investigates values as they are identified by the use of

frames in communication, with the following operational definition of a frame interred with values, or 'values-frame', providing the framework for identification:

> Implicit or explicit communicative language structures that are indicative of preferential or desirable qualities.

The following is an example of a language structure indicating a sentiment of 'value' as defined by the operational definition:

> You didn't look nervous at all ('Composure') (Sky New Zealand, 2021).

This example, posed as a question to weightlifter David Liti, reveals that the athletes' 'Composure' during competition is a quality of value. Accordingly, the frame can be interpreted as related to context alongside the value that is invoked, in this case the athlete's competition experience. Therefore, the 'values-frame' relates that there is interest in the athlete's approach to competition and value in their composure therein (value= composure).

Furthermore, such 'values-frames' could also reveal multiple values within the language structure of the frame, such as the following example:

> Emma you've earned everything that this moment represents, and you've stood on the podium ('Effort', 'Prestige') (Sky New Zealand, 2021).

Here, the athlete's 'Effort' is valued as that which has enabled them to achieve their performance, and the performance itself is valued as having obtained a prestigious Olympic result ('Prestige'). In these cases, the frame is recorded separately as applied to each, regarding the athlete's 'Effort', and 'Magnitude' according to the 'Prestige' of the result. Coding for multiple value expressions enabled the inclusion of multiple values within frame structures, capturing the complexity of the values-frames specific to their communication in the Olympic context.

Such cases of 'values-framing' were identified and recorded as text excerpts, along with the respective values interpreted (Bingham, 2023; Williams & Moser, 2019). At the conclusion of the analysis, the values coded to the frames were organized into groups of like-values invoked by like-frames ('frame groups'), with value and frame designations refined to accurately represent the diversity of the sample. The sorting of values-frames allowed for interpretation and refinement of context and salience both for the frames and the values interred in them.

Although drawing on qualitative reflexive coding processes often employed in methods such as thematic analysis, the organizing of frames and values for the identification of patterns in values communication does not constitute an arranging of interpreted themes, as the values-frame codes themselves serve to define their relevance across sample, with the organization of 'frame groups' guided by interpretation of the function of the frames in context, and not thematic meaning-making (Braun & Clark, 2022; Yanto, 2023). Similarly, critics of frame analysis as a methodological approach

might prefer to regard this process as a theoretically informed inductive content analysis (Cummins & Hahn, 2024; see also Sadri, Gentile, Buzzelli, & Billings, 2026). However, such is the essential nature of frame theory for the identification of frames pertaining to values within the interpretative coding process that frame analysis is recognised here as the methodological approach (Scheff, 2005).

Contribution Coding

Along with the recordings of frames and their corresponding values, 'contribution codes' were also assigned. Contribution coding describes the initiation of communication of each values-frame by either the athlete (A) or journalist (J), and whether the values-frames appear subsequently, according to the following codes:

- Inserted (I): The values-frame appears for the first time relative to context, or is reinserted following intermediary dialogue.
- Reactive (R): Values-frame is communicated in response to the other party either in opposition, or by suggestion or inference.
- Neutral (N): Values-frame is maintained repetitively in context.

These codes interpreted the use of values-frames in terms of the social interaction taking place and their relationship to the role of the contributor, conferring the respective values-frame contributions of each party.

Findings and Discussion

The results of the interpretation and coding of frames and values are presented first from a quantitative perspective, identifying frames and values of significance by salience across the samples. This provided a basis upon which to focus the qualitative discussion of the frames and identified values, in terms of Goffman's frame theory, and the contributions to framing interpretable by the application of mediatization theory.

The analysis identified a total of 86 distinct values across nine frame categories, with individual repetitions of values totalling 526. Outright, these figures demonstrate a distinctly small portion of frames relative to the number of values, illustrative of a very consistent approach both to the interview questions by journalists, and the respective responses from athletes- as was observed during the analysis. However, the coding and organization of values aligned to the frames, revealed a considerable concentration of certain values residing within an even smaller proportion of frames. Thus, the findings focus on the frames and values identified in the upper quartile of the data (374 frames invoking values equating to 71.10% of the sample) as a purposive selection, the statistical reasoning for which is presented below in Table 1. (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025; Patton, 1990).

While the purposive selection approach sufficiently identifies consistencies and absences, it risks excluding novel or rare exceptions. To mitigate this, the discussion acknowledges two pertinent

examples of values-framing wherein the invocation of limited values-frames proved greatly revealing of the negotiation of values in interacting frames between athletes and journalists, particularly where external issues punctuated the Games narrative.

Table 1.

Highest and Lowest Values-Frames per Group Count; Median; Upper, Lower and Inter-Quartile Ranges of Values-Frames Across the Sample.

Total Number Frames conferring values	Number of distinct values	Value with the highest salience (frequency)	Value (s) with the lowest salience (frequency)	Median salience of values	Upper Quartile	Lower Quartile	Inter-Quartile Range
526	86	'Prestige'=43	1= (26)	3	7	1	6

In line with the data presented in Table 1., it was observed that many of the upper quartile frames and values were repeatedly invoked within consistent contextual elements of the interview structure. This observation prompted the arrangement of frames and values by context, revealing relative consistency in the interview format, and how and by whom values-frames were communicated. These are presented alongside the frame, values and contribution data in Table 2 (context). Here, the frames are referred to as 'frame groups', describing the variation in values pertaining to each frame.

Table 2.

Showing Upper Quartile Frames and Values Including Values Count, Number of Interviews and Journalist (J) or Athlete (A) Contributions.

Context	Frame Group	Values	Values Count (salience)	No. of Interviews (%)	R' and 'A' Contribution
Competing at the Olympic Games.	'Magnitude'	Prestige	43	94.4%	JI: 23, JN: 2, JR: 1. AR: 6, AI: 5, AN:6.
		Realization	31	38.9%	AI: 9, AR: 10, AN:5. JI: 2, JR: 1, JN: 4.
		Emotion	24	77.8%	JI: 13, JR: 1, JN: 0. AI: 5, AR: 4, AN: 1.

		Expectation	16	33.3%	AI: 8, AN: 3, AR: 1. JI: 3, JR: 1, JN: 0.
Performing/Achieving at the Olympic Games.	'Recognition'	Support	25	66.7%	AI: 14, AR: 6, AN: 0. JR: 2, JI: 2, JN: 1.
		Gratitude	18	50%	AI: 15, AR: 1, AN: 0. JI: 2, JR/JN: 0.
		Audience	16	50%	AI: 12, AR: 2, AN: 0. JI: 2, JR/JN: 0.
		Home (Home Proximity)	12	38.9%	AI: 5, AR: 2, AN: 1. JI: 3, JR: 1, JN: 0
		Media	12	44.4%	AI: 7, AR: 2, AN: 1. JI: 2, JR: 0, JN: 0.
		Audience Proximity	11	55.6%	JI: 4, JR: 0, JN: 0. AI: 5, AN: 0, AR: 2.
		Humility	10	27.8%	AI: 8, AR: 1, AN: 0. JI: 1, JR: 0, JN: 0.
		Family	9	33.3%	AI: 7, AR: 1, AN: 0. JR: 1, JI: 0, JN: 0.
Qualities attributed to athlete performance.	'Instrumental'	Effort	20	55.6%	AI: 13, AR: 3, AN: 1. JR: 2, JI: 1, JN: 0.
		Perseverance	14	50%	AR: 2, AI: 9, AN:0. JI: 3, JR: 0, JN: 0.
		Difficulty	12	44.4%	AI: 8, AR: 3, AN: 0. JR: 1, JN/JI: 0.

		Confidence	11	33.3%	AI: 4, AN: 1, AR: 4. JI: 2, JR: 0, JN: 0.
		Exceptionalism	9	22.2%	AI: 5, AN: 1, AR: 0. JI: 3, JR: 0, JN: 0.
		Performance/ Perform	7	27.8%	JI: 4, JR: 0, JN: 0. AI: 2, AR: 1, AN:0.
		Composure	7	27.8%	AR: 3, AI: 0, AN: 1. JI: 2, JR: 1, JN: 0.
Reflections on the Games experience.	'Reward'	Nationalism	31	61%	JI: 11, JR: 1, JN: 1. AI: 16, AR: 1, AN: 1.
		Pride	19	55.6%	AI: 11, AR: 4, AN: 1. JI: 2, JR: 1, JN: 0.
		Experience	10	33.3%	AI: 6, AR: 1, AN: 1. JI: 2, JR: 0, JN: 0.
		Legacy	7	16.7%	JI: 4, JR: 0, JN: 0. AI: 1, AR: 2, AN: 0.

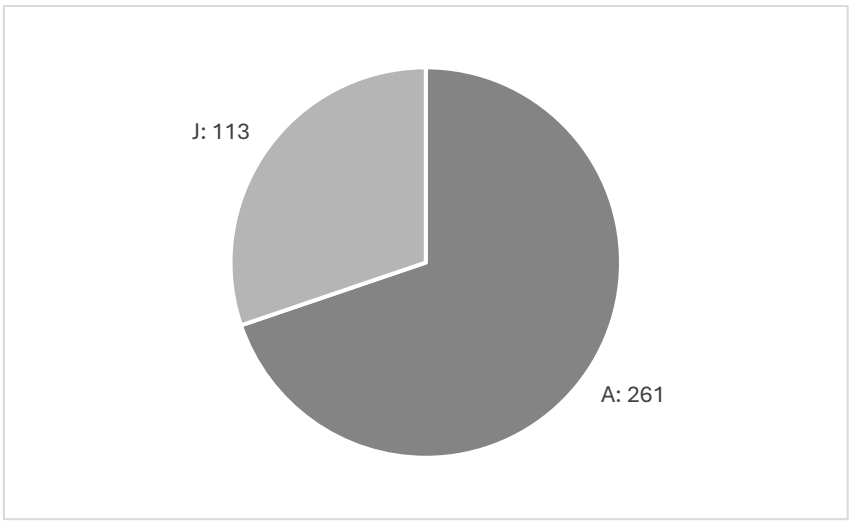
Table 2. reveals four communication contexts respective of the four frame groups and 23 corresponding values identified in the upper quartile, with the communication contexts serving to describe the corresponding frames and values within the interaction, as elaborated upon in the coming section (Prominent frames and values).

Values-Frame Contribution

Further to Table 3., the overall athlete ('A') and journalist ('J') contributions are displayed in Figure 1. Here, the term 'values-frames' is invoked to collectively describe the presentation of frames intertwined with values as they appeared across the sample.

Figure 1.

Pie Chart Showing Communication of Upper Quartile Values-Frames by Athlete (A) and Journalist (J).



The figure shows a predominant communication of values-frames by athletes compared to journalists, with Figure 2. (below) condensing the data by values-frame contribution code (J/A: I, R, N).

Figure 2.

Pie Chart Showing Communication of Upper Quartile Values-Frames by Values-Frame Communication Category.

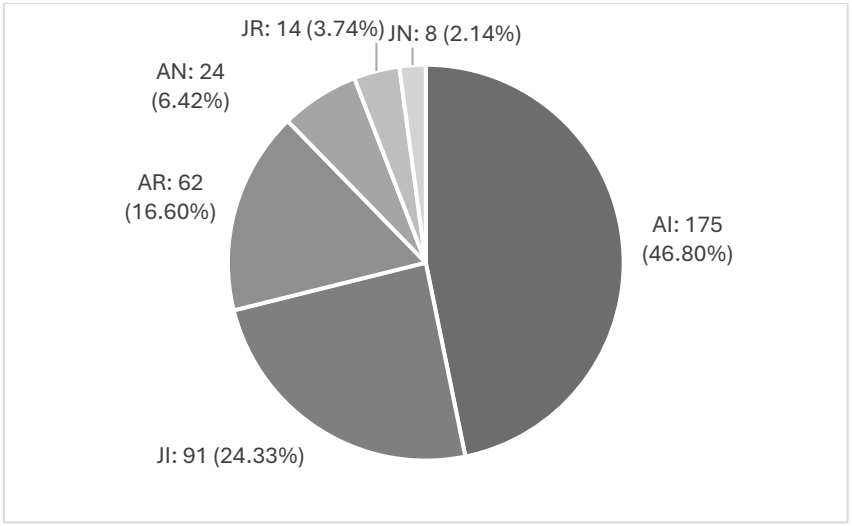


Figure 2. shows that athletes initiated a greater proportion of values-frame communication (AI= 46.80%) and contributed 23.02% of values-frames in prompted neutral or reactive communications. However, the second largest category of values-frames contributions were those initiated by journalists (JI= 24.33%), indicating that although athletes contributed values-frames independently, a considerable proportion of the overall values-frames communicated were introduced by journalists, then reiterated or maintained by athletes (JI + AR +AN = 47.35%). Although less than the combination of values-frames inserted by athletes (AI + JR + JN= 52.68%).), this still equates to a substantial proportion of the overall values-frames, signifying the relevance of journalists.

Prominent Frames and Values

Referring to Table 2., 'Magnitude' emerged as the most populace frame group, including the value 'Prestige' with the highest overall representation and distribution across the interviews (43 and 94.4%). Among the values, 'Prestige', 'Realization' and 'Emotion' were all largely communicated as emphasizing the pre-eminence of the Olympics and the significance of competing at the highest level of sport (Context= 'Competing at the Olympic Games). Furthermore, 'Prestige' was predominantly inserted by journalists (JI: 23) although maintained by athletes alongside evocations of 'Realization' and 'Emotion', as demonstrated here:

> J: Hayden Wilde Olympic Bronze medallist how do those words sound? ('Prestige' (JI))
>
> HW: ah its..(inaudible- drops head, wincing back tears, drops head further obscuring face, leaning on rail, looks up), It's pretty awesome aye, like far out (breaks into tears) ('Prestige'(AN), 'Realization'(AR),'Emotion' (AR)), (Sky New Zealand, 2021).

This example illustrates how 'Realization' and 'Emotion' were communicated by athletes in response to questions regarding emotion or feeling towards the prestige of their performances. Collectively, these values speak to the exaltation of the Games as the pinnacle of sporting excellence ('Prestige'), and the desire by both contributors to communicate and understand the significance of the event- in which the athlete contribution appears invariably superlative ('Realization', 'Emotion', 'Expectation').

The second largest frame group 'Recognition' referred to values as foregrounding the organizations and individuals that contributed to the athletes' performances and the athletes' deference to them (e.g. 'Gratitude', 'Humility'). Interestingly, athletes invariably led the insertion of these values in communication, as indicated by the AI data, and a higher relative overall 'A' contribution in each case. The finding indicates athletes place considerable value on the support contributors themselves ('Support' = 25 and 66.7%), and the chance to acknowledge them before the media, thus enabling the audiences' reception of their 'gratitude' (18 and 50%) and 'humility' (10 and 27.8%).

The 'Instrumental' group framed athlete personal qualities as values constructive to the athlete's performances (Qualities attributed to athlete performance), positioning the athletes as embodiments of coveted Olympic success. In particular, the athletes framed these values in terms that justified the deservedness of their Olympic success ('Effort', 'Perseverance', 'Difficulty'). In turn, these values-frames allude to an enormity surrounding Olympic achievements in society, inherent in their reverence for their own achievements.

Finally, 'Reward' frames featured values interred in the benefits of competing at the Games (reflections on Games experience), both for athletes and the national audience, reflecting a mutual awareness of the relevance of Olympic achievement to the nation and what it means for the athlete,

both personally and as a national representative. These frames and associated values, further attest to the communicated significance placed on success at the Olympics- and those who achieve it.

Mediatization, Values and Frames

Leading with Goffman's (1974) theory that frames are formed of shared knowledges and experiences, the cohesion in the values-framing across the interviews signals a ubiquitous format in the media space, indicating familiarity between the participants suggestive of continuity with mediation of previous Games. This finding is especially significant given the unique context of the Tokyo 2020/21 Games wherein the athletes preparation, competition and Games experience were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, references to the pandemic are scant, with emphasis in the framing on: the magnitude of the Games and its impact on the athlete; the athlete's admission of emotion towards their achievement and those who support them ('Recognition'); the qualities that contributed to athletes' successes ('Instrumental'), and the significance of their Olympic achievement in the New Zealand national socio-cultural context ('Reward'). These are startling consistencies, stark against the context of the pandemic, wherein the collective values-frames speak to an unfaltering reverence for the Games, and the excellence interred in athletic performances. In terms of mediatization theory, the cohesion between the values-frames put forward by athletes and journalists alike, show that the media and socio-cultural spheres surrounding the Games are considerably intertwined to the point that each party tailors their communication within a common understanding of both what the Games constitute (e.g. 'Prestige') and the contexts and values of interest to the New Zealand audience. Importantly, while journalists are expected to infiltrate the relevant audience towards the production of content of value or interest, athletes too are observed projecting themselves towards the national audience, with an awareness that certain values (Table 3.) are endearing to that audience- or even necessary as a New Zealand Olympian (Hua & Tan, 2012). This observation resonates with Kohe and Warren's (2019) studies, highlighting the importance of humility for New Zealand athletes, both in recognizing support, and qualifying their achievements in terms of the hard work that has enabled them (Knight, et al., 2005; Ryan, 2007). Goffman's (1959) note that social roles can come with pre-existing socio-cultural attachments, further supports the findings demonstration of the entrenched societal notions of what it means to compete in the Olympics for New Zealand. Socially significant, these values were proliferated in the media content, due to their adoption by the communicators, and the subsequent cooperative framing of their athletic embodiment to the nation.

There is undeniable consistency in the findings with IOC stated values, particularly that of 'excellence' (Frame group 'Magnitude'). The curation of Olympic media by the IOC, suggests that associated processes effectively facilitate IOC values prerogatives, infiltrating into values communication in regional media, resulting in the elevation of values associated with the prestige and significance of the

Games to the top of the values hierarchy. Licen et al. (2022a) refers to broadcast rights to the Games as 'prestigious' for the media companies that procure them, affording the attraction of audiences and opportunities to disseminate Olympic content across various media formats and platforms. It is thus important to consider that the 'prestige' of the Games is beneficial to: The Olympic movement in exalting the Games ahead of other sporting events; broadcast media who pay considerable money for exclusive rights and access; the athletes who justify their abilities and careers in their performances; and the audiences who tune in to spectate preeminent competition. Games 'prestige' (alongside others in the 'magnitude' group) is thus a keystone value in the mediatization of the Games, driving media and societal interests that comprise it. Yet, how Games 'prestige' impacts the expression of values in Olympic media across various nations and cultures is another question worth asking, given its place as a foundational element of the Games belying oft-cited displays of nationalism. Given the global scope of the Games and the IOC's ambitions of global solidarity; comparable analysis of values across nations (and of the mediatization processes behind them), could provide invaluable insights towards understanding the Games as a global media mechanism for the communication of values, and their divergence (or lack of) across cultures. Relatedly, the significance of the mediatized environment in safeguarding the priority of Olympic values in the public domain should not be overlooked, particularly where discussions concerning relative deflections of ethical challenges to Olympic ideals are pertinent. Given the context of the Tokyo Games- amid an unprecedented global pandemic- the findings are especially demonstrative of the power of these mediatized interconnections in upholding institutional Olympic values before all others.

Media Processes and Games Structures

Media processes inherent to the format and programming of Games' competition can be seen as influential to the frames and values exchanged between athletes and journalists. Accredited media are afforded access to designated spaces, with athletes funnelled towards journalists post-competition (Li, Scott, Sharpe, Stokowski & Zhong, 2022). However, there is no predicting an Olympic result, and journalists await athletes unsure of their reactions. This uncertainty is compounded in the Olympic environment due to the vast number of sports and athletes competing in a condensed timeframe, and a restricted number of journalists who may have little or no experience in the sports they are covering (Trunecka, 2022). These conditions likely contribute to the formulaic approach revealed in the findings by both parties. Moreover, journalists must engage over events they may only have a basic knowledge of, and package their communication intelligibly to a similarly unfamiliar audience. Likewise, athletes appear aware that their Olympic audience may not be familiar with themselves or their sport, as exemplified in the following exchange with triathlete Hayden Wilde:

> J: Can you just tell us, I mean, it wasn't the greatest swim of your life, but um when you come out of the water like that what is your mindset, knowing that you can compete with these guys all the time? ('Perseverance' (JI), 'Composure' (JI)),

> HW: Yea…like if I had pre-race interview you would know that I'm not the strongest swimmer so um if anyone at home kind of um, didn't watch triathlon and saw me way back, it's pretty standard so um yea. ('Media' (AI), 'Audience' (AI)), (Sky New Zealand, 2021).

Such is the potential for unfamiliarity between journalists and athletes/sports, that the common context to the interaction, and the audience receiving, is the Games themselves. Returning to Goffman's (1974) frames as born of shared experiences and knowledge and considering the familiar roles within these interactions "that a particular front has already been established for" (Goffman, 1959, p.11); whether the athletes or their events are fully comprehended by the journalist and audience appears less relevant than the shared familiarity with the Games and the established values interred. Thus, awareness that audiences might only be exposed to individual sports once every four years, is another mediatized factor contributing to the consistent references to the nature of competing at the Olympics as a singular event, and the associated 'magnitude' (frame) and 'prestige' (value) delivered towards and by those who participate.

Journalists questions framing the 'magnitude' of the event frequently elicit like-framed responses, invoking values of 'prestige' and 'emotion' in particular, such as: "Emma, a historic day for Kiwi's on the water" (Sky New Zealand, 2021). Here the Games are an unspoken context underscoring what is historical about what has happened- New Zealand crews have won two gold medals and one silver at the Olympic rowing regatta. The athlete isn't asked for an emotion reaction, but the expectation is implied as the statement is made and the interaction passed on for the athlete to signal their agreement. This framing clearly invokes a belief that there is agreement between the journalist and the athlete, revealing how the expectation of shared values in context are propagated. The example also reveals how nationalism is seamlessly drawn into the narrative- the collective term 'Kiwi's' instantly recognizing the national context of achievement within the overarching significance of the Games themselves. Thus, even an example seemingly innocuous as this illuminates the tacit understandings between journalists and athletes that certain values are applicable and salient within the Olympic context.

Furthermore, media processes consistent with the interview format are also likely influences on the values-framing. The contribution findings show that athletes inserting values-frames into interview dialogues registered the highest contribution of values-frames across the interviews, while the combined values-frames of JI, AR and AN suggest that journalists played a near equal role in setting the values-framing agenda. It is significant to note, such is the nature of the role of interviewer (journalist) and interviewee (athlete); that athletes spoke for longer and in more detail than the questions posed to them by journalists, affording a greater opportunity to repeat or insert values-frames. They are also visually the focus of the interview, indicating the value of their contribution to

the dialogue. It is therefore striking that journalists maintained such influence over the values-frames communicated, suggesting they occupy a prominent role in establishing the values-framing agenda. The contribution data thus reinforces the depths of the mediatized connection, evidenced by the consistencies in values-framing contributions from both athletes and journalists.

Divergent Values-Frames: Laurel Hubbard and Valerie Adams

Despite these clear consistencies in the frames and values communicated across the interviews and contributors, it is worth discussing two notable exceptions, wherein athletes and journalists jostled to reconcile novel values-frames not seamlessly accommodated within the described Olympic interview values mandate.

Expanding the Frames: Laurel Hubbard in Tokyo

In Tokyo, Laurel Hubbard became the first openly transgender woman to compete at the Olympics, presenting a novel socio-cultural context pertinent to her performance and related media interest. Hubbard's interview focused on the magnitude of competing at the Olympics (1), her competition process (2), the structure of her sport (3), her journey to the Games (4) and the Games as a focus of media attention (7); a combination of typical contexts identified in the findings. However, the familiar contexts of Hubbard's interview are offset by her use of 'normalization' frames, wherein she directly aligns herself to values assumed to be associated with New Zealand Olympians by society at large. This alignment is especially important given Hubbard's participation in the Games is both unprecedented and controversial: a celebratory step for advocates for transgender rights; a point of contention among athletes and sports administrators, and a lightning rod for transphobic rhetoric (Scovel, Nelson & Thorpe, 2023; Kavoura & Jenzen, 2024). How these contentions are expressed by values-frames in Hubbard's interview are an intriguing reflection of both the journalist and Hubbard's attempts to nullify contentions among the audience and direct focus to her Olympic performance, as the following interaction captures:

> J: You had a near career-ending injury in 2018, what does it mean to you to have come out and competed on an Olympic stage**,** and made some history as well? (Perseverance (JI) , Prestige (JI), Legacy (JI)), (Sky New Zealand, 2021).

Here, the reference to making 'some history' clearly alludes to the significance of Hubbard's gender identity, although stops short of openly embracing her unprecedented inclusion in the Games. Instead of speaking to her unique experience, Hubbard chooses to focus on her athletic journey:

> LH: Well, I'm so grateful, that injury that I had back in 2018 was so traumatic that I never thought that I would ever compete again, and consequently everything that's happened since then has been a bonus, and I think that's why it's so hard for me to be too disappointed tonight because it's something that I never expected could be possible ('Perseverance' (AR), 'Difficulty' (AR), 'Gratitude' (AI)), (Sky New Zealand, 2021).

Hubbard's reluctance to engage in conversation regarding her inclusion is reinforced in a follow-up question, where the journalist acknowledges that Hubbard's inclusion has been controversial:

> How are you able to block out the periphery, the interest and just be you, get out there and perform and perform well for New Zealand? ('Media' (JI), 'Audience' (JI), 'Exceptionalism' (JI), 'Nationalism' (JI)), (Sky New Zealand, 2021).

At once complimentary of her performance and relatively non-confrontational in seeking Hubbard's feelings towards the controversy surrounding her; the question does not embolden Hubbard's willingness to embrace the uniqueness of her position, instead prompting an ever-normalizing response:

> Oh, that's a good question, um (looks down, pauses), I'm not sure it's possible for any person to really block out everything that's happening in the world, um but uh, you just do what you can and you get on with it ('Normalization' (AR)), (Sky New Zealand, 2021).

This exchange demonstrates a veiled screen of values-framing, whereby the audience is at once prompted to recognize the controversy around Hubbard, while stopping short of offering the values in contention (noted by Kavoura and Jenzen (2024) to be 'inclusivity' and 'fairness'). Somewhat contradictorily, in affording Hubbard the typical contexts and values-frames observed across the interviews, the audience is tacitly encouraged to respect her as an Olympic athlete regardless. Thus, while seemingly non-confrontational; the values-framing of Hubbard can be seen to reflect both audience and media expectations of Olympic coverage (established above), and the complex socio-cultural jostling in the background of Hubbard's participation in the Games- and the inclusion of transgender women in women's sport broadly. Moreover, Hubbard's example begs the question: What values-frames might have been contributed by the athlete in a more celebratory media environment? Thorpe, Nelson, Scovel and Veale's (2023) analysis of journalists' treatment of Hubbard found that her self-induced seclusion from media leading into the Games made it difficult for journalists to engage in advocating her inclusion. This may explain the journalist's tentativeness in applying values-frames regarding her inclusion, and Hubbard's subsequent downplaying of her significance, reinforcing that familiar connections between athletes and journalists are significant to the likelihood of their communicating novel or challenging values-frames (Mirer, 2023; Trunecka, 2021). Regardless, it is clear from this example that even subtle values exchanges between journalists and athletes in mediated spaces can prove crucial to determining the degree to which athletes embrace communication of novel or contentious values-frames, further suggesting that journalists have a significant influence on the scope for challenge to the values hierarchy within the confines of Olympic broadcast coverage. This finding is elaborated upon further in the following example featuring shot putter Valerie Adams.

Valerie Adams: Juggling Sacrifice and Success

The sacrifices made by Valerie Adams (as mother to two young children) in pursuing her fifth Olympics is a point of contention in the values-framing and an insightful example of values interplay between athletes and journalists. Here, the interviewing journalist appears confused as to how to interpret the values-hierarchy behind Adams' decision:

> J: Those are massive calls, massive sacrifices you've made, you haven't seen those two little humans for a couple of months, was the sacrifice worth it? ('Sacrifice' (JR), 'Family' (JR), 'Value/Worth' (JI)), (Sky New Zealand, 2021).

This proposition in itself, referencing something external suggestive of higher importance, is unprecedented across a sample littered with reverence for the prestigious Olympic Games and related athletic performances. Unlike Hubbard, Adams engages in negotiating the values-framing by acknowledging societal norms and expressing the emotional toll of her achievement, asserting her values position in priority of her Olympic achievement:

> 100%, that's hard, umm I'm gonna be away for about four months in total so…it's the price you pay for ahh, giving all you've got for these Olympic Games. I don't want to get to these Games and have any regrets whatsoever, and it's really important that we put ourselves in the best situation possible so, here we are ('Family' (AR), 'Value' (AR), 'Effort' (AI), 'Determination' (AI), 'Sacrifice' (AN)), (Sky New Zealand, 2021).

That Adams is pushed to justify her achievement in terms of her sacrifices, sees the journalist frame 'family' (particularly motherhood) as acceptable over the 'prestige' of the Olympics, reflective of what has (until recently) been the norm for generations of female athletes, whose sporting careers were constrained by socio-culturally bound familial obligations, with 'good' motherhood associated with assistive, subservient roles (Leberman & Palmer, 2009). While Adams' performance is acknowledged, that she is not unequivocally celebrated for her medal relative to her sacrifices as a mother, and instead pushed to qualify the value of her decision, demonstrates that values hierarchies in an otherwise ubiquitous interview format can and do appear in conflict with external socio-cultural values-hierarchies. In these cases, athletes can be seen as central to the mediatization of Olympic values in that they both represent and influence the values order, mediated for the world to see. The interplay between Adams and the journalist testifies to the balance each party negotiates in upholding social roles established for the media interaction, alongside external socio-cultural values that are not necessarily easily assimilated. Thus, mediatized values communication is not simply a cohesive process but also an iterative one, where values-frames are contested by athletes and journalists both as Games media agents and as members of society.

A limitation of this study is the difficulty with which it can be confidently stated that these values are unique to New Zealand athletes, and not common to the Olympic media environment more broadly.

As the first study of its kind examining and cataloguing communicated values in this medium, there are no other comparable studies against which such nationally-based socio-cultural claims can be asserted. The most that can be done, is to offer that there are consistencies in the values expressed here in those acknowledged in the New Zealand sports literature, suggesting these values are very much socially conditioned in the nation, even beyond the Games (Kohe & Warren, 2019; Ryan, 2007). Moreover, although many of the values here may be recognizable as those broadly associated with sport and the Games (e.g. 'effort, 'legacy' and 'prestige'), it should not be assumed that they are consistently framed in the same way across cultures, with further research required to identify any such consistencies or variability.

Conclusion

It is clear in the New Zealand context that the Olympic Games are considerably established in association with a concerted set of values, framed consistently across the media coverage, and compounded by the logics of media processes and Games structures. However, the findings also demonstrate that athletes maintain a capacity to diversify values-framing in Olympic interviews, and that journalists play a role in fostering an environment in which athletes feel emboldened to assert their own frames and values priorities. By doing so, athletes have the potential to bring insightful socio-cultural context to otherwise ubiquitous values-framing in the media format, grounding the Games as a mediatized production indicative of the time and place in which they take place. Yet, the striking consistency of the values-frame findings, and their compatibility with IOC values, begs the question: Do these influences and processes act similarly in other socio-cultural contexts? Finally, the combined methodological applications of Goffman's frame theory, values theory and mediatization theory demonstrates a novel use of compatible conceptualizations that proved effective for inductive analysis into the meanings underpinning the communications, and theorization as to the potential socio-cultural significance of media coverage and the influencing forces that shape it.

Introduction to Chapter Six: Research Stage Three

The following chapter presents the research and findings referred to in the introductory chapter as stage three of the thesis, in the form of a research article titled: *Mediatization, Nationalism and Socio-Cultural Layering: Values Communication and the Construction of the New Zealand Olympian Archetype on Facebook during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games*. This article is prepared for consideration by *Communication and Sport*.

At the outset of this study, I intended that the culmination of media samples analysed across the respective stages would combine to represent a meaningful representation of New Zealand media coverage. However, it was not anticipated that the latter sequential stages and samples would seemingly respond to the findings revealed in their predecessors. Yet, as it transpired, the insights regarding the significance of the athlete voice and their mediatized performances respective of their intended, national audience (illuminated in stage two) appears to predicate the sample and analysis of this third and final stage. Focusing on athlete Facebook posts and their subsequent audience comments; this chapter examines a curated, yet athlete-led communication of values as a facet of Olympic media coverage, and the responding values communicated by their audience in the comments.

This chapter presents as a rare example of social media analysis wherein a sample of 16 posts and 876 comments are qualitatively analysed for values communication, the first of its kind in the New Zealand context. To do so, a tandem thematic analysis was undertaken on the respective 'Posts' and 'Comments' samples, identifying the communication of values in context, and comparing contextual thematic trends between the two types of communicators and formats. The findings reinforce the prominent values revealed in stages one and two of the thesis, including the strong sense of nationalism inherent to values communications regarding athletes and Olympic competition. Furthermore, the revealed mediatized interplay between athletes and their audience, draws a greater focus in the discussion on the socio-cultural backdrop of New Zealand as an Olympic participant, and the roles and expectations of Olympians therein- important considerations highlighted in the overall discussion chapter.

Chapter Six: Mediatization, Nationalism and Socio-Cultural Layering: Values Communication and the Construction of the New Zealand Olympian Archetype on Facebook during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games.

Abstract

Social media platforms have become integral fixtures of the media-sport environment, and the Olympic Games have been no exception (Nölleke, Scheu & Birkner, 2021; Slater, Antunovic, Messer & Dreher, 2023). While authenticity is often cited as a key value of the social media "marketplace of attention", the communication of social values in athlete/audience interactions during the Games is yet to be examined (Webster, 2014, p.2). Acknowledging the structures of IOC rule 40, and Olympism as defining and prioritizing values within the Games; this study adopts a thematic analysis approach to examine communications by New Zealand athletes on Facebook and their associated audience comments, revealing a distinct cohesion of socio-cultural values through which the Games are communicated. The discussion interprets these findings through the lens of mediatization theory, suggesting that athletes target the national audience in their posts in accordance with socio-cultural and platform logics. The research proffers that these communications are observed as eliciting prideful and possessive audience responses, consistent with expectations conducive to the role of an ingrained New Zealand Olympian archetype.

Keywords: *Mediatization, Social Media, Facebook, Olympic Games, Thematic Analysis*.

Introduction

Beyond sheer size and scale, the Olympics are distinct from other sporting mega-events because they are deliberately constructed as the centrepiece of a moralistic doctrine dating back to the inception in 1894: Olympism. As such, the Games claim adherence to Olympic values, explicitly defined as 'excellence, respect and friendship' (Chatziefstathiou & Henry, 2012). Yet, as the Games are disseminated globally via licensed regional broadcast providers alongside various other non-accredited news, entertainment and social media outlets; the communication of Olympic values is thus also mediated through these diverse socio-cultural lenses (Fernández Peña, Natividad & Dolors, 2025; Slater, et al., 2023). Accordingly, analysis of media coverage of the Olympics has questioned national interpretations of the Games, often guided by literature surrounding the attachment of nationalist features in Games structures, viewing the Olympic stage as a platform for the assertion of national identities (Eagleman, Burch & Vooris, 2014; Mori, 2019; Wang, 2024). However, the rise of trans-national social media platforms has further blurred the lines of national media coverage of the Games, and thus calls for new approaches towards understanding socio-cultural distinctions in the communication of Games values.

Since 2012, social media platforms have become a feature of Olympic mediation, with wide-ranging impact on media dissemination, audience engagement, and fan interactions (Hutchins & Sanderson, 2017). Operating within an increasingly digitalized media-sport landscape, social media has opened communication exposure opportunities for athletes and fans alike (Abeza & Sanderson, 2022; Hutchins & Rowe, 2012). Platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and (in the case of this article) Facebook, are now essential components of athlete public relations (Schibblock, Hinds, Kopp & Schnitzer, 2022; Staley & Droux, 2025). Commercially, these platforms provide opportunities for athletes to receive endorsements, and fulfil sponsorship obligations (Staley & Droux, 2025). On a personal level, athletes use social media to shape identity narratives, communicating directly with their audience and sharing personal anecdotes on their own terms (Mori, 2019; Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012). As such, content posted by athletes to their social media accounts during the Olympics can offer important insights into how the athlete views themselves and their audience within a heavily commercialized, mediatized environment (Fernández Peña, et al., 2025; Horne, 2017; Licen, Antunovic & Bartoluci, 2022a). Furthermore, comments made by members of the public in response to athlete posts can appear to reflect societal receptions of the athlete and their position in the Games, providing a glimpse into the socio-cultural context in which athlete and audience interact (Schibblock, et al., 2022). Analysis of these interactions proffers a scope to interpret the role of athletes within the Games (and indeed the Games themselves) in terms of the values communicated, which, in turn, can be used to critically understand the meanings associated with the Olympics and Olympians in society (Horky & Budiasa, 2024).

The purpose of the article is to critically interpret athlete Facebook posts and audience comments in terms of values theory. It therefore examines how a sample of athletes from New Zealand communicated with followers during the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, and the degree to which the values they invoked either diverged from, or were reinforced by, the people who chose to respond publicly. This examination is based in a thematic analysis approach to the identification of values in context and is sensitized by mediatization theory, meaning the research interprets the socio-cultural framework shaping communications between athlete and audience members and explains the media processes that condition these interactions. The article shows that consistent, cohesive themes (and the values underpinning them) utilised by Olympic athletes, construct an athlete archetype of the New Zealand Olympian, and that this construction is reinforced within the mediatized Olympic social media environment.

Literature Review

Abeza and Sanderson (2022) describe the unique features social media facilitate in the sport media environment as offering “ease of networking, instant global reach, absence of gatekeeping, and ease of collaboration” which have made these platforms “remarkably powerful multipurpose tools” (p.284).

Social media sites have offered sports stakeholders diverse functions including: “live coverage, news updates, public relations, risk management, activism, promotions, sales, and relationship marketing” (Abeza & Sanderson, 2022, p.284). Studies examining social media and sport demonstrate a diversity of application and integration of these communication platforms to an equally varied array of sports, cultures, athletes and audiences, from community sport to professional leagues and mega-events (Chung & Goebert, 2025; Fernández Peña, et al., 2025; Grimmer & Horky, 2018; Wang, 2024). To the latter, Abeza and Sanderson (2024) and Hutchins and Rowe (2012) identify the London 2012 Games as a turning point in media production of the Olympics, with IOC President Jacques Rogge advocating the importance of spectator’s accessing the Games “through media that they are immediately comfortable with” (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012, p.76). The quote attests to both the accommodation and incorporation of social media into the mediation of the Olympics, but also the interconnection between sport and media, wherein sport must adapt to remain relevant, responding to emerging media technologies and audience consumption trends (Licen, Frandsen, Horky, Onwumechili & Wei, 2022b).

Broadly, the effects of social media on the mediation of sport has been to proliferate coverage across platforms, offering a constant stream of sports information and interactive opportunities for institutions, audiences and athletes alike (Hutchins & Sanderson, 2017). As Hutchins and Rowe (2012) and Schibblock, et. al. (2023) attest, the era of social media has seen events such as the Olympics become multi-platform media productions, spectated across multiple formats and devices simultaneously. Hutchins and Rowe (2012) coin this development the “transmedia sport experience” a pervasive complex that efficiently turns any, “even tangentially sport related topic into global news”(p.73). Here, Hutchins and Rowe (2012) echo a consensus in the scholarship that social media platforms are now widespread, entrenched components of media sport production, affording new opportunities for sports stakeholders to capitalize on, such as Soccer star Christiano Ronaldo’s reported $3 million dollar fee per sponsored Instagram post (Blair, 2025), or more contentiously, endorsements granted to influencer Morgan Riddle owing to her appearances at matches as Tennis star Taylor Fritz’s girlfriend (Testa, 2023).

Athletes, Social Media and the Olympics

Similarly, Social Media tools have provided opportunities for athletes to embrace control their public identity and communicate directly with audiences, by-passing traditional media avenues (Brison & Geurin, 2021; Mirer, 2025). Hutchins and Rowe (2012) describe social media as expanding the media attention athletes traditionally received, while affording greater autonomy with immediate feedback from fans and supporters (Brison & Geurin, 2021; Finlay, 2018). Furthermore, Schibblock, et. al. (2022) describe the social media ecology as an advantageous environment for athlete self-promotion, while Staley and Droux (2025) regard it as essential for maximizing athletes personal branding and scope for

attracting endorsements. Perhaps most tellingly, the IOC acknowledge the significance of social media to athletes at the Games, as stated ahead of the Tokyo 2020/21 Games:

> The implication of an association with the Olympic Games through use of athletes is particularly powerful during and immediately before the Olympic Games…it is hoped that the worldwide exposure provided to athletes participating in Tokyo 2020 through media coverage, including the IOC's global broadcast arrangements, can help raise their profile for years to come (International Olympic Committee, 2021a, pp.3-4).

This statement reveals the special relevance the IOC believe the Olympics to hold in society, and the leverage the mediated Olympic stage may afford to athletes seeking to market themselves, towards establishing an enduring, profitable media presence. The caveat here is that IOC restrictions (rule 40) limit any connection between athletes and the Games that may risk associations between athletes' personal sponsors and the Olympic brand. Additionally, athletes are dissuaded from engaging in the promotion of:

> (values) Incompatible with the values of the Olympic movement or the relevant NOC, for example: prohibitions on sponsorships in connection with tobacco, prohibited drugs and other categories e.g. alcohol, gambling and pornographic or immoral businesses (International Olympic Committee, 2021a, p.6).

Here, the moral underpinnings of the Games and their significance to the communication of the event are clear, alluding to a values framework informing how athletes are permitted to express themselves.

Furthermore, recent research describes an awareness among athletes that their public image isn't just about self-expression, but the creation of a public identity, curated somewhat by the interests of their fans and sporting public, including their home nation (Chung & Goebert, 2025; Horky, Grimmer & Theobalt, 2021; Jansen & Skey, 2020). The editorial control that athletes exercise over their identity on social media has been scrutinized in terms of Goffman's (1959) theories of self-presentation, particularly in terms of his references to front-stage/back-stage behaviour (Horky, et al., 2021; Smith & Sanderson, 2015). Taking this approach, Schibblock, et. al.'s (2022) study of athlete social media, including during the 2018 Winter Olympics, suggest motivations behind posts were "based on the public self and desire to please the audience by appearing in a pleasant and authentic light… (conforming to) … the general social norm" (p.267). The study notes a change in athlete posts during the Games period, accordingly with the strictures of IOC rule 40, but also on a moral level, with female athletes observed as including fewer sexualized posts (Finlay, 2017; Schibblock, et.al., 2022). This finding suggests that athletes understand that the Olympic environment transcends their personal image, incorporating a set of values consistent with IOC expectations of Olympic athletes. Additionally, Lebel and Danylchuk's (2012) investigation of Tennis players at the US Open revealed differing approaches between male and female players, with male players spending more time on Twitter engaging in sports fandom, while female athletes were more often observed to adopt a brand manager role, characterized by formal acknowledgements of contemporary events. Such observations

further suggest that athletes' socio-cultural identities outside of sport, including their ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, play a role in conditioning athlete posts favourably towards their perceived audience.

In light of these athlete behaviours, it is also important to consider the socio-cultural fabric of their audiences that engage with the Olympics. Eagleman et al. (2014) note that traditional media coverage of the Games has typically been tailored to nationally constructed audiences, encouraged by regional media ownership of broadcast rights (Billings & Eastman, 2002; Moretti, 2005). Eagleman et al.'s (2014) study of audience responses to London 2012 found that measures of nationalism increased in respondents after the Games, noting the "desire to watch one's own nation compete" and contending that "people tune in to watch their nation's athletes do well"(p.101). Alternatively, Mori (2019) takes a historical view, characterizing Olympic nationalism in the digital age as an omnipresent ideology inherent to the environment, while Tang (2013) regards nationalism as essential to the Games popularity and success. Collectively, these studies testify to the duality among the Olympic audience from the athlete's perspective: The national and the international. Furthermore, Eagleman, et. al. (2014) note that new media technologies have been less prone to biases based on nationality in their coverage than traditional media formats, although Slater et al.'s (2023) more recent study suggests broadcasters' use of social media has perpetuated nationalism in the Games. These somewhat conflicting conjectures reveal that the contribution of social media content to nationalism in mediation of the Games requires further examination. By examining the values communicated in athlete Facebook posts and audience comments on those posts, this research affords the scope to reveal any such nationalist tendencies.

Values, Mediatization and Society

Values theory is rooted in a long history of philosophizing regarding the function and role of values in society, and their embeddedness in society and culture (Lee, Whitehead & Balchin, 2000; Rokeach, 1973). Cheng and Fleischman (2010) note that values research has been fractured due to transdisciplinary application of terms, crediting the work of Rokeach (1973) in uniting conceptual approaches, wherein values represent:

> An enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence (Rokeach, 1973, p.5).

Rokeach's (1973) 'preference' is expanded upon by Robin Williams Jnr's (1979) description of values as a moral language, designating understandings of the desirable (valuable) and undesirable. Both these definitions consider 'values' as innate socio-cultural understandings, communicated through and to society in various ways. Towards identifying values in society, both Rokeach (1973) and Schwartz (1992) adopted survey approaches, with Rokeach (1973) delineating 18 values as instrumental

(invoking action) and another 18 terminal (end-state goals) values. However, the survey approach has been criticised for its limited imposition of values concepts, that may not be adaptive to the context of the respondent data (Lee et al., 2000). For example, the Rokeach (1973) survey supposes a total of 36 values derived from interviews with American adults, thus limiting the analysis to a concise list of prescribed values that may not be widely adaptive beyond this specific context. Alternatively, Cheng and Fleischman (2010) advocate for content analysis for discerning values, via informed interpretation and coding of contextually sensitive texts. In this space, Raymond Williams' (1961) theory of the 'structure of feeling' can be applied to understanding values in social media, as cultural content in which "human thought and experience are variously recorded" (Williams, 1961, p.41). Although not conceptualized in terms of values directly, William's (1961) descriptions of culture as ordinary and embedded in social life, speak to the omnipresence of cultural understandings throughout society, thus aligning contentions that values are inherent in communication. These theoretical interconnections thus underpin the examination of Facebook content in this study for the identification of values communicated by New Zealand athletes and their audiences.

Mediatization theory has been utilized to interpret the close interdependencies of sport and media, revealing the ways that each shapes the other (Licen, et al., 2022b). The theory posits that the exchange of influence between media and society is mutual, proffering a scope to acknowledge and interpret the relationship from both sides (Frandsen, 2020; Licen et al., 2022b). Applying mediatization as a 'sensitizing' lens to media content analysis, offers a theoretical framework by which to observe and interpret various contributing influences underpinning the construction and presentation of media communications (Frandsen, 2020; Jensen, 2013). By adopting this theory, interpreted values in media communications may also be considered in terms of the media and societal processes that shape them, such as the content frameworks and logics of social media sites.

To the point of media processes, metrics gathered and presented on the Facebook site offer users insights by which to tailor their content towards maximizing audience attention (Arcostanzo & Pulvirenti, 2015). Correspondingly, Hallinan, Scharlach & Shifman (2022) describe Facebook priorities of 'authenticity' and 'engagement' as key focusing values driving posts, while Gillespie (2018) attests that social media posts represent "tiny values assertions", identifying user interests and drawing salience to certain aspects (p.210). These values therefore, play a key role in identifying and connecting users to relevant (engaging) content. The juxtaposition of social media logics promoting high-impact content and the styling of Facebook as a platform for values communication, thus presents a pertinent media environment within which to conceptualise values communication in terms of mediatization theory (Klinger & Svensson, 2015; Shin, Lewis, Kim & Thorson, 2024; Van Dijck & Poell, 2013). Furthermore, Van Dijck and Poell (2013) note that social media sites' capacity to turn

user data into immediate indicators of popularity instils a latent mass media logic[7] of professionalism into "regular people" (p.5). Athletes offer a particular example of this professionalization of regular people, while another manifestation of the logic is to close the gap between athlete and audience, intimating a closer connection (Mori, 2019). While research has explored audience perceptions of athletes on social media, studies have yet to conceptualize these relationships in terms of social bonds based on the communication and reciprocation of values (Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Sanderson, 2009). By examining the communication of values on Facebook by both athletes' and their audience(s), this study foregrounds the socio-cultural connections underlying the interactions between them.

Finally, in order to interpret values it is important to consider the contextual socio-cultural attachments to the Games respective of the research sample. It is widely acknowledged that New Zealand places considerable importance on sport, including the Olympics (Bruce, Falcous & Thorpe, 2007; Kohe & Warren, 2019; Melnick & Jackson, 2002). Kohe and Warren (2019) detail the significance of New Zealand Olympians in society as role models, while Knight, MacNeill and Donnelly (2005) testify to New Zealand's national interest in the Games as a stage for demonstrating and inspiring effort and excellence. Such is the distinction of athletes in New Zealand society, that they have been identified as a group vulnerable to Tall Poppy Syndrome (TPS), a term developed by Australasian researchers to describe a shared cultural tendency of "denigrating or 'cutting down' those who are successful"(Kirkwood & Warren, 2019, p.103). Importantly, Kirkwood and Warren (2019) acknowledge that professional athletes in New Zealand actively work to combat TPS in their public communications strategies by encouraging the perception that their success is the result of "hard work and determination" (p.103).

As in many other countries, in New Zealand, sport has also served to elevate culturally marginalized groups, including Māori and Pacific peoples with Palmer (2007) noting "Māori sporting success is one of few media representations of Māori people and Māori culture that is celebrated and admired by New Zealand society in general"(p.312). Palmer (2007) describes New Zealand as a nation with a "bi-cultural past and multi-cultural future", with sport continuing to offer a context in which socio-cultural intersections contribute to an evolving sense of post-colonial national identity (p.308). Importantly, these cultural dynamics attest to the individual context of the selected nation in terms of the values that are expressed, and that this requires consideration in the research approach and analysis.

Methodology

Thematic analysis (TA) offers a framework for identifying "patterns of meaning" (themes) applicable to the communication of values (Braun, Clarke & Weate, 2016, p.294; Neuendorf, 2019). Rather than an

[7] 'Media logic is a concept developed by Altheide and Snow (1979), referring to the informing processes that drive media organizations interactions and decision making, and their consequent influences on society.

search for empirical truth, thematic analysis as used here, is described by Braun and Clark (2020) as a Big Q qualitative approach, in which interpretation of texts by the researcher is essential to discerning and describing patterns demonstrative of meaning. Here, the content for analysis is the data, with the contextual familiarity and expertise of the researcher furnishing the toolkit for interpretation of relevant themes (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012; Neuendorf, 2019). Not necessarily tied to a particular theoretical framework, TA enables the researcher to apply selected theories to the method in accordance with the needs of the research (Braun and Clark, 2020). Thus, TA can accommodate concepts from both mediatization theory and values theory, serving the research objective- to understand the values communicated and the mediatized processes that shape them. Furthermore, Braun, et al.'s (2016) discussion of TA for sport and exercise research describes the method as:

> Provide(ing) analyses of people's experiences in relation to an issue…It can identify patterns in peoples practices or behaviours related to, or their views and perspectives on, a certain issue (p.297).

This description aligns with the previous exposition of values theory describing values as a moral language underpinning communications and behaviours (Williams, 1979). In keeping with Braun and Clark's (2006, 2022) itemization of the various deployments of TA to qualitative samples, this research aligns with their description of a 'latent' approach to thematic analysis, in which coding and analysis centres around "ideas or concepts that underpin what is explicitly expressed"(Braun et al., 2016, p.296). The flexibility afforded by TA to iteratively code and reflexively analyse the data is useful here, as values communication could equally present explicitly as well as implicitly, contributing a combination of semantic and latent elements- as is acceptable within the methodology (Guest, et al., 2012). Furthermore, Guest, et al. (2012) recommends TA for the analysis of variable data sets, as applicable in this case due to the differing formats of Facebook posts and comments. While critics have cited a lack of repeatability of results as a limitation of TA, Braun and Clark (2020) and Morgan (2022) advocate that the interpretive intimacy between the researcher and data is a strength of the method, accepting the role of the researcher as essential to the understanding of meaningful themes. They go on to contend that TA does not claim to purport objective truths, but rather explorations of meanings as interpreted and rationalized by the researcher ()Braun & Clark, 2020; Morgan, 2022; Naeem, Ozuem, Howell & Ranfagni, 2023). However, Braun and Clark (2022) state that drawing descriptive examples from the data in support of thematic findings is essential to robust TA, contributing to a compelling narrative of the meanings expressed and woven through the themes.

The flexible, interpretive application of TA explained by Braun and Clark (2006; 2010) is selected as a suitable methodology by which to explore, identify and catalogue values communicated in the media texts, and to recognize patterns of values communication (themes). Accordingly, this study questions *what are the* values patterns underpinning interactions between New Zealand Olympic athletes and

their Facebook audience during the Tokyo 2020/21 Olympic Games, and *what can be interpreted* about the mediatization processes that shape them?

Athlete Selection

Eight athletes were purposively selected to ensure a diverse sample for analysis, with consideration given to : level of Olympic success, gender, cultural background, sport, and position in Games schedule (weeks one and two). Additionally, all athletes were required to have an openly accessible, active Facebook account during the Games.

Data Collection and Sample Cleaning

With the objective to identify and understand themes across the athlete and audience communication formats, the analysis was conducted in two stages. Interpretation, coding and thematic analysis were applied to athlete 'Post(s)' as a collective sample, and then to audience 'Comment(s)'. By doing so, themes could be compared between them, acknowledging the interactional relationship and differing platform formats.

The Facebook posts were observed between 16th July – 15th August 2021 (covering the period from one week before to one week after the Games), screenshotted and transcribed for analysis. A large sample of 78 posts and over 8,500 comments was produced, prompting the decision to narrow the selection to one post prior to competition (Post 1.) and one post afterwards (Post 2.). In cases where athletes had more than one post in either category, the post with the greatest number of comments was selected (Markula & Silk, 2011; Patton, 1990). Additionally, in cases where the athlete competed in multiple events or featured in iterative rounds of competition, the post with the most comments prior to the conclusion of their program was selected as the pre-competition post. The revised sample captured values both in anticipation of competition and afterwards, with the aim of reflecting nuances in values communication relative to athletes' outcomes and experiences. Further, while all posts featured images, I only analysed the text attributed to the posts, which allowed me to maintain a consistent, analytical focus on the articulation of values through language. This filter was also applied to comments- I excluded memes, images and emojis.

An initial familiarization of posts and comments was undertaken as a guide towards establishing coding and sample refining (Braun, et al., 2016; Neuendorf, 2019). Upon observation of comments, it became clear that many constituted little more than an impression of the athlete's post, including singular messages of 'Congrats' or Well done'. Thus, a clause minimum was applied to comments selected for analysis, with only comments of three clauses or more included, as those proffering requisite detail for values interpretation. The clause minimum proved an efficient mechanism for identifying qualifying comments (those offering 'values-sentiments'), with greater attention to

variation of expression than a word-count based model. The number of comments analysed per athlete and per post category, before and after sample cleaning, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Comments per athlete, Post 1 and Post 2.

Athlete, Sport:	Gender	Ethnicity	No. Comments Post 1	No. Comments Post 2	Total Comments
David Liti, Weightlifting	Male	Tongan	1	6	7
Emma Twigg, Rowing	Female	NZ European	35	27	62
Hayden Wilde, Triathlon	Male	NZ European	48	71	119
Lisa Carrington, Canoe	Female	Māori	133	81	214
Ruby Tui, Rugby	Female	Samoan	20	42	62
David Nyika, Boxing	Male	European/Ugandan	129	85	214
Lewis Clareburt, Swimming	Male	Māori	119	8	127
Ella Williams, Surfing.	Female	NZ European	19	52	71
Total Comments:			504	372	

A total of 876 comments were analysed across the data set, 504 comments in the Post 1. sample, and 372 in Post 2.

Coding and Thematic Interpretation

Robust TA requires the objectives to be clearly stated, and the rationale for coding and organization of themes consistent and justified (Guest, et al., 2012). Accordingly, the following operational definition of values, derived from Rokeach (1973), was applied as a framework for identifying values in the data:

> Relative notions of the desirable or undesirable, communicated explicitly or implicitly in the media text, discourse or dialogue.

All codes met this criterion for values identification, determined inductively to isolate the values communicated. Coding was a reflexive process undertaken by a single coder, ensuring like-values-represented by recording the textual sentiments encapsulating them- were collated under respective codes, and that codes could be adapted or added to definitively distinguish the values invoked (Braun & Clark, 2020, 2022).

A second layer of inductive analysis was applied to organizing codes into themes relative to their promotion of values in context. This process allowed for a consistent, reflexive approach to recognizing and cataloguing patterns of values communication, ensuring a robust interpretation of

inherent themes (Braun & Clark, 2020). These themes are named and described below, in accessible terms to the reader, alongside their codes and supported by direct examples from the texts (Braun & Clark, 2022).

Findings

The thematic findings are presented according to their respective 'Post(s)' and 'Comment(s)' samples. Themes identified in the athletes' 'Posts' sample are presented alongside the associated values (codes) in Table 2.

'Post' Themes

The analysis produced four cohesive themes, broadly relating to the athlete's experiences in the Games. Themes crossed both Post 1 and Post 2, with only minor imbalances (this was partially impacted by the two athletes for whom Post 1 referred both to prior performances and prospective ones). However, because these themes applied to both post categories the Olympics itself clearly provides the requisite context for achievement upon which communications are based.

My Olympics to Me

This theme relayed aspects of the athletes' journey to the Games, and reflections on their experiences therein. Examples such as: "It's just such a huge honour to be selected for the Tokyo Olympics." (Tui, 2021a, 'Olympic Excellence', 'Achievement', 'Honour', Post 1.), demonstrated the significance of the Olympic achievement to the athlete, relaying an immediate reflection of what it has taken to get there, and to participate: "Today I get to surf as an Olympian" (Williams, 2021a, 'Olympic Excellence', Post 1.). The theme of appreciating the Olympics in the context of meaning to the athlete was also interpreted in post-competition posts, including:"4 years ago I was digging holes and building retaining walls, Four years later standing on the podium @Olympic games" (Wilde, 2021b, 'Journey', 'Achievement', Post 2.). Here, the reflection on the athletes life before the Games gives a sense of the surreal, affording magnitude to the event. These examples demonstrate the core thematic contention- that the Games mark a pinnacle of achievement, rendering value upon reflections on their significance.

'Olympic Moment' and 'The Olympic Stage'

Similarly, the 'Olympic Moment' theme continued athletes' reflection on the Games, highlighting gratitude and acknowledgement of those supporting them, such as: "Thanks so much to everyone who has supported me…I am so extremely grateful to have an awesome team here in Japan." (Williams, 2021b, 'Support', 'Gratitude, Post 2) and "There are so many people who make my success possible" (Carrington, 2021b, 'Support', 'Gratitude', Post 2.). Further, the theme also reflects an anticipation among athletes that their 'Olympic Moment' premises an audience receptive to such acknowledgements. This sense of audience attention thus recognizes the media visibility afforded to the Games and the achievements therein.

'The Olympic Stage' theme is distinct from the 'Olympic Moment' in comprising values athletes' associate with their role before the audience and the significance of their performances- particularly to the nation: "It's an exciting time for our sport. I hope watching (The NZ Team)...made you proud and has inspired you to chase your own dreams" (Carrington, 2021b, 'Inspiration', Post 2.). This example also emphasizes Olympic exposure to the nation, that by representing New Zealand at the Games, the athlete perceives themselves as garnering widespread national relevance, and an awareness of the 'inspirational' impact of their mediated performance.

The Making of an Athlete

This theme coalesces communications of qualities considered instrumental to athlete success. 'Effort' in particular referred to challenges inherent to the Games, invoking values regarding the application, consistency and concentration required such as: "Dream big, work hard, stay focused" (Wilde, 2021a, 'Preparation', 'Effort', 'Focus', Post 1.). Others foregrounded their perseverance and determination over their career leading to this point: "it's the small sparks, which start small fires, that eventually build enough heat to burn the whole f***ing forest down." (Twigg, 2021b, 'Perseverance', 'Determination', Post 2.). Such expressions both justify the athletes' achievements, and offer insight to those following their examples. The theme also relayed values athletes associated with competition, imbuing their roles with more than just sporting skill and execution: "I have nothing but respect for my opponent and can appreciate the frustration he must have felt" (Nyika, 2021a, 'Respect', 'Compassion', Post 1.). Thus, the theme captured athletes descriptions of themselves as athletes, and the example they seek to convey.

Table 2.

Themes and Values Identified in Athlete Posts 1 and 2.

Values per Theme/Post								
Themes:	**'My Olympics to me'**		**'Olympic Moment'**		**The Making of an Athlete**		**The Olympic Stage**	
Athletes:	Post 1	Post 2	Post 1	Post 2	Post 1	Post 2	Post 1	Post 2
David Liti:	Journey, Growth.	Achievement, Legacy.		National Representation.	Effort.			
Emma Twigg:		Journey, Experience, Achievement.	Following, Support.	Support, Family, Gratitude, National Representation, Pride.		Determination, Perseverance.		Impact.
Hayden Wilde:		Journey, Experience, Achievement.	Support, Commercial Support.	Humility.	Confidence, Effort, Determination, Preparation, Focus.		Aspiration.	
Lisa Carrington:	Achievement, Legacy.	Experience, Cultural Identity, Achievement.	Support, Gratitude.	Following, Support, Commercial Support, Family, Gratitude, National Representation.	Focus.	Commitment, Teamwork, Kindness.		Inspiration.

Ruby Tui:	Excitement, Achievement, Olympic Excellence, Honour.	Development, Opportunity, Experience, Achievement, Olympic Excellence.	Support, Gratitude.		Effort.	Teamwork.	Aspiration.	
David Nyika:			National Representation.		Respect, Competition. Kindness, Compassion.	Respect, Sportsmanship, Camaraderie.		
Lewis Clareburt:		Opportunity	Gratitude, Pride	Gratitude.	Effort.	Determination		
Ella Williams:	Olympic Excellence.	Journey, Experience, Olympic Excellence, Legacy.	National Representation, Pride.	Support, National Representation, Sporting Community, Pride.				Visibility.

'Comment' Themes

It was intriguing to compare the above four themes within the athlete posts with the seven identified in the audience comments (Table 3.), with clear consistencies emerging thematically and in the associated values. The coded data collected is exhibited numerically here not as quantitative justification of the themes themselves, but to offer insight into the relative prevalence of codes pertaining to themes between the two post types.

Table 3.

Themes and Values identified in Comments for Athlete Post 1 and 2.

	Themes:							
Post:	Detailing Impression	Wilful Anticipation	Approximal Relatability	Possessive Nationalism	The Athlete Archetype	The Olympic Journey	Restoring Justice, gifting hope.	Outliers
Post 1.	Congratulations (161), Pride (161), Superlative (121), Skill Affirmation/Praise (155), Achievement (74), Inspiration/Role Model (71), Legend/Status (37).	Well Wishes (222), Support (51), Excitement (50), Confidence (47), Enjoyment (29), Health and Safety (4).	Following (64), Family (4), Personal (26), Rest/Break (2), Location in NZ (49), Location-Overseas (14), Connection (15), Fan (5), Sport Community (13).	National Support & Legacy (59), Collective ('us'/'we') (58).	Effort (77), Commitment/ Determination (6), Humility (22), Altruism/ Sportsmanship (13), Professionalism (3), Compassion (4), Competitive Spirit (1), Olympic values (1).	Journey/ Culmination (48), Opportunity (3).	Deservedness (18),Thanks (13).	Sportsmanship -victim (15).
Post 2.	Congratulations (193), Skill Affirmation/Praise (140), Pride (128), Superlative (121), Achievement (65), Inspiration/Role Model (70), Legend/Status (32). Wahine Toa (4).	Enjoyment (22), Support (15), Excitement (15), Confidence (5), Health and Safety (3), Well Wishes (48).	Following (40), Personal (31), Location in NZ (26), Rest/Break (34), Connection (20), Location-Overseas (10), Fan (5), Family (4), Cultural Identity (7), Sport Community (9).	National Support & Legacy (77), Collective ('us'/'we') (38).	Effort (55), Humility (18), Commitment/ Determination (16), Altruism/ Sportsmanship (15), Strength (4),	Journey/Culmination (62), Future (10), Opportunity (1).	Deservedness (38),Thanks (27).	Commiseration/fairness (2), Religion (1), Gender Equality (1).

Totals (Post1. / Post 2):	45.45%/55.49%	23.48%/7.96%	11.19%/13.71%	6.82%/8.47%	7.40%/3.91%	2.97%/5.38%	1.81%/4.79%	0.87%/0.29%

Detailing Impression

'Detailing Impression' was broadly prominent, typified by references to the athlete's achievements, specifically the valuing of their performances based on the impression or *impact* on the audience member. This included celebrations of the athlete, such as: "I think you're amazing Emma" (Menendez, 2021, posted to Twigg, Post 2. 'Superlative'), descriptions of inspiration: "You are an awesome role model to my sons" (Tremain, 2021, posted to Liti, Post 1. 'Inspiration/Role Model') and their own pride: "So proud of you" (Walker, 2021, posted to Clareburt, Post 1. 'Pride' Post 1). Thus, these sentiments conveyed a desire to identify and communicate *who* and *what*, the audience member deemed impressive.

The term 'Wahine Toa' is included here as a distinct Te Reo Māori expression of admiration. Wahine (woman), combining with 'Toa', evokes various applicable meanings in this context, including: 'victorious', 'brave', 'strong', and 'warrior' (Hurst & Leberman, 2015). The term exclusively described Lisa Carrington, a triple gold medallist, who also foregrounded her Māori heritage in her posts. In these cases, 'Wahine Toa' received its own code, due to its distinctive, repeated use celebrating the athlete. However, cross-over relevance to the 'Approximal Relatability' theme is noted given the use of Te Reo invoking cultural belonging, and thus posits a dual resonance with the 'Cultural Identity' code.

Wilful Anticipation

'Wilful Anticipation' communicated audience hopes for athletes and their performances, such as: "Go smash your next goals" (Murray, 2021, posted to Carrington, Post 1, 'Well Wishes'), and "I look forward to seeing you accept your Olympic medal." (Dickson, 2021, posted to Nyika, Post 1.,'Confidence'). Additionally, values shared in the auspiciousness of the occasion, such as: "Enjoy this moment" (Pickles, 2021, posted to Wilde, Post 2., 'Enjoyment') and looked ahead to the future: "Can't wait to watch your Pro career." (Reid, 2021, posted to Nyika, Post 2., 'Excitement'). These values thus register commenters' investment in the athletes', communicating their hopes and expectations within the Games, and beyond.

Possessive Nationalism

'Possessive Nationalism' captured values sentiments wherein commenters' claimed the athlete as representative of their nation, shared in their 'national' success, or postulated national significance. Communications indicated a collective, national interest in the athlete, including: "The whole of NZ is behind their golden girl." (O'Brien, 2021, posted to Carrington, Post 1., 'National Support & Legacy'), and a shared sense of nationhood: "Giving us our first medal of the Games" (Day, 2021, posted to

Wilde, Post 1., 'National Collective (us/we/our)'). These sentiments often combined with pride, such as: "Our whole country is proud of you." (Stephens, 2021, posted to Twigg, Post 2., 'National Collective', 'Pride'). However, these were distinct from 'Pride' values under 'Detailing Impression', as requiring an acknowledgement of national belonging.

The phrase 'Team of Five Million' was also observed as communicating national support (e.g. "Backed by team of 5 million" (Hawke, 2021, posted to Clareburt, Post 1.). This is notable given the extensive promotion of the phrase within the New Zealand government's pandemic response rhetoric (Hafner & Sun, 2021). This was a rare insight within the data contextualizing the surrounding pandemic- which was of negligible mention within the communications.

The Athlete Archetype

This theme mirrors the 'Making of an Athlete' theme in the 'Post' analysis, capturing communications in which athlete qualities are valued, either as serving in competition, or admired in their conduct. These included 'Effort', such as: "You put in the hard yards and now look at ya" (Rae, 2021, posted to Tui, Post 2.) and 'Commitment/Determination', coded together owing to a shared application towards athletes' dedication: "You didn't give up, you never quit" (Clarkin, 2021, posted to Nyika, Post 2.). Furthermore, 'Humility' was widely praised across the sample, including: "I love how down to earth and real you are" (Taylor, 2021, posted to Twigg, Post 2.). These values, reinforced by additional praising of 'Altruism/Sportsmanship' , 'Professionalism', 'Compassion', 'Competitive Spirit' and 'Olympic Values'; combine to reflect a social paradigm of the hardworking, dedicated and humble athlete- a notably consistent archetype across both athlete and audience communications.

Approximal Relatability

'Approximal Relatability' captured communications of connection from commenters to athletes, indicating a value by association. These values-sentiments appeared on a spectrum of proximity. 'Follower' communicated a commitment to watching the athlete compete: "I've loved watching you over the years" (Baker, 2021a, posted to Carrington, Post 1.), while 'Fan' emphasized admiration for the athlete, with both sentiments acknowledging a remote position: "You bring such joy to your kiwi sporting fans like me!" (Towes, 2021, posted to Carrington, Post 1). Bringing the connection closer, values-sentiments in 'Location NZ' communicated *where* in the country the commenter and athlete shared belonging: "Hey Ella, you'll always be top of the podium to us back here in Whangamata!" (Hughes, 2021, posted to Williams, Post 2.). Closer still, 'Personal' values-sentiments conveyed commenters anecdotes recalling encounters with the athlete, or relatable experiences from their own lives, such as: "I have been tied up with sports…I have seen some of the best sportsmen in NZ your attitude puts you right at the top" (Burfield, 2021, posted to Nyika, Post 1). Finally, 'Family' referenced a direct proximity by family connection, such as: "Congrats Hayden we are friends of your grandparents

Nita and Bruce we have watched you thru them for a very long time" (Arlidge, 2021, posted to Wilde, Post 2.).

'Cultural Identity' was coded as denoting a collective belonging more specified than national ties. These were identifiable both through use of language, and in explicit statements of cultural relevance, such as: "Kapai sister….you're a legend and an inspiration to all wahine and Māori." (Davis, 2021, posted to Carrington, Post 2). Notably, the use of Te Reo Māori was considered a communication of connection on two levels: As casual integrations with English typical of everyday language, and as intentional statements of cultural belonging. Delineating the two, use of Te Reo was identified as drawing on an inclusive bi-cultural heritage and included under 'Possessive Nationalism' such as: "You made Aotearoa NZ so proud with your bronze medal" (Bridge, 2021, posted to Wilde Post 2., 'National Support and Legacy'). Alternatively, use of Te Reo could communicate a deliberate emphasis on belonging to, and/or representing Maoridom, including: "Wahine toa, wahine ma. Arohanui Lisa Carrington…your achievements! AUE EHOA[8]."(Baker, 2021b, posted to Carrington, Post 2., 'Cultural Identity'). These cases were included under 'Approximal Relatability' due to their highlighting of cultural ties between the athlete and their indigenous community.

Furthermore 'Cultural Identity' codes were also attributed to comments highlighting athletes' Pacific heritage (Ruby Tui and David Liti) including features of Samoan and Tongan languages respectively. Finally, "Sporting Community' values also conferred connections of belonging alongside the athlete, including through the use terminology: "The high school swimmers were cheering you on the big screen at NAC after NZSS" (Wilson, 2021, posted to Clareburt, Post 1.). Here, the inference is that the commenter and athlete share knowledge of these acronyms, identifying the audience member as a contextual 'insider'.

Restoring Justice and Hope

'Restoring Justice and Hope' communicated appreciation, for the athlete achieving a 'Deserved' result: "So deserving of the medals and accolades" (Destounis, 2021, posted to Carrington, Post 1.), and for the athlete's performance: "Thank you for inspiring NZ swimmers" (Lochray ,2021, posted to Clareburt, Post 1., 'Thankfulness'). Similar to 'Inspiration/Role model' codes collected under 'Detailing Impression' (and 'The Olympic Stage' theme); here athletes appear as a litmus test for the viability of aspiration for New Zealander's, combining with 'approximal relatability' and 'possessive nationalism', to communicate a sense of emboldening associated with Olympic performances, reassuring beliefs in upward mobility through sport, and the ability of New Zealander's to succeed internationally.

[8] This comment translates as: "Brave/strong woman…Love to you Lisa Carrington…your achievements! Wow my friend!"

The Olympic Journey

Finally, 'The Olympic Journey' echoes sentiments invoked by athletes in 'My Olympics to Me'; wherein the Games are valued as a pivotal, often reflective, moment in the athlete's career, such as: "Gonna be an epic race! Embrace it, what an experience!" (Henderson-Corporaal, 2021, posted to Wilde, Post 1., 'Journey/Culmination'). Interestingly, neither athletes nor their audience referenced the postponement of the Games, or any unique challenges pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as health or economic impacts of the illness on themselves or family, or disruptions to training and/or qualifying processes given the one-year postponement.

Discussion

The findings reveal a collective narrative of intersecting themes, inclusive of athlete posts and audience comments, summarized as:

- The excellence of, and reverence for the Games.
- Desirable actions and conduct of New Zealand athletes.
- The national significance of athletes' participation and achievement on the Olympic Stage.

It is noteworthy that all comments were positive, conveying desirable values associated with the athletes and the Games- an anomalous finding compared to a recent longitudinal study revealing widespread abuse of athletes on social media, although potential censorship of undesirable comments by athletes moderating their accounts must be acknowledged here (World Athletics, 2024b). Despite the possibility that athletes removed negative comments, however, the overwhelming positivity of the comments that did feature is important: not only were there no negative comments; neither were there neutral or ambivalent ones. The consistencies between athlete and audience values communicated in the themes thus suggest a common awareness of suitable values communicated in the Olympic context and a general adherence to these ideals (Fernández Peña, et al., 2025). Moreover, the values underpinning the themes are consistent with the literature regarding Olympism values (Excellence in particular), the significance of sport and sportspeople in New Zealand society, and the pervasive nationalism that pervades and permeates the Games (Billings, et al., 2018a; Slater et al., 2023). When considering these themes under the lens of mediatization theory, the findings reveal intensely concentrated socio-cultural ideals coalescing around a consistent New Zealand Olympian archetype, proliferated and reinforced through intersecting societal and media logics. In simple terms, this archetype describes a hard-working, humble and inspirational role model, celebrated as representative of national achievement and potential.

Athlete Posts: Situating Socio-Cultural Identity

Thematic consistencies across the athlete posts revealed little variety in the information athletes deemed salient to their audience, and the values therein. Themes 'My Olympics and Me' and 'The

Making of an Athlete' both offered insights into values athletes deemed relevant to their success, either in reaching the Games or through their Olympic achievements. However, the consistent communication of values such as 'Effort', 'Determination', 'Commitment' and 'Humility'; revealed that athletes sought to justify their success by highlighting instrumental qualities. Crucially, there are no mentions of talent, skill or superior execution by the athletes, but rather 'Gratitude' communications, exhibiting their 'Humility'. This finding is significant, suggesting that it is incongruous for New Zealand athletes to celebrate their talent or skill in communications with the public, intimating a complete internalisation of TPS.

The celebration of instrumental values is also reflected in audience comments; simultaneously venerating athletes for their success, while underscoring social conditions for their reverence, as exemplified here: "You're an amazing inspirational lady! Your dedication, hard work and humbleness are what makes you so amazing." (Bakani, 2021, posted to Carrington, Post 2). That this style of humble affirmation is such a widespread practice among athletes and audience, further resonates with Kirkwood and Warren's (2019) summations of TPS in New Zealand and its special applicability to athletes, where the pervasiveness of the success-qualification dichotomy positions these values as embedded in athlete identity constructions (Pierce, et al., 2017). The further reiteration by commenters suggests that they are also considerably culturally established, including as a feature of national identity and pride, encapsulated here: "So proud to be kiwis, because of sports people like you who are gracious and respectful to others regardless....it's the kiwis way" (Motu, 2021, posted to Nyika, Post 1). Thus, values of 'Humility' and the need to ground Olympic success in instrumental qualities can be considered on two levels: The perception of the athlete before the national audience, and the reception of New Zealander's on the international stage (Cvitanovich, 2026; Pierce, Hodge, Taylor & Button, 2017; Rahman & Lockwood, 2011).

Alongside the examples provided under 'The Olympic Stage', communications of instrumental athlete qualities can be recognized as empowering the inspiring example athletes perceive themselves to embody (Rojek, 2001). Not only do athletes communicate their own value of these qualities (and other variables such as 'Support', detailed in 'Olympic Moment'), but their thematic prevalence alongside values of 'Inspiration' ('The Olympic Stage') suggests of a sense of duty to relay these values to their audience - recognizing their own success and fulfilling an obligation embedded in their New Zealand Olympian role. In turn, themes denotes a clear construction of what it means to be a New Zealand Olympian- to both achieve and empower on the Olympic Stage. Collectively, these themes highlight this awareness on behalf of athletes, suggesting an intrinsic connection to societal values associated with their role as New Zealand Olympians and what they represent to the nation (Kohe & Warren, 2019). That the entirety of comments analysed were positive may suggest that this selection of athletes were successful in meeting such expectations. Moreover, a consequence of this sense of

obligation, whereby athletes curate their Facebook communications in line with national values, is that they can appear to commit themselves to directing communications towards the national audience, despite the global context of the competition.

Athlete Attachments and Socio-Cultural Layering

Considering athlete perceptions of their audience in terms of mediatization theory, it is important to reconcile these communications within the social media environment in which they take place. Social media sites (including) Facebook have been widely cited as marketplace(s) of attention, with posts that successfully capture and hold the audience's attention promoted in newsfeeds over others, measured by engagement metrics such as comments (Klinger & Svensson, 2015; Van Dijck & Poell, 2013; Webster, 2014). Therefore, athletes' curation of communications in favour of a national athlete archetype can also be considered a tactical move for attracting and maintaining the audience perceived to have the most interest in them. Moreover, choosing the archetypal national athlete as the default persona also can be considered a downstream effect of the nationalist structures embedded in the Games, wherein athletes as representatives of their nations are more likely to garner attention on a national level and thus angle their social media to satisfy that audience (Eagleman et al., 2014). Evidence from the 'Possessive Nationalism' theme reinforces this claim, revealing a strong sense of connection among the audience to the nation, and their athletes by extension.

Furthermore, the 'possessiveness' over athletes collated under 'Possessive Nationalism' also exhibits inward, wherein athletes are 'claimed' by commenters by flagging shared geography, community, culture and experiences. In addition to athlete celebrations of cultural identity, these expressions (coded to 'Approximal Relatability') serve to establish a proximity of connection between the athlete and the audience member beyond a collective belonging to the nation. This connection was significant among Māori, interpreted by invocations of Te Reo indicative of expressions of an inclusive national identity, as well as explicit references to Māori cultural identity, such as: "He wahine toa. He wahine Māori tuturu. Mauri Ora" (Baty, 2021, posted to Carrington, Post 2.) (A brave woman, a true Māori woman, Mauri Ora[9]). The quote demonstrates the claiming of the athlete in cultural terms, designating Carrington as representing what it means to be a powerful Māori woman, and her recognition and celebration by Māori. A gendered expression, this example draws attention to a connection point between the athlete and a specific socio-cultural identity, celebrating the athletes representation on those terms. Building on themes 'Olympic Stage' and 'Possessive Nationalism', such examples describe a symbolic function of athletes in New Zealand society, and the significance of their representation, attending to and connecting with, various points of socio-cultural belonging (Critanovich, 2026). Audience members both join athletes' setting of the socio-cultural identity agenda, and take it upon themselves to insert connection points, posturing their proximity to the

[9] "Mauri Ora" refers to an enlivened state of wellbeing or presence of mind (Lipsham, 2023).

athlete, and foregrounding specific identities before their fellow audience. These expressions of connection bring to focus the significance of representation for a multi-cultural society under the banner of the nation, with athletes serving as socio-cultural sub-flags defined both by self-presentation and audience attachments. Thus, as the facilitator of post/comment interaction; Facebook emerges as a platform where socio-cultural fan communities are explicitly visible, defining and congregating around who or what is worthy of their designation. However, the consistency in the themes further reveals that the values characterizing athletes on Facebook are significantly nationally aligned. This therefore supports the case for understanding the values associated with New Zealand Olympic athletes in terms of an embedded national athlete archetype, inherently familiar and accepted throughout society, regardless of cultural, experiential or community distinctions.

Additionally, these instances of socio-cultural attachment to athletes universally bolster existing elevations of the athlete, attaching a stratification beneath them wherein audience members jostle to assimilate their own distinctions. That 'Approximal Relatability' is widely applied to the athletes- including established champions, medallists and debut athletes- suggests that the prestige of the Games (and subsequent status of New Zealand Olympians) determines the common ground for admiration. It is therefore pertinent to consider how the Olympic environment impacts these manifestations uniquely, compared to other sporting contexts, such as the All Blacks mentioned by Kirkwood and Warren (2020). To this point, it is worth nothing that the institutional doctrine of Olympism is also reflected in these values identified in the New Zealand context, with ideals of sportsmanship, camaraderie and fair-play' are very much compatible with the identified values 'Humility' and 'Gratitude', contextualized by the 'Making of an Athlete' and 'Athlete Archetype' themes (Kohe & Warren, 2018, Kirkwood & Warren, 2020). Furthermore, in light of Kirkwood and Warren's (2019) discussion of TPS and New Zealand sport; it is reasonable to proffer that athletes' concentrate on the national Olympic audience in proactive recognition of the Olympic values and platform, and as a conciliatory gesture acknowledging national socio-cultural expectations. As such, recognition of the national audience and their support offers an olive branch to would-be critics, inviting them to share in a stake of the glory. The success of this agreement is demonstrated in the 'Possessive Nationalism' findings, wherein these values are accepted and proliferated by the audience. Thus, while these values may be viewed generally as justifications of success typical of New Zealand society, they nonetheless garner a distinct pertinence in the contemporary, mediatized Olympic environment. Moreover, the celebration of the Games and Olympic achievement across the posts and comments also suggests a widespread veneration of the event- at least during Games time- likely correlating with intense, multi-media communication of the Games (Hutchins & Sanderson, 2017).

Facebook Logics and Olympic Exposure

Notably, all the comments analysed (exemplified above) appeared in the form of statements-messages to the athletes without question, or prompt to suggest expectation of interaction. While any such expectations cannot be inferred by this observation alone, it can be considered that the comments may serve an additional function for the commenter, signalling their values and priorities to their own social network. Building on this point, the findings observe that comments on posts were not necessarily chronological, with instances of posts celebrating the outcome of the athletes' events appearing on pre-competition posts, common across the sample. These chronological mis-matches suggest that comments can serve independently of the posts they appear in connection with, not necessarily in response to the specific post. This variability suggests that the act of adding a comment to an athlete's post may simply fulfil the individual's desire to communicate their endorsement, rather than an attempt to engage in an interaction. Conceptualised as such, athlete posts on Facebook effectively serve as supporter's hubs, with those who comment publicly co-signing their support - a digital version of a supporters jersey - for both the athlete and the wider social network to behold.

Assuming this analogy, the act of commenting on an athlete's post presents as a mediatized mechanism, a function of the second-screen approach to sports consumption with digital media facilitating direct fan engagement alongside traditional media coverage (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012). Specifically, the post-comment format offered by Facebook serves to structure communication behaviours surrounding what it means to be spectators of sport- to express support for athletes and to celebrate sporting nationalism. While research has explored fan interactions on various athlete and fan blogs and websites, there remains much to be revealed as to the use of athlete social media pages as facilitators of supporter interactions. Considering that these posts are accessible via the athlete's page, or prompted in users newsfeeds via the Facebook algorithm, they may attract both purposeful fans/followers, and those responding to (media logic) prompts (Klinger & Svensson, 2015; Van Dijck & Poell, 2013). Indeed, to what degree are comments opportunistic in nature- placing athlete audience engagement at the mercy of algorithm logics and event factors such as scheduling? This question is particularly relevant in the Olympic multi-sport mega-event context, where athletes contend for media attention (Billings, et al., 2018a). Considering the facets of nationalism identified in the themes, the convenience and timing of posts on social media and their visibility to the audience, presents as another piece of the Olympic-nationalism puzzle. Future research into the linked roles of traditional media and social media in facilitating nationalist coverage and narratives, may further illustrate these trends as mediatized behaviours.

Considering the above, several questions emerge: What do these mediatized fan behaviours mean for the athletes who seek to address them? Do athlete posts regarding performances in their sport outside of the Games remain informed by the same vignette of the 'New Zealand Olympian', or do they,

as in Schibblock, et al.'s (2022) study, fulfil more personal and promotional motivations? Given Kirkwood and Warren's (2019) identification of TPS as a broad condition in New Zealand society; does the humility central to the New Zealand Olympian archetype remain integral to athlete social media identity outside of the intensity of the national focus brought with the Games? There is a premise here for socio-cultural tension, wherein athletes seek to support and promote themselves by leveraging the commercial, international Olympic stage, while remaining aligned to these national socio-cultural values (Schibblock, et al., 2022). While superstar gymnast Simone Biles has openly claim status as the G.O.A.T in her sport, similarly qualified and certified humble kiwi Lisa Carrington appears a stark contrast (BBC Sport, 2021). These differences beg the question, what bearing does the New Zealand archetype have on athletes' abilities to capitalize on their Olympic image at home or in international markets? To the issue of marketing, Rahman and Lockwood (2011) and Rojek (2001) have identified contradictions between Olympic authenticity and promotional logics in professional sports marketing, however, in the case of social media, aligning with Van Dijck and Poell's (2013) professionalization of regular people, it is important to consider that many Olympic athletes do not have public relations resources at their disposal. This consideration makes the consistencies among athletes here all the more stark. While unable to answer these questions, this study establishes the foundation for further exploration of these issues as they pertain to New Zealand athletes, highlighting integral intersections of media and socio-cultural influences, serving to condition the mediatized athlete in the Olympic media environment.

As an inductive thematic analysis grounded in observation and interpretation, there is of course scope for these findings to be interpreted differently. However, the repeatable application of the operating values definition by a single interpreter analysing the texts, corroborated by the collection of text excerpts for cross-data comparison, was implemented to best ensure consistency and reliability of the results. To take this study further, a targeted analysis of the identified values across a greater sample of media may yet reveal additional nuance to the communication of values.

Conclusion

The mediatization of athlete Facebook posts and audience comments serves to concentrate a constitution between parties in which a distinct, shared values framework informs communications across various socio-cultural layers. This research has identified a consistent presentation of values patterns within the 'Post' and 'Comment' themes pertaining to the excellence of the Olympics, instrumental athlete qualities, and a celebration of athletes as representative of the nation. While prominent values such as 'Olympic Excellence', 'Effort', and 'Humility' appear consistent with existing literature regarding the Olympic movement and sport in New Zealand society; the collective, cohesive presentation of values in the themes demonstrates that societal expectations transcend and thrive through athletes' use of social media, aligning with established expectations of athletes as figures of

national significance. Likewise, the audience responds with assertions of national and approximal connection, legitimizing and reinforcing the identities of the athletes in terms of the associated national values, and aligning themselves to their example. In terms of mediatization, the Facebook Olympic environment appears to proliferate existing New Zealand values constructs, both as a platform for athletes to attract and placate national audiences, and for audiences to reciprocate, coalescing around a 'humble', 'hard-working' and 'deserving' New Zealand Olympian archetype. This nexus appears a crucial feature of the social media platform, where athletes communicate directly with audiences, and audience members interpret and interact with athlete content as themselves, unmitigated by journalists as in traditional media. Moreover, the findings make it clear that athlete posts centre on communications of their acceptance and fulfilment of their societal role, conferred upon them as representatives of New Zealand at the Olympic Games. The widespread audience reciprocation not only reflects a reverence for the athletes and the qualities associated with them, but also on the Games as an opportunity to promote New Zealand to the world, with athletes serving as international ambassadors. This research thus expands on current understandings of nationalism in the Olympic media environment, revealing the complexity of national socio-cultural values as they transcend social media surrounding the Olympic Games.

Chapter Seven: Discussion

Olympic athletes I know often talk about their experience in sport as living within 'the athlete bubble', describing their existence as operating within an uncommon set of priorities that support and enable their athletic performance. Sport has always felt important to me, and no sporting event more so than the Olympic Games. As a New Zealander growing up in the nineties, I could not help but be aware of Rugby and the All Blacks, but for me, the Olympics were always more intriguing, even aspirational. Perhaps that was in part due to my gender, it is only recently that women's rugby has begun to make inroads on the exposure afforded to the men's game, and it still has a long way to go. Certainly, it had something to do with my father having been an Olympian, and my mother a former athlete in an Olympic sport. Their examples were likely enough of a reason for me, as a child, to prioritize sport, and to value myself for my sporting abilities. But, as I got older and started to traverse the ups and downs of the dream of becoming an athlete, I began to see that it was not just about me and how I saw myself, it permeated all those around me in various ways. For my fellow athletes, their experiences and achievements in sport shaped other aspects of their life trajectories, determining their career duration, educational and vocational decisions, and available opportunities. For my friends outside of sport- who championed my dreams, always understanding when I could not be there for milestones in their own lives because of training and competition commitments, who supported me unquestioningly. Later, and perhaps most formatively for this research, I then supported my husband through his decision to retire from sport after my own career had already ended. I recall accompanying him to visit with counselling professionals outside of his sport about the option of retiring, then 6 months before the Tokyo 2020 Olympics were scheduled to go ahead. Within the conversation and the advice he received, there was no question of his retiring before the Games, and very little elaboration necessary. The reasons were obvious- however he felt about it then, retiring before the Games would only open the door to future regret. As it turned out, the COVID-19 pandemic struck, the Games were postponed and the uncertainty around them was enough for his decision to go ahead with retirement to be widely acceptable.

The scenario of my husband's retirement continues to intrigue me; that this sense of Olympic priority seems to have been understood fairly well on the 'outside'. I had to wonder, what *is the source* of this unspoken importance that held him in the sport, that even external councillors didn't dare to question? What *is the foundation* of seemingly innate reverence- for the Olympics specifically- that I can admit drove my own ambitions and shaped my self-identity? Why did my friends value, accommodate and justify my pursuit of sport, even when they themselves did not share my ambitions? I began to become aware that the answer spoke to something bigger than me, my family and the people close to me. It spoke to a sense of something *valuable* that transcends the consciousness of society broadly, regardless of whether we choose to prioritize it. The New Zealand

sporting literature makes this much clear - sport is important in New Zealand and to New Zealanders (Bruce et al., 2007; Warren, 2018). But I wanted to know more. I wanted to know and understand the mechanisms and messages that convey this sense of value in New Zealand society. To understand what they mean and how they continue to circulate. That is what drove my pursuit of this research, and what the findings- reconciled in terms of values and mediatization theory- have revealed.

This thesis demonstrates that the New Zealand media coverage analysed broadly values the prestige, magnitude and exclusivity of the Olympic Games. The Games are said to be *the* preeminent test of excellence. And they are; a global stage upon which to validate the qualities of excellence perceived in athletes. In turn, the athletes themselves are embodiments of this excellence, on display through their athletic performances, and communicated to the audience in discussion of their journey to the Games; their summations of the instrumental attributes that allow them to succeed; and their gratitude for the support and national appreciation that respectively enable and celebrate their position. As national representatives these qualities are all the more significant, particularly as the findings show, those of 'Effort', 'Dedication' and 'Humility'. This veneration of athletes on the 'Excellent' Olympic stage is observed as subsequently conferred upon the nation- the country that has raised and supported athletic success and to whom values- particularly those of 'Effort', 'Support' and 'Gratitude'- are ultimately communicated. It is significant that this outcome was interpreted at every stage of the research, across the various samples of media content, and approached from several methodological and accompanying theoretical perspectives. Furthermore, the results are striking in their uniformity, not only owing to the diversity of media sources- press releases, digital news, broadcast interviews, and Facebook posts and comments- but also a variety of media contributors- The International Olympic Committee (IOC), the New Zealand Olympic Committee (NZOC), journalists, athletes and the Olympic audience.

What is perhaps most interesting about the constancy of these values across the media content, is how they can be observed to be constructed, influenced and protected by institutional, socio-cultural and media logics; ultimately conspiring to perpetuate a concise, historically anchored view of the Games and New Zealand's participation in it. In reconciling these interconnections, mediatization theory proved an effective sensitizing lens at each stage of the findings, widely revealing alignments between socio-cultural values and processes informing media content and dissemination. With this in mind, the following discussion integrates and evaluates the findings at each stage of the research, interpreting them as a response to the overall aims established at the outset of the thesis. Getting to this point of overall reconciliation has been a highly iterative, and in many ways variable process, shaped by the flexibility of the project design to respond to the inductive findings at each stage. To begin the response, it is pertinent to revisit those overall research aims, as an underlying framework for this penultimate chapter:

- To reveal the values communicated in New Zealand media coverage of the Tokyo 2020/21 Olympic Games.
- To examine how the values communicated in New Zealand media coverage of the Tokyo 2020/21 Olympic Games are influenced reflexively by media and society.
- To interpret, through analysis of the communication of values in New Zealand media coverage of the Tokyo 2020/21 Olympic Games, the value or role of Olympic sport in New Zealand culture and society.

Reflecting upon these aims, I will first consider the research design and execution in terms of their efficacy as a means of interrogation, enabling me to elicit findings and deepen relevant discussion through each stage of the process. From there, I move to consider the research design in terms of the specific structure and aims of each stage, offering my reflections on their methodological and theoretical orientations, and synthesizing the findings between them. This is followed by a discussion of the relative findings through the lens of mediatization theory, highlighting consistencies between the three as well as attributes unique to the various media formats before summarizing the cohesive findings. I then discuss the context of this study, specifically its application in time and place as it pertains to the COVID-19 pandemic and the unique environment it created.

This discussion of context extends to a reflection of the findings as they relate to New Zealand as the socio-cultural case study, regarding where the communication of values may be unique to the country, and how this investigation may contribute to global understandings of values communication relative to the Olympic Games. From here, a discussion of potential applications of similar values-based research pertaining to two emerging issues in the international sporting landscape follows- namely the Enhanced Games[10] and Olympic athlete renumeration- speaking to the importance of research that continues to acknowledge and understand the value of sport in contemporary society, and relatedly, the values that sport represents and communicates. In addition to those highlighted throughout the discussion, this section concludes with an acknowledgement of the limitations of the research, alongside the measures and considerations taken as a means of mitigating them.

Finally, the conclusion section summarizes the overall findings of the thesis and their application both to the New Zealand socio-cultural context, and beyond. It also incorporates my personal reflections over the course of the research stages, ultimately drawing back to the philosophical orientations regarding the value of Olympic sport in and to society, that has shaped and maintained my interest prior to, and throughout this research journey.

[10] The first Enhanced Games have since taken place in July 2026, showcasing Olympic mainstay sports Swimming, Track and Field and Weightlifting. The Games encourage the use of performance enhancing drugs, and offer financial renumeration to contesting athletes (Enhanced, n.d.).

Research Design

A feature of the research design was the three-stage approach, incorporating different samples of media content, with the analysis approached within three distinct theoretical and methodological frameworks. By doing so, the question of values communicated in New Zealand media coverage of the Games traversed the global and local institutional powers (IOC and NZOC); the New Zealand online press; regionally sanctioned broadcast media, and finally; athlete social media content and their responding audience. At each stage, values theory and mediatization theory established a foundation upon which to unite broad understandings of values communicated in the media content, while Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA, stage one) and Frame analysis (stage two) added novel, constructive theoretical insights in addition to methodological applications. Both of these approaches challenged the research to conceptualize the values communicated differently, deepening and diversifying understandings of the institutional, media logical and social influences on these communications.

The Foucauldian emphasis on relational power exchange and the embedded communication of knowledges in discourse proved an ideal starting point from which to interpret the media and institutional networks informing media communication of the Games, and values communications therein (Foucault, 1972, 1978). The pairing of FDA with press releases from the IOC and NZOC, and New Zealand news media coverage, proved a fitting combination; acknowledging the role of the Olympic institution alongside it's media discourse manifestations, and drawing attention to the influence of the IOC in determining and upholding the values agenda. That the research findings foregrounded competition spaces as central to values communications, and in particular the attention afforded to athletes, proffered an inductive platform from which to embark on stage two of the research, embracing Goffman's (1959, 1974) theories on frames and self-presentation with a frame analysis of athlete and journalists interactions in post-competition interviews.

Goffman's (1959, 1974) approach to frame analysis highlights the importance of social interaction in the communication of frames, and the meanings interred in them. These elements offered an important starting point for reconciling the interactions between athletes and journalists, as both a person-to-person interaction, and a self-aware performance before the media lens. Keeping in mind the preceding Foucauldian contention that power in society is bound by contextual expectations, Goffman's (1959) references to self-presentation and concepts of the performance of social roles appeared as both complementary to his frame theories, and applicable to the contextual performance of both athletes and journalists within the interviews. The emergent formulaic nature of the interviews over the analysis of frames communicating values, rendered these theories even more applicable, guiding the inquiry towards a highly-nuanced, micro-analysis of the performance of values-frames particularly- what was communicated, by whom, and what was *not*. That the athletes and journalists

were observed as largely repeating and reinforcing common values-frames- particularly guided by journalists- illustrated these performances as social roles, and made the questioning of athlete communications on their own terms even more pertinent.

In these first two stages, the decision to embrace theory underpinning the methodological approaches of FDA and Frame analysis in conceptualizing the inquiry, provided useful theoretical guidance to understanding the communication of values in the media content. However, the final thematic analysis diverged from this pattern, offering a broadly interpretative framework from which to draw on the experience and context gained through research stages one and two, and challenging the research to reconcile values communications within a diverse domain of contextually applicable literature. Upon reflection, the selection of methods across the three stages, and decision to finalize the research enquiry through a broadly informed, interpretative approach, was both highly befitting of the diverse sets of media content analysed, and of my own development as a researcher across the thesis. Not only did the theoretical underpinnings of FDA and frame analysis challenge me to conceptualize values in the media coverage from new perspectives; they also offered theoretical guidance from which to reconcile my own position and refine my research approach. Thus, the positioning of thematic analysis at the final stage of the research, as I reflect, also represents a maturation of my own research skills and confidence in interpreting meaningful insights from the analysis. Although at times challenging, I greatly value the diversity of theory applied throughout this thesis, both for the guidance and perspectives that shape the findings, and for the applied education they have served me.

Olympic Mediatization and Values Communication

At each stage of the research, mediatization theory was utilized as a consistent theoretical perspective applied to concept of values as inherent to constructed media communications, informed both by media logics and societal processes. The mediatization lens allowed for the examination of values across a variety of media content and platforms, maintaining an awareness of the communications of values before a broad audience in a concise spatial and temporal setting, and the subsequent contextual forces that contribute to their salience and utility. Particular elements, such as the structure and organization of the Olympic event, media rights and access, athlete availability and audience knowledge, are all captured in the findings pertaining to the event at large. Others, such as the availability of broadcast media, access to broadcast coverage, and the temporal and algorithmic logics of Facebook, are processes attuned to specific media technologies and platforms, although nonetheless broad in terms of their mediatized influence.

The following section discusses the implications of the mediatized findings at each stage of the research, and their collective contribution to understanding the values findings as a cohesive, robust mediatized values proposition.

The Olympic Movement: Power and Processes

When considering the effects of processes of mediatization within a Foucauldian analysis of values communicated in media coverage of the games, the structure and schedule of Olympic competition as ordained by the power of the IOC emerged as a critical, mediatized contributor. To begin, the minimal public relations communications produced by the IOC during the Games, is interpretable as a determination to hold focus on the event itself as a representation of the movement and its values. Furthermore, the significance of the Games and sports therein was also evident in the remaining three media samples (NZOC, RNZ and NZH) considerable focus on competition - to the exclusion of other, external content. The application of mediatization theory purports that these findings are considered beyond simply assumed media interest and commercial imperatives of the entertainment spectacle that is the athletic competitions, but rather to consider how they may be contrived by media and societal processes that underpin the Games (Billings & Wenner, 2017; Frandsen, 2015; 2020; Kassing, 2024; Nybelius, 2024). The scale of the Games is one such factor- 206 teams, 33 sports and 11420 athletes- all competing within a two week period (International Olympic Committee, n.d.d). Similarly, the allocation of media accreditation to a limited number of journalists in accordance with regional broadcast agreements sold to restricted media entities, further demands a concise and strategic focus for media personnel. This, in turn, can also be seen to explain the favouring of national athletes in coverage, and particularly, medal winners. As the COVID-19 section of this chapter will discuss; media focus on competition spaces may have been even more pronounced in Tokyo, with no external events surrounding Games competition, and limited media access associated with pandemic constraints (International Olympic Committee, 2021b; Oshimi, et al., 2025). Indeed, rather than focus on the constraints incurred by the pandemic, the media coverage centred on what the Games are renowned for- athletic exceptionalism. The power of the Games to foreground sport and athletes above all else, is thus understood in Foucauldian terms as a testament to IOC dominance and ordinances over media coverage, serving to highlight values favourable to the event as the pinnacle of sporting excellence, and subsequently, the excellence of the athletic performers therein. The application of mediatization theory to these findings enabled me to understand the confluence of the processes identified as driving Games production and media coverage, acknowledging the media role and the impact of these inherent power structures on values communication. Accordingly, the factors of: IOC power over the staging of the Games; tight event scheduling and associated media access and resourcing; and the media and commercial value of the Games spectacle as leveraged through the focus on athletes and competition; can be seen to collectively conspire to circulate the identified Games values, reflecting them as foundational propositions underpinning the processes themselves. Moreover, the combination of FDA as a methodological approach with mediatization (and values) theory utilized here, demonstrates the compatibility of the theory with Foucault's (1972, 1978) understandings of power in discourse as a reflection of society. This combination gave the requisite

scope to reconcile sentiments embedded in media texts as relational to the media and societal processes that shape them.

Interestingly, this influence upheld by structural elements of the Games and their pervasion through mediatized influences, was also observed as bearing consequences on values communications within competition spaces. While on the one hand, the mediatized focus on athlete competition as the main feature of Olympic media coverage offers the requisite attention for athletes to inform on values salience, or even diverge from contrived values ordinances. However, the findings in this sample produced no such novel invocations, with athlete quotes in the sample corroborating the broadly identified values.[11] The Foucauldian approach to this revelation is to consider that the aforementioned controls over the structure and media coverage of the Games, directs athletes as to their role in the Olympic production, the values that are applicable to the context of the Games, and what their performances represent (Dmukhovskaya, 2025; Horky & Budiasa, 2024; Kovacs, & Doczi, 2020). These directions are in turn interpreted and reproduced by journalists and editors in line with the corresponding value expectations. The results reveal an apparently seamless adherence to a common set of values; a testament to the efficacy of the Olympic institution and its power within the media space, and accordingly, the integration of Olympic values in the mediatized constitution of the Games.

These contentions- of the extent of Olympic power and whether there is scope in media coverage for challenge to institutional ordinances of values- presented important considerations to take forward in the analysis and contextualization of the remaining parts of the thesis, and together as a whole. To that end, the observed centralization of media attention on competition spaces within the Games, and the proposition of athletes as potentially influential values communicators, converged as a pertinent basis from which to advance into the second stage of the research enquiry

Social Roles on the Olympic Stage

As summarized in the opening to this discussion, it feels appropriate here to first acknowledge that many of the findings revealed in the stage two frame analysis (chapter five) can be seen to reinforce those revealed in the stage one FDA analysis (chapter four). Principally, the significance and prestige of the Olympic Games, athletic feats as embodiments of excellence, and the celebration of athlete qualities, all bore considerable values-based resonance. Also aligning with the findings of the stage one analysis, the widespread cohesion in values communications between athletes and journalists appeared to further support the case for the significant entwinement of media and society in determining the socio-cultural values understandings underpinning the Games.

[11] See values under 'Olympic Excellence and National Applications' and 'Athlete Qualities', Chapter Four, Table 6, p.101.

In light of the consistency of the values findings; the Goffman (1959,1974) approach to interpreting interview interactions between journalists and athletes offered a fresh conceptualization of the sphere of power that are the Olympic competition venues, and the subtle ways in which values divergence can be hinted at. Intriguingly, athletes and journalists belong both to the Olympic context, and the external socio-cultural context to which the Games are mediated and for whom Olympic values are propositioned. The frame analysis approach to these interviews allowed for the illumination of subtle intersections of such values within an otherwise rigid values-context, both reiterating the relative insulation of the mediatized Olympic space, and the rare cases where socio-cultural values penetrate the discourse.

Importantly, the prudence of Goffman's (1959,1974) theories on frame analysis, with supporting theoretical perspectives regarding the presentation of self, provoked new insights and understandings by directing attention to the micro-sociological contributors inherent in human social interactions that select and frame values communications. These theoretical concepts informed the priority given to the analysis of the individuals (athletes and journalists) interacting in the media content, as a format that is, by nature, somewhat less predictable and curatable than the press releases and news articles analysed in stage one. These less formally scripted interactions offered scope to understand the mediatization of Games values communications as applied to media professionals and athletes within the Games, with both parties ultimately revealed as committing values communications to a shared understanding of what the Games represent, and to the interests of the New Zealand audience. The Goffman (1959) perspective attributes these acts to the performance of known social roles, explaining the prescriptive interests of the journalists, and the seemingly perfunctory responses by the athletes, as engrained over many iterations of Games mediation. By interpreting the frames in terms of the parties' contributions to the interaction, the established 'role-play' could also be observed in the disproportionate representation of journalists informing the values-agenda in the interview, despite athletes contributing a greater proportion of the dialogue.

Furthermore, the application of mediatization theory added additional contextual layers to these 'social' outcomes. To begin, the high price placed on the sale of regional broadcast rights at once could be seen to endear media coverage to focus on the 'prestige' of the Games, as a reflection of the media prestige afforded through its purchase. By distributing media sales on a regional basis, the IOC can be seen as entrenching broadcast interest towards those of national audiences, trickling into journalists' focus on national athletes and how their athletic feats resonate with the nation (Billings, 2010; Eljand-Kärp & Harro-Loit, 2020; Horne & Whannel, 2020; Yan, 2020). Furthermore, the emphasis on the Games as 'prestigious', as revealed in the use of frames by athletes and journalists alike, can also be understood as a default frame owing to mediatized pressures informed by the extensive variety of sports and limited media. In particular, the variable sports expertise on behalf of the journalists (and

that which they expect of the audience) was observed as essentially committing both athletes and journalists to describing the competition and results in non-specific terms, reductively regarding the Olympic Games as simply the pinnacle of excellence, as in the following exchange with swimmer Erica Fairweather:

> J: "200m heat at the Olympic Games how did it feel to be out there?"
>
> EF: "I mean there's nothing better than it right? We've made it to the Olympic Games." (Sky New Zealand, 2021).

Despite these insulating influences, there remained hints of a scope to diversify values communications, with two athlete interviews in particular revealing of such relative values transgressions - Laurel Hubbard and Dame Valerie Adams. In the first case, the research revealed a reluctance on behalf of the journalist to embrace Hubbard for her history-making debut as the first trans-gender woman to compete at the Olympics. This inhibition presented an interesting dichotomy which saw the journalist invoke values consistent with New Zealand Olympians at the Games, subtly venerating Hubbard's participation despite framing her participation in terms of external controversy surrounding her inclusion. That Hubbard in turn reflected these frames, and acclimated her Olympic position by her own 'Normalization' frame; demonstrated the influence of journalists in setting the tone of the values-agenda, determined by their relative openness to embracing novel values-frames relative to external discourses. Similarly, Dame Valerie Adam's interview revealed an awkward juggling of motherhood with Olympic success, wherein values of 'Family' were manoeuvred around those instrumental to Olympic success, with Adams negotiating her Olympic achievement relative to her maternal sacrifices. These examples testify to a unanimous agreement of what the Olympic values represent and the roles of journalists and athletes in upholding them. They also demonstrate the reconciliation of novel or external values brought by athletes and journalists into the Olympic media environment, as an iterative negotiation contingent on this agreement. That these cases are rare and subtle, speaks to the considerable mediatization of Games values, as highlighted here by those upholding them in media coverage.

Further to this discussion of the stage two analysis, it is relevant to highlight the complications I met in the process of obtaining the requisite television interviews for analysis. As previously noted, *Sky New Zealand* was the broadcast rights holder for the Tokyo Games, in a deal with the IOC that ensured elements of shared coverage with public broadcast TVNZ: two entities that collectively represent a considerable portion of the New Zealand television ecology (Cooke, 2025). Initial submissions were made to both broadcasters for access to archived footage, which was not readily available in public archives, to which both entities returned a request for permission from the NZOC as the guardians of the Olympic movement in New Zealand. I am grateful to the NZOC for affording me permission to access the footage for analysis, with Sky readily making the requested clips available. TVNZ however,

was less forthcoming, requiring extra permissions from athletes and third-party broadcasters that helped comprise their footage, with additional approvals required should quotes or insights derived by the analysis be included in submissions to journals. These additional hurdles raised questions in my mind as to the potential precariousness of TVNZ's access to Olympic broadcast materials that might underpin that level of caution. It also appeared to speak to not insignificant protections applied to the safeguarding of the Olympic brand in general.

As it turned out, the TVNZ footage was ultimately rendered redundant, with the footage formed from Sky NZ content and others supplied by international third-party outlets (such as BBC, IOC, Channel 7 Australia, to name a few). Further to that, in dialogue with the TVNZ archive team, it was revealed that TVNZ had sent no media correspondents to Tokyo for the Games owing to difficulties associated with the pandemic. That absence in itself seems a worthy testament to the uniqueness of the Games and the impact of the pandemic, in this case pushing media coverage entirely and without contest, into the committed hands of those invested in it. While not directly a finding of this thesis, these insights illustrate the very limited media environment in Tokyo as it relates to New Zealand media coverage, by which Sky NZ's coverage can be considered as acquiring even greater national relevance. In terms of mediatization, this case testifies to the formative role of media rights holders in the construction and dissemination of Olympic media coverage, and the guarded relationship between such media, the IOC and regional Olympic authorities. Not only might this guardedness have served to ensure that values were communicated in Olympic media coverage in a manner desirable to the IOC (thus protecting media rights holders invested privilege), but it also appears to extend to subsidiary broadcasters who rely on rights holders contributions to form their Olympic coverage. Given that TVNZ did not send correspondents to Tokyo, this may have been an even more pronounced factor in this iteration of the Games.

Overall, the stage two research findings reinforced the position obtained through stage one- that the mediatized institution of the Games informs the behaviour of those contributing to its mediation. Within this contextual environment, the values communicated present as a cohesive, established framework indicative of social understandings of the Games and the roles of those who participate and interact within them. The stage two findings further testify to the significance of athletes as the focus of Games mediation within competition spaces, and revealed subtle exchanges in which values communication can diverge from otherwise almost autonomous positions. These findings in particular, affirmed the relevance of the research focus on athletes as key contributors to values communications in Olympic media coverage- a premise examined further in the third and final stage of the analysis.

Reinforcing and Reflecting Values: Athletes and their Audience.

The final stage (chapter six) of the analysis foregrounded the direct communication of athletes during the Games as afforded by social media (Facebook), and in doing so, allowed for the incorporation of responding values communication by those receiving them- their fans and followers. Accordingly, the use of thematic analysis as the research method for this final stage of the enquiry, afforded interpretation of the values in the variable content structures of the Facebook post-comment mediums, and a flexibility within which to widely embrace values theory and mediatization theory in reconciliation of the findings (Braun, et al., 2016).

Overall, the thematic analysis revealed three core themes and associated values: The excellence of and reverence for the Olympic Games; desirable actions and conduct of the New Zealand athletes, and the national significance of their participation and achievement on the Olympic stage. Each of these themes resonated significantly with findings in the previous stages of the analysis, presenting as the third iteration of a well-established values order, pervasive across the examined media communications and consistent with the acknowledged Olympic, media and socio-cultural New Zealand literature. However, the interactions between the athletes- as individuals curating a self-image directed to a perceived audience- and the commenters as fans, followers or supporters; revealed the mediatization processes upholding these established values constructs in the domain of social media.

Importantly, the athlete posts reveal that New Zealand Olympic athletes significantly direct their communications towards a national audience, foregrounding values perceived to be endearing to them. These priorities, particularly the identified: 'Effort', 'Dedication', 'Support' and 'Humility' are reflected consistently in the posts and praised by commenters, collectively building a picture of the desirable New Zealand Olympian archetype. This archetype is illustrative of the roles perceived by athletes and *of* athletes, and can also be seen to reflect the media logics driving the Facebook interaction- those prioritizing authenticity and engagement (Hallinan, et al. 2022). They can also be seen to exhibit historical notions of socio-cultural values descended from 19th century amateurism, and resonate with the formative role international sport has played as a determinant of New Zealand national identity (Ryan, 2007; Watson & Ryan, 2018). That athletes infer in their role at the Games a sense of national responsibility, effectively drives their media communications in-line with national values, a submission supported by the considerable nationalism identified in the comments, which may also be exacerbated by the Facebook algorithm, both targeting and responding to, audience engagement.

Furthermore, the alignment of media logics with the national connotations of the role of New Zealand Olympians, suggests that mediatization of the Games in the sphere of social media serves to bolster the effects of nationalist structures interred in the Games, and the socio-cultural values that

determine their expression. The extent of connection between athletes and the national audience and the respective impact on social media communications was particularly revealing in the findings. Athletes were unanimously celebrated in the comments, not just for their qualities and achievements, but in their proximity to New Zealand society across various socio-cultural layers. Accordingly, commenters are recorded as aligning themselves to athletes through assignations of socio-cultural identities, wherein athletes are both nationally claimed, and culturally sub-claimed. These acts of commenters signalling their cultural allegiances by way of athlete posts, can be seen to perform both a celebratory function- proclaiming that which is valued in New Zealand- and also a personal one, wherein the commenter identifies themself on socio-cultural terms, both to the athlete and the wider audience (Fernández Peña, et al., 2025). Facilitating this dynamic, the Facebook platform grants both visibility and access to these socio-cultural perspectives, fostering more nuanced reflections of nationalism as it relates to New Zealand Olympians at the Games. That there is no conflict between the comments, nor any criticism or critique of the athletes themselves, might further reveal the undercurrent of media-algorithmic influence aligning these fan connections, but could equally testify to the considerable reverence afforded to New Zealand Olympians in society (Bruce, 2009; Pierce et al., 2017; Thomson & Jackson, 2016). While it is certainly possible that any such comments have been removed, that the athletes are observed as widely committing themselves to the national audience in-line with a consistent perspective on Olympic values, may itself be sufficient to have warded off any overt critics, which are known to exhibit around athletes in the social media environment (World Athletics, 2024b).

Moreover, I suggest that these mediatized Olympic values upheld in New Zealand media, may be considered as potentially bearing an impact on athletes' capacities to benefit commercially from their Olympic experience. In light of IOC claims praising the commercial and career opportunities afforded to Olympians via their media exposure in the Games, it is pertinent to consider that the roots of many of these values- 'Effort', 'Dedication', 'Humility', and 'Sportsmanship'- can be seen to derive from concepts of amateurism lauding "sport for its own sake" and not for financial gain (Rahman & Lockwood, 2011, p.824; Coakley, 2015; Stojanovska, Kerr & Ryan, 2023). Given the raised negotiations between New Zealand athletes and society wherein athletes style themselves appropriately so as to avoid critical 'Tall-Poppy' driven interactions, I contest that amateur underpinnings mitigating the 'glory' afforded to athletes are still very much alive in New Zealand society (Kirkwood & Warren, 2019; Pierce, et al., 2017). Furthermore, that athletes are observed as curating themselves to the New Zealand national audience, essentially ignores the global exposure celebrated by the IOC, instead reducing athlete communications simply to relaying the prestige of the context of the event relative to their success. This reduction presents an interesting opening for further research, to understand the extent to which these dynamics may impact or condition New Zealand athletes' prospects for capitalizing on Olympic exposure either nationally, or internationally. Certainly, Olympians are noted

as celebrated pillars of New Zealand society, but it is unclear the degree to which this status lends itself to career or financial opportunities (Horky & Budiasa, 2024; Kovacs & Doczi, 2020; Nybelius, 2024). Do such values-driven factors impact all athletes equally? And if not, what are the contingents that differentiate one athlete from another- scale of success, career duration, sport? It would appear clear that not all Olympic athletes experience the same degree of media traction and subsequent commercial viability afforded by their participation in the Olympic Games. Accordingly, given the insights revealed here, I contend that any attempt to understand the factors that contribute to athletes relative commercial successes born via the Games, ought to include consideration of the media and societal processes that shape their communication strategies during their time in the Olympic media spotlight and beyond.

Mediatized Values: A Summary

Collectively, the application of the sensitizing mediatization lens at each stage of the research, testifies to the efficacy of this approach for interpreting media and social processes impacting upon the qualitative findings as they presented in the media texts. Maintaining the photographic analogy, this study contributes a testimony to the 'wide angle' and 'zoom' features of the mediatization lens, at least as applied to qualitative media content analysis, demonstrating how overarching mediatized connections are interpretable from contextualized media analysis, and in doing so, revealing where subsequent connections may be conceptualized for further analysis. Paired with three robust approaches to media content analysis, applying mediatization theory in this way enabled me to extend my understanding of the values communicated beyond their contextual appearances in the texts, to consider them as a part of the wider Olympic and media environment by which they are conditioned. I feel that this broad approach was essential, in order to meaningfully engage with the media and values content in consideration of the true context of the text, including: the pandemic, the socio-cultural and historical contributions to New Zealander's engagement with the Games (athlete, media and audience alike), and the institutional structures that inter Olympic values and guard their communication. In these terms, this work stands in support of Frandsen (2020) and Jensen's (2013) conceptions of the sensitizing mediatization lens, as one of many evolving applications of the theory, particularly in the sport-media space. Furthermore, I consider that my application of mediatization theory in this way across this thesis, may also serve as a precursory view of the interconnected mediatized processes that determine values communication in the Olympic media content, by which secondary investigations conceptualizing relationships between specific connection points may offer further insight. For example, investigation of the relationship between athletes and journalists at the Games- the briefs given to journalists regarding the areas of interest, the duration of media interactions and pieces, the volume of content and associated deadlines and the relative flexibility for spontaneity of coverage- all emerge as consequential to the media processes informing coverage of the event (Billings, & Wenner, 2017; Dmukhovskaya, 2025; Kovacs & Doczi, 2020). Such an investigation might

follow a more institutional conceptualization of mediatization theory, while approaches to the athlete side of these interactions may benefit from a more socio-constructivist approach, including queries such as: what questions do athletes expect to respond to in the Olympic context? To what degree are they aware of their media presence and possible opportunities? What consistencies or divergences are interpretable between athletes self-presentation on social media and the traditional media, and what might this infer about the integration of media in their roles as athletes? Moreover, that the sensitizing application of mediatization in this thesis reveals and legitimizes these questions, demonstrates an efficacy of this approach as a mechanism for pulling back the layers of influence that contribute to the ultimate communication of values, as evident in the texts (Dmukhovskaya, 2025; Kassing, 2024; Nybelius, 2024). In these terms, the application of mediatization theory in this study can be considered to have provided a broad overview of the interconnections of media and society contributing to New Zealand Olympic media content, that have proved revealing of the considerable layering of mutually-affecting processes that inform the media construction of the Games and subsequently, the communication of values therein.

Overall, it is clear that processes of mediatization have served to anchor the values communicated in New Zealand media coverage of the Games in line with scholarly accounts of historical attitudes in New Zealand's Olympic history, and the international Olympic movement (Chatziefstathiou & Henry, 2012; Kohe & Warren, 2019). However, by applying mediatization theory as a sensitizing lens to these findings, intersecting influences of media and society in preserving and proliferating the establish values-order were revealed, in line with increasingly diverse mediation of the Games (Fernández Peña, 2024; Fernández Peña, et al., 2025; Liu, 2019; Nybelius, 2024). Such innovations in Games mediation have been described by Frandsen (2016) as a process of successive waves of mediatization, with Hutchins and Sandserson (2017) pointing particularly to the impacts of social media and digital technologies as facilitating media interaction. Moreover, much as macro-processes such as industrialization, urbanization and globalization are acknowledged as heavy influences on the organization and codification of sports leagues and ultimately Olympic sport in the 19th century; this thesis suggests that such increasing mediatization over the 20th century through to the present day ,has resulted similarly in the embedded codification of mediated Olympic sporting values (Ryan, 2007; Scambler, 2005). That the values revealed here resemble so closely those put forward at Sorbonne in 1894, despite the interceding abandonment of amateurism and expansion of the Olympic sporting program; can be seen to testify to the strength of interconnection between media and society in the constitution of the Games. That these findings are observed in New Zealand, a nation whose historical and sporting identity aligns so closely with the trajectory of British and Olympic sport in 19th century, speaks particularly to the significance of nationalism and legacy as key Games associations communicated within the values, lending socio-cultural weight to the mediatized grandeur of the international Olympic stage. It is clear that these aspects and values offer seductive qualities to media

coverage of the Games, supported by social media authenticity logics and institutional and structural gearing towards the national audience, revealed to maintain, or even proliferate these values throughout ongoing waves of mediatization.

Olympic Values in the Context of a Global Pandemic

This picture of a rigid values framework, perpetuated and safeguarded through processes of mediatization, is all the more stark when considered in terms of what was *not* present in the media coverage. The premise of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Olympic postponement underpinning the Tokyo Games provided the opportunity to consider the Games in terms of an alternative narrative- one that accommodated and embraced the unprecedented nature of this iteration of the Games. That this discourse largely did not materialize, and only rare inclusions were captured in the findings, testifies further to the power interred in the Olympic values framework applied in the New Zealand setting, and possibly elsewhere around the world.

At the outset, I proposed that the Tokyo 2020/21 Olympic Games presented a particularly interesting case for the examination of values in media coverage, owing to the proximity of the Games to, and the impacts of, the global COVID-19 pandemic. While the Olympic Games had been halted due to global disruptions before- namely the two world wars- Tokyo 2020 was unique in Games history both in its initial postponement, and eventual hosting, with pandemic still a global health crisis not least in the host nation Japan. The risk posed to the health and safety of both the hosts and Olympic participants is undisputed, exemplified in the quarantine processes isolating athletes to 'bubbles' within the village, and the decision to bar spectators from competition venues (International Olympic Committee, n.d.b). These were remarkable steps to take, disruptive to the Games village culture, and unprecedented for the hosts and would-be spectators. However, even more intriguing, was the juxtaposition of hosting the Games- an athletic spectacle of health and virility, requiring athletes to compete in close contact with each other- against the isolation and health and safety strictures of the pandemic, within and outside of the Games. How could athletic performances be reconciled in this environment of extreme concern for health, and widespread advice to isolate from one another? In New Zealand's case, a nation renowned for its strict COVID-19 elimination policy, such contradictions also applied to athlete travel, and not least their occupation of coveted managed isolation (MIQ) placements, highly contested by New Zealanders overseas hoping to return to their home country (Beattie & Priestley, 2021; Theunissen & Wolf, 2023). Thus, the stage was set for contention, over the sensibility of hosting the Games during the pandemic, and more importantly, how the Games would be valued against this backdrop of apparent contradictions. That media covering the Games were the sole interpreters corresponding from Tokyo, made media content surrounding the Games the most legitimate medium for values examination.

The results were unanimous across all three stages of the research: The context of the pandemic featured remarkably seldom in values communications associated with the Olympic Games. Reconciling the extant discourse regarding the pandemic in stage one of the research in Foucauldian terms, the discussion considered the mechanisms of certain values associated with the Games (principally 'national pride' and 'legacy') as vehicles for relational power exchange, utilized to venerate the New Zealand government's pandemic response campaign. Here, the symbolic power of the New Zealand team at the Games, can be seen to contemporarily support government priorities of national solidarity amid isolation measures, supported by the rhetoric exalting the 'Team of Five Million' and the methods by which to 'Go hard, Go Early' against the pandemic (Beattie & Priestley, 2021; Theunissen & Wolf, 2023). Rather than contradict the government's pandemic response, values communicated within Games media coverage appears to support it; foregrounding commonalities and disregarding their contradictions. While a cross-context of pandemic rhetoric and Games values communications did not transpire in the athlete interviews, it can be observed as resurfacing in the social media analysis of audience comments. Here, commenters are recorded as making references to the 'Team of Five Million', as a call to unite the audience with their athletes within a sphere of national pride and solidarity. These combined examples strengthen the case for a rhetorical socio-cultural relationship between Games values communications and those surrounding the pandemic, seemingly most relevant to peripheral media responding to Olympic events. While there remains scope to interrogate this relationship more closely, perhaps through a parallel discourse analysis of media covering the pandemic and its intersection with the Games; my work here testifies to the power of the mediatized Olympic values as a mechanism for protecting the interests of the Games, and posits that it bears an efficacy for shaping contextual issues more broadly in society.

These intersections aside, perhaps the most interesting element of the findings regarding the pandemic was not how it featured in or influenced values communication in the Games, but rather its relative absence. Across the media content, there were almost no references to the impact of the pandemic on the athletes- their preparations for the Games and handling of the one year postponement; their experiences within the Games; or well wishes and aspirations for the audience struggling with the pandemic conditions. The frame analysis findings reveal that journalists avoided such questions in post-competition interviews, with the contribution codes suggesting that encouragement on behalf of journalists would most likely have been necessary to invoke any similar discourse. The lack of interest among the journalists in pandemic-related impacts on athletes, at least in this medium, demonstrates a commitment to unburden the Olympic competition of the pandemic context, aligning with aforementioned media logics determining the role of journalists and acceptable coverage of Olympic sport (Billings, 2010; Eljand-Kärp & Harro-Loit, 2020; English, 2022; Horky et al., 2024). However, the above examples represent a small selection of questions that could have featured in Games discourse, none of which overtly questions, much less refutes, the validity of

the Games. The general lack of deference to the pandemic context across the findings, interpreted through a Foucauldian lens, pertains to the social roles and expectations established in the Games, as ensured by its regulatory power structures- including the IOC's relationship with media broadcasters. These are undoubtably factors that underpin the mediatization of the Games and its subsequent impacts on values communications in media coverage. Both the stage one and two analyses revealed the impacts of restricted access to the Games ordained by the IOC as informing values communications, largely by training the media lens on competition venues, and athlete endeavours therein. These factors should also be considered in explanation of the lack of pandemic context across the media, and the relative focus on athletes.

Moreover, upon observing the media coverage of the Paris 2024 Games during the course of my research, I found it stark to note the inclusion of coverage across the host city; the orchestrated interactions between athletes and fans at Champions Park, amid a Games that proactively showcased the history and culture of the hosts throughout (Hageman, 2024; Martin, 2024). A key element of this strategy was to locate competition venues in culturally significant areas of the city, including: Equestrian at the Versailles, Triathlon and swimming in the Seine, and beach volleyball directly in front of the Eiffel Tower (OECD, 2025). While this approach is well-suited to a European city of considerable history with a surplus of famed architectural and cultural icons, the pandemic would have made this style of hosting and its media reflection almost impossible in Tokyo. Pandemic restrictions applied to residents and media accreditation holders alike, limiting travel around the city and stifling interactions between the Games and the city's residents (International Olympic Committee, 2021b; Oshimi, et al., 2025). Social media was also affected, with athlete coverage limited to their village bubbles, and training and competition venues, with very little opportunity to interact and experience the culture of the Games as styled by the hosts. The result, it can be argued, is that media coverage was limited to that within competition venues to an even greater degree than other Games', supported by the corresponding findings showing values communications centred closely on athlete and Olympic competition qualities. Within this athlete-centred frame, the pandemic proved a legitimizer of Olympic-level perseverance and resilience, and ultimately, a styling of the prestigious Olympic Games as all the more remarkable.

Importantly, the findings as they relate to the pandemic testify to the resilience of the values communicated in media coverage of the Games, despite apparent contextual contradictions. Ultimately, the pandemic backdrop to this study reinforces the points made in the above theoretical discussion, that mediatization processes over time have successfully insulated the values communicated in media coverage of the Olympic Games, proving unyielding even amid the context of an ongoing global health crisis.

Sport in New Zealand Society: Values, Heroes and Nationalism

As a Kiwi, the decision to place the socio-cultural focus on New Zealand is naturally of personal interest. Moreover, in the absence of similar exploration of Olympic values in contemporary media scholarship internationally, I have found my reflections on the place of this work gravitating towards the historical- regarding the Games in New Zealand and their impact on society. In this realm, Kohe (2010) positions his take on New Zealand's Olympic history as one of a more critical awareness regarding the formation of historical knowledges, offering the following:

> I realise that my Olympic education and childhood memories of the games were largely contrived, part of a mediated spectacle designed by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), media corporations, national television stations, sports journalists and amateur historians to win audiences. By using popular images that play on nostalgia, highlighting the stories of successful Olympians and reinforcing ideas about New Zealand's national sporting traditions I was sold, albeit subtly, an Olympic brand; a popular version of events, interpretations, and assumptions about the Olympics and its history (p.2).

This perspective effectively summarizes the core contention among New Zealand sport scholars- that New Zealand is a nation in which sport has served as a working definition for success and prosperity (Falcous & Potgieter, 2022; Ryan, 2007; Watson & Ryan, 2018). Kohe's (2010) work posits that New Zealand Olympic history has in turn been exceptionalized by historians' focus on stories of successful Olympians, while ignoring other agents who have contributed to shaping the New Zealand Olympic movement. It is to this point of historical narrativization that the findings here make an important contribution. By applying mediatization theory to the investigation of media content; I have theorized in this thesis as to *why* and *how* such discourses- and the values that underpin them- remain so unequivocally salient in contemporary New Zealand Olympic media coverage. My findings here proffer that the celebratory discourse and narratives Kohe (2010) alludes to are not just reconciled in retrospect, but rather ascend to narratives formed in real-time- including by athletes and social media users alike. The Olympic salesmanship Kohe (2010) refers to is not simply an institutional, media product, but a societally reinforced one, traceable to the mediatization of the Games and the values upheld therein.

Furthermore, by targeting contemporary media content for analysis, this thesis broadens the scope by which to examine the persuasiveness and seductiveness of the heroic athlete archetype as identified in the findings. The idolization of Olympians and the Games was an area that struck a particularly personal note with me, eliciting considerable rumination. Why was it important to me to be successful in sport growing up? At what level does being 'good' or 'bad' at sport inform on one's self-identity? Why do I, personally, hesitate to describe myself as an athlete, on account of having pursued elite sport, but never having reached the Games? These are queries pertaining to the role and value of Olympic sport in New Zealand society, an aspirational ideal proposed to all who participate. I acknowledge these questions here as relevant not only to the research itself, but as drawn from my own personal

experiences that undoubtably bear upon the inquiry- as a researcher, a Kiwi, a former athlete, a sports fan and, simultaneously, a critic.

An overview of the history of sport as a cornerstone of New Zealand society, from 19th century colonization through to the 21st century, was detailed in section four of the chapter two literature review (p. 52). It was clear even then, that sport has not only facilitated a social knitting-together or peoples during the colonial era, but that it brought with it values associated with class distinctions, amplified through the ideological structuring of the new colony- particularly those of sporting amateurism and idealization of effort and physical activity (Hokowhitu, 2007; Ryan, 2007). Additionally, that teams representing New Zealand overseas towards the end of the 19th century were celebrated as evidential of the prosperity of the colonial nation, further attests to the significance of sporting success to the country's legitimacy internationally, driving an early sense of national identity (Ryan, 2007; Ryan & Watson, 2018). In both of these examples of sports' role in early New Zealand society, sporting activity and success constitutes a path to improvement- of the self, of society and of the nation (Thomson, & Jackson, 2016). This instrumental notion, that sporting endeavours encourage and facilitate upward mobility, is echoed in the values revealed through this analysis of New Zealand media coverage. That these values are also reflective of the values of the International Olympic movement, also reflects the concurrence of the reimagining of British sport in the late 19th century with emigration to New Zealand, as an immensely formative piece of New Zealand socio-cultural history. That both the IOC and New Zealand media are revealed to maintain these values, is again a testament to their considerable engraining in society both in New Zealand and abroad, and the successful integration and alignment of media, society and the Games over time.

It is within this interconnected sport-media culture that a picture of the New Zealand Olympian emerges; an encapsulation of idealized sporting values, representative of both the self and the nation (Gammon, Ramshaw & Waterton, 2013; Jansen & Skey, 2020; Krieger, 2025). While iterations of the New Zealand sporting figure have been canvassed by various scholars including Knight et. al. (2005) and Kohe and Warren (2019), in this thesis I draw on a broad snapshot of media content and culture to reveal the contemporary persistence of the New Zealand Olympic athlete archetype- construct bearing considerable influence on media, athletes and audiences. The exact qualities of these athletes are clearly posited across the research stages, but what is more interesting to consider in this final discussion, is what the repetitive communication of values and qualities associated with New Zealand Olympic athletes, represent to society.

In considering this question, it is pertinent to look beyond New Zealand to the international sporting legacy that the country shares in. Sport has been established across cultures as a fertile ground for the reproduction of hero narratives, celebrating the feats of the athletes, and the outcomes of their endeavours. Maguire (2011) states that "(sporting) heroes express both the myths and revered social

values of a society and the sports ethic…(underpinning) involvement in sport"(p.854). This statement can be assumed as a concise reconciliation of the findings revealed in this study, wherein the athletes, as the focus of Olympic media coverage, effectively serve as embodiments of the values of sport. That these values are so familiar- to athletes, media and audience alike- is evident of their societal embeddedness, as demonstrated by the role-playing identified in stages two and three of this study. However, this commitment to Olympic sporting figures as emblematic of national values is most interesting to reflect upon on a historical level, tracing back to the Games and culture that formed the inspiration for De Coubertin's modern Olympic movement. A rise in antiquarianism in the late 19th century, and the seductiveness of the Ancient Olympic Games as a vessel for the moral guidance De Coubertin hoped to instil, render the Ancient Games and the hero culture resonant within them, an enduring influence to consider. In particular, the stories told within the Ancient Games and in wider Greek mythology, as preserved in the works of Hesiod and Homer; present as evocative reflections of the athlete qualities and reverence that emerge in the values across the media coverage (Chatziefstathiou & Henry, 2012; Koulouri, 2005; Scambler, 2005). The heroic tales such as those of Odysseus, and Herakles, speak to the glorification of those who use their wit, courage and physicality to perform superhuman feats, aided and abetted by the gods (Lunt, 2009; Zavaliy, 2020). These are the stories the Ancient Greeks told to venerate the gods they worshipped, whose divinity they preserved and celebrated in the hosting of the Olympic Games, and various other athletic and cultural festivals (Lunt, 2009; Zavaliy, 2020). The Ancient Games then, were not simply about god worship, or a practice in regional peace-keeping; they were also the embodiment of heroic tradition (Belis, 2021; Lunt 2009). Moreover, by venerating the Games themselves, the relative difficulty of victory becomes elevated, steepening the proverbial mountain the athletes must climb to achieve glory and in so doing, achieve heroic status. In the absence of the monsters and giants of mythology, the athletic endeavour is endowed as an act of supreme virtue, dedication and heroic struggle. These venerations of athleticism are observed in this thesis, not least in the emphasis on the magnitude and excellence interred in media coverage of the Games.

Furthermore, it is not insignificant to note that the heroic platitudes celebrating Ancient Olympic athletes are observed to be broadly applicable to the Olympic athletes in the media samples. The following comment, extracted from the New Zealand Herald in the stage one FDA analysis, speaks to this distinction and its ancestry: "In ancient Greek mythology, there were 12 Olympians. How times have changed; we get to laud so many more" (The New Zealand Herald, 2021a). This quote effectively summarizes an observable thread in the research, wherein celebration of Olympians does not simply apply to the most successful or most marketable athletes; but a heroic seal placed over all those who represent New Zealand in the Games. If the vases and transcriptions of Ancient oral tradition are the vessels of the Greek heroic mythology, the media coverage of the contemporary Olympic Games represents a fractured, yet cohesive tome of hero worship very much alive in our own time and place. It

seems the only flaw in the above quote (or perhaps the underlying irony) is to consider that in over 2,500 years of human history spanning cultures and peoples; the celebration of Olympic athletes may have changed relatively little.

Moreover, the findings describe a striking parallel in the idealizing of athletes in the Ancient Games as embodiments of heroic qualities, and media communications of values regarding contemporary athletes in the Olympic context. That values celebrating the athletes and the event itself emerge so prominently in the findings can, in many ways, be interpreted as a continuation of these Ancient traditions. Then, as now, heroes represent to society what an individual is capable of, and the qualities required to achieve such betterment- for the individual and society (Maguire, 2011; Lunt 2009). These values can be seen as the antecedents of critics citing the 'great sporting myth'; human examples of the 'good' demonstrated through sport, and celebrated on a religious level (Coakley, 2015). As my research demonstrated, all three different media types that I investigated featured consistent veneration of New Zealand athletes for their 'Effort', 'Dedication', 'Perseverance' and 'Humility', juxtaposed with a styling of the Olympic Games as the pinnacle of excellence.[12] It is also clear that the athletes are seen to perform an aspirational function in society- closely curated by contextual values- and simultaneously a display of national identity and representation of the national 'good'. Rather than serving an overt religious function as in Ancient traditions, in the contemporary New Zealand context these values can be seen as feeding egalitarian societal narratives. Ryan (n.d.) describes the 'myth' that sport in New Zealand is more egalitarian than elsewhere, which can be seen reflected in athletes' emphasis on 'Effort' and 'Dedication' as enabling their achievements, and not anything distinctive about their talent or superior skill. In simple terms, the premise here is that any New Zealander can achieve such feats if they employ the requisite values to their lives. The 'Humility' employed in this context reiterates this point, with the athlete assuring their followers that their achievements are earned and not gifted.

The importance for athletes to display humility in receiving Olympic success was a particular curiosity to me, although as indicated above, not necessarily an unexpected one. In addition to the discussion surrounding Tall Poppy Syndrome as part of the New Zealand's sociological culture, it is interesting to consider that the valuing of 'Humility' recognizes a status afforded to Olympians, in that Olympic success requires a qualification for its reception palatable to social order, despite the achievement inheriting certain status benefits. Sticking with the Ancient Greek theme of the Olympic context, one does not need to look far to identify the deep roots of the valuing of 'Humility', and its relationship with power. Homer's Odysseus taking credit for his own cunning by revealing himself to Polyphemus, only to be hounded by his divine father Poseidon; is evocative of the risks of assuming ones achievements transcend the social order, human or divine, with 'Hubris' acting as a the negative counter-value to

[12] Chapter Four pp. 100-101, Chapter Five pp.125-126, Chapter Six pp.147-150.

‘Humility’ (Homer, 2003). In the Olympic context however, the question I am left with is: What can be revealed about society by examining whom athletes direct their humility to? In terms of New Zealand Olympians, it is clear that the national audience is the key demographic, in a relatively apolitical approach, underpinned by the various proximities within the nation so willingly pointed to among the audience.

Particularly evident in stage three of the research, the above constructs of the New Zealand Olympian archetype are also inextricable from values associated with national solidarity and nationalism. Nationalism has been widely interrogated within the Olympic Games, and similarly acknowledged as central to Games organization, structure and media dissemination, and arguably essential to the enduring relevance of the Olympic movement (Billings et al., 2013; Mutz & Gerke, 2018). This thesis offers similar insights; revealing a consistent streak of nationalism as inherent to New Zealand media coverage of the Games and associated values communications. As posited in other sections of this discussion; Olympic nationalism is also deeply connected to the mediatization of the Games, and particularly the dispersal of broadcast media into regional coverage spaces (Billings & Wenner, 2017; Horne & Whannel, 2020; Krieger, 2025). The above discussion of the New Zealand Olympian archetype and its established socio-cultural history is central to this divergence from the international to the national, as focusing media attention on already embedded notions regarding the significance of sport and athletes in New Zealand society. As canvassed previously, the geographic dispersal of Olympic coverage through RHB’s is but one mechanism by which the mediatization of the Games can be seen to focus the media lens on the national, but the subsequent attention on national athletes as New Zealand Olympians is notable here as a culmination of media and socio-cultural values representing that which is important to the nation, and widely aspirational to its citizens. The mediatized values of the Games in this sense, do not simply serve hero narratives, but continue to reinforce established ideals of sport as an instrumental means of upward mobility, accessible to all New Zealander’s.

For New Zealand athletes then, the task is to seek and receive success, acknowledging the value and status of that success, while still casting oneself as only fractionally above any ordinary member of the so-called ‘Team of Five Million’. This does not mean that athletes don’t find themselves acknowledged in more deliberate terms, with the investitures of Dame Valerie Adams and Dame Lisa Carrington recent examples- crucially, *bestowed* upon them. Certainly, other countries have their equivalent honours, New Zealand’s is modelled off the British system, while the American’s have the Presidential Medal of Honour. This elevation and veneration of Olympians across societies can, at first, appear roughly equivocal (at least between these western nations). Athletes from these nations too can be observed as displaying degrees of ‘Humility’, or rather, denigrated for their lack of deference. Images of American superstars Michael Phelps and Simone Biles holding a hand over their hearts before the star-spangled banner- a national custom- are an evocative display of deference to the nation (United

States Code, 1994). However, these athletes can also be seen to exhibit a level of confidence and pride in their abilities that transgresses upon that which appears acceptable within the New Zealand sample. Biles wearing a glittering goat necklace during the Paris Olympics is one example, a symbol of her status as the greatest of all time (Bregman, 2024). Such accolades are equally afforded to Lisa Carrington in her canoe, but are (as the findings show) not espoused or adopted by the athlete herself. A key difference in comparing the cases of American Biles and Kiwi Carrington is of course the size of the nations they represent, and with it the capital and attention marketplace afforded nationally. Importantly, in considering the noted distinctions of New Zealand society along with the international platform of the Olympic Games and its attested opportunities for athletes; the sociological fabric of the nations' competing likely have a considerable impact on athlete conduct, and accordingly, the values communicated

Individual athlete differences aside, there is a case to suggest New Zealand's requisite demand for athlete 'Humility' is not necessarily consistent in other Olympic nations, at least not to the degree to which it becomes a requisite submission to the national audience. Interestingly, on her podcast American rugby player turned media personality Ilona Maher recently discussed Canadian figure skater Madeine Schizas, who received criticism for telling media at the Canadian figure skating nationals that another skater would go to the Milano-Cortina winter Games "over my dead body"(Maher, Maher & Maher, 2026). Noting that criticisms of the comment were telling of expected standards of conduct for Shizas as a Canadian, Maher celebrated Shizas, countering with the following appraisal of New Zealand rugby players:

> I've always hated that (criticism of competitive talk)...It's kind of the culture in New Zealand rugby of being very humble, like overly humble, like saying like 'oh no the boys went out there and did so well, we're so proud like even...it'll be like Portia Woodman just scored, literally seven tries and most of them were individual and she'll be like, you know, it was my teammates...(Maher et al., 2026)

Maher's observations both acknowledge a typical humility associated with New Zealand athletes on the world stage, and similarly Canadian expectations that their athletes speak politely about their teammates, while as herself- an American athlete- praising Shizas for her competitive honesty. These subtleties suggest a space for further analysis of the values communicated by athletes from various cultures and their reception in their own societies, as an opportunity to reveal the diverse experiences of athletes from different nations competing in the Olympics- including their relationships with society and media, and their commercial viability. Here, the intersections of virtue and commercialization central to the contemporary Olympic movement can be scrutinized more closely, particularly in terms of the roles and experiences of those at the centre of the Games- the athletes and those spectating them.

Contemporary Issues and Future Research

Considering these reflections in terms of some of the current challenges faced by Olympic sport today, the relevance of examining the values associated with Olympic sport is all the more pertinent. In particular, the challenge to the Olympic movement presented by the Enhanced Games is currently unfolding. It not only contests the anti-doping structures of Olympic sport, but the capitalist renumeration that athletes are, or should be, entitled to. Athlete and public perception of the value of Olympic sport is integral to this challenge, with athletes currently prohibited from taking part in the Enhanced Games should they wish to compete in the Olympics; forcing the polarization between one event proclaiming the unrestrained pursuit of human excellence, and another with the established doctrine, underpinned by strict anti-doping legislation (Enhanced, 2025). Medical concerns aside, the crux of the Olympic argument against the Enhanced Games is a values-based one, not only that competition should be fair contingent on the current rules, but also that there is virtue and example to be set by Olympian's participating in the Games drug-free, without the motivational carrot of an event-sanctioned payday.

The issue of Olympic athlete renumeration is also rearing its head in other spheres, most notably the IAAF's decision to offer Gold medallists at the Paris Olympics $50,000, and plans to award financial prizes to the top 3 finishers in Los Angeles 2028 (IAAF, 2024a). Although not sanctioned by the IOC, the IAAF's decision to repatriate Olympic income to athletes is claimed to incentivize athletes to remain in the sport, and not to be seduced by other, more profitable professional sports leagues (IAAF, 2024a). These financial changes amid the Olympic landscape can be considered revealing of the lingering holds of 19th century amateurism in the Olympic doctrine, with such moves by the IAAF challenging the accommodation that while athletes may profit from their sport, they do not profit directly from the Games itself. In the absence of a change to this foundational, institutional approach to athlete pay, the Olympic response to the threat of the Enhanced Games, relies on the hope that the entrenched values doctrine of Olympism will be sufficient to overcome such temptations of riches.

Furthermore, while the relative success of the Enhanced Games and the degree to which it is a threat to Olympic sport is yet to be determined, the impact of prominent Olympic athletes signing over to the Enhanced Games is already observable, stirring contentions over Olympic sporting values among sport audience communities. As a recent example, Paris Olympic medallist Ben Proud of Great Britain announced his retirement from Olympic swimming in favour or pursuing the Enhanced Games, citing financial opportunity among other reasons:

> (Swimming gave me) A skill that, in 5 to 10 years, I may no longer have the privilege to perform at this level. I'm fortunate to be in a position to be able to capitalise on what I can do in the water, and to pursue something unique that excites me in a new way. For the first time in a very long time I'm making the decision not for swimming, but for me (Proud, 2025).

On face value, Proud's reasons are clear- he would like to earn money from his sport while he still has the aptitude to cash in. However, the final lines of this quote reveal a different tension- an obligation to a values-laden sporting environment which the athlete feels has transgressed upon his personal sense of sporting autonomy. This statement at once refers to an expectation of what an Olympic swimmer should represent, the self-sacrifice that it necessitates, and the athlete's decision that it is no longer worth it. A review of the response in the comments on Proud's Instagram account was all the more revealing, including detractors such as the following:

> You said it right, you're doing this for yourself and yourself only. Congrats for helping destroy the integrity of professional sports (Maistrello, n.d.).

This comment derides the athletes decision to divorce himself from the values of Olympic sport, highlighting the societal expectations surrounding his position as an athlete. However, others comments were more supportive, including:

> Fantastic Ben. Bring home the $1m pal (Marty P, n.d.).

This comment reveals an understanding among some of the sporting audience that Olympic athletes in sports such as Swimming- those which rely heavily on Olympic exposure- are relatively under-paid compared to other more professionalized sports (Harris & Dulin, 2024). It is interesting that these are the sports, events and athletes featured in the inaugural Enhanced Games, possibly because they are precisely those that the start-up event can lure with financial incentives. Moreover, the comments here reflect the values-clash which both events must reconcile in order to retain or grow audiences- Should sport continue to represent a socio-cultural values proposition based on (amateur) ideals of virtue, and cultural norms of athlete veneration and example? Is it acceptable, or indeed compatible, for athletes to seek financial renumeration for their efforts, and for that to be their primary motivation? Furthermore, if the latter is the case, how can the aforementioned values be retained in the Olympic context, and moreover, should they? Comparative research into media values communication between professional sporting leagues, of sports included in the Olympics and otherwise, may further reveal nuances in values communication tied to the legacy of Olympic amateurism, and their associated influences on perceptions of athletes as role models, and the pay checks they may agreeably be entitled to.

It is clear from the above interactions that the Enhanced Games not only proposes to challenge perceptions of athletes in the Olympics and the virtues of sport, but also what these athletes represent to their nations. In keeping with the findings that the national audience and the entrenched archetypal values associated with national Olympians in New Zealand are integral to the values associated with Olympic sport; how would those values be compromised or reconciled should an athlete submit to compete in the Enhanced Games? If such a case were to occur, how would a New Zealand audience respond? And moreover, how might national audience reactions across different nations compare? Given the apparent intrinsic values-links to nationalism in the Olympics, it is

difficult to imagine (and fascinating to follow) national audiences embracing these athletes with the same values associated with the Olympics, or bestowing upon them the strictures embedded in the Olympic archetype (Horne, J., & Whannel, 2020; Krieger, 2025). How then, are these athletes to be valued? As representative of the nation? As admirable on different terms? Or as a precautionary tale of transgression? These are questions, not yet faced in the New Zealand context but clearly viable elsewhere, that research adopting a similar approach to this reconciliation of values in media coverage, may yet reveal. Similarly, analysis in this area might also assess the impact of the Enhanced Games in contention with the Olympics, and whether or not its presence intuits deliberate changes to values-communication on both the Olympic institution and national levels, presumably towards emphasizing the superiority of the Olympic doctrine. Viewing these cases in terms of the research findings, premises examples of the very meaningful, and even combative role the communication of Olympic values through media coverage can play in upholding global support for the Games, and thus further testifies to the imperatives of research seeking to understand the socio-cultural relevance of the contemporary Olympic phenomenon (Miah, 2024).

Research Limitations

Limitations and delimitations have been acknowledged across each stage of the research, particularly pertaining to the design and findings of the stages in isolation.[13] These, of course, also apply to the overall thesis, in establishing the representativeness of the New Zealand media sample, and the interpretive nature of the qualitative approaches respectively. Rather than itemize these specifically here, I will instead concentrate on their impact on the thesis as a whole in terms of its comprehensiveness as an analysis of values in New Zealand Olympic media coverage, and the mediatization processes that inform these communications.

To begin, the static data period over the three articles warrants some scrutiny and justification. Each of the three articles assessed the period from 16th July-15th August, allowing for consistency between the analyses, and thus providing a foundation for comparison of the values communicated relative to the Games schedule. However, when it comes to interpreting values communicated in terms of the Olympics and the pandemic, confining the data period to the four weeks stipulated may have excluded such discourse that might have occurred with greater representation weeks, or even months prior. To capture any such discourse would have required a deductive approach, enabling an isolation of media content for analysis on more selective grounds. In turn, such an approach would void the preferred approach to observe the values communicated in Olympic media relative to the pandemic inductively in the context of the Games themselves. However, to ensure that the values related to the pandemic in the data period were understood in the context of relevant prior discussion, contention in the media around the hosting of the Olympics was canvassed during the literature review stage. Here, I noted

[13] Chapter Three p.111, Chapter Four p.124, Chapter Five p.154.

that there was no official challenge to New Zealand's participation at Tokyo, whether in submissions to government, political opposition, or public protest (Huffadine, 2021). This absence was sufficient to contend that there was a lack of organized public outcry leading into the Games, with the issue of ongoing media discourse to be resolved within the research itself. Furthermore, I did not set out to contend that there ought to have been a particular media reaction necessarily, but rather to understand which perspectives were communicated on the relationship between the Games and the pandemic, how they were communicated, by whom and why. As the prior discussion demonstrates, the relative absence of commentary regarding the pandemic broadly across the media sample, opened questions regarding which values were foregrounded, ultimately yielding interpretations as to the implicit, mediatized control over Olympic media discourse.

It is also important to consider the degree to which the thesis can be considered a reasonable sample of New Zealand Olympic media coverage. The media samples selected for stage one, two and three of this thesis were identified as distinct modes of media communication central to New Zealand media communications covering the Olympic Games, and that inform and shape regional Games values communications. While these samples are justified in their respective chapters, it is important to acknowledge that collectively they are by no means comprehensive of the New Zealand media coverage of the Olympic Games. A global media-mega event, the Games abound with authorized and unauthorized media correspondents in New Zealand and internationally, including: Television networks, radio and podcast coverage, online news and blog sites, as well as various social media platforms utilized by a variety of entities (media companies, organizations, influencers, athletes, and fans) across various different formats (e.g. Youtube, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok) (Billings et al., 2018a; Hutchins & Sanderson, 2017). Accordingly, the media sample here is a purposive selection, representative of five distinct contributors- institutional public relations, online news media, television interviews, and Facebook posts and audience comments. The continuity observed between the three stages is strongly suggestive of widespread New Zealand values communication trends, and thus can be seen to attest to the validity of the selection. Furthermore, in the cases of stages two and three, a concise selection of athletes were chosen for analysis, with selection considerations (e.g. gender, ethnicity, sport) employed as a means of ensuring a representative sample and manageable amount of data for single coder, qualitative analysis. Naturally, the more athletes included, the more representative of the wider New Zealand team the study could claim to be. However, the considerable saturation of the revealed values- within each stage and cohesively across the three stages- can be seen to support that a suitable scale of representative data was achieved. In both of these research stages, I had the flexibility to add additional athletes to the samples had I had concerns for lack of data - ultimately I did not deem this to be necessary. However, there were cases where the athletes I had planned to include in the analysis were ultimately exchanged for others due to lack of requisite content suitable for analysis.

Further to the above points on media selection, it is also important to acknowledge that the respective media samples all underwent sample cleaning, removing elements deemed inappropriate to the research interests. While these were documented and justified in each of the respective chapters, I want to especially note here the exclusion of international media coverage, as a means to thereby acknowledge its place amid New Zealand Games media coverage. The stage one FDA filtered news articles from The New Zealand Herald and Radio New Zealand, selecting only those produced organically but the outlet. By doing so, I eliminated 132 articles supplied by international news outlets, allowing me to maintain a focus on the values communicated in New Zealand media coverage by New Zealanders for New Zealanders, avoiding confusion of potentially different values promoted by international media. However, it could be argued that editorial selection of these articles for re-publication might indicate a sanction of the values therein, at least in the editorial discretion of the media outlet. Furthermore, comparative analysis of the international sources included for selection alongside those produced in-house by the New Zealand outlets, may have underscored any difference in values priorities between regional and international media. Certainly, it was noted that the New Zealand-produced content focused on telling the stories of New Zealand athletes, concentrating in-house resources on national coverage, and outsourcing media coverage of international athletes. These logics can be seen as both ensuring coverage of New Zealand athletes amid the global scope of the Games, and that coverage of these athletes was consistent with cultural nuances and presumed regional audience interests. While I believe the exclusion of international content from these samples was justified in terms of protecting the research interest in New Zealand Olympic values communicated *by* and *for* New Zealanders, I include it here as a limitation as a means of considering that New Zealand Olympic media coverage as an Olympic values discourse, does in fact include international media correspondents and their coverage of the Games, which may have an impact on Olympic values associations for both media and society.

This issue of international media coverage and its transcendence into the regional New Zealand media space is also applicable to the stage two frame analysis of athlete-journalist interviews. As I mentioned previously, I initially approached both *Sky New Zealand* as the regional broadcast rights holder in New Zealand, as well as public broadcaster *TVNZ*, comprising two major broadcasters in New Zealand. As stated, TVNZ was ultimately excluded from the sample as much of the content was repatriated from Sky and therefore redundant. I repeat this here however, as an opportunity to note that the remainder of the TVNZ sample included footage from third-party international contributors such as Channel 7 Australia and BBC. Upholding the approach taken to international content in the stage one analysis, these inclusions in the TVNZ sample further contributed to my decision to discard the sample altogether. Yet, I acknowledge here the inclusion of international broadcast media within New Zealand media coverage of the Olympic Games, as relevant to the values communicated to the New Zealand audience respective of the Games as a whole, and to New Zealand athlete participation.

These insights thus acknowledge that New Zealand coverage of the Games does not exist in isolation of the rest of the world. Further research into these international media connections could indeed take a similar approach to that exercised here, towards understanding the values underpinning coverage of New Zealand athletes in international media, that which is seized upon and repatriated by New Zealand media, and that which is not. Such a study may yet help to spotlight the cultural specificity and nuance of the findings in this study, and further divulge insights into these intimations of a globally-interconnected narrativization of New Zealand national identity in the Olympic media environment.

I would like to make a further note here on data triangulation within the research components. Respective of the word counts granted by the nominated publications, it was necessary in each case to triangulate the data selected for analysis and discussion, to focus on that which proffered the most robust, persuasive and informative insights (Patton, 1990). In the case of stage two, this meant that a portion of the data that was not analysed beyond coding, was absent from the body of the article. In the interest of accommodating this data within the thesis, I have included it as an aside in Appendix D. Moreover, I note here the need for data triangulation across all three stages, as necessary to my scope as a solo researcher within the timeframe and academic confines inherent to undertaking a PhD thesis, as well as the parameters of the research article publication format.

Finally, a limitation applicable to the third stage of the thesis warrants mention, as it illuminates pathways for future research. Article three takes the position that athletes are posting their own content to their Facebook account pages, unless implied otherwise. In the case of the latter, Emma Twigg was the only athlete identified to have used an account manager to communicate with followers throughout the Games, before taking back control in her post-competition posts. In this case, Post 1. featured communication prepared by an account manager, while Post 2. Appears to represent the words of the athlete herself “I am back in MIQ reflecting on what my team has achieved.” (Twigg, 2021b). I accept that this inconsistency threatens to confuse the issue of values communication on behalf of athletes, particularly in the interests of discerning the athlete voice. However, I ultimately decided that this post did not invalidate the athlete from the sample, owing to discernible consistencies with the athletes communication strategy. The post in question featured information regarding the scheduling of the athletes’ event, informing the audience when they could tune in to watch: “Emma's Quarter final has been moved forward to Sunday” (Twigg, 2021a). Considering that the athletes’ act of employing an account manager to maintain communications during the Games can be seen to denote a desire to keep a presumed audience informed, I decided this communication was consistent with the values of such an undertaking (coded as ‘Following’). Moreover, given that Post 2. clearly revealed the athletes’ own voice and values communication, inclusion was considered appropriate to the research interests. However, had there been a greater number of athletes in the

sample employing managers to their communications, different accommodations may have been made either to identify and compare athletes and account managers for values communication, or to eliminate managed accounts from the sample altogether. Furthermore, this represents an opportunity for further research, perhaps designed around separate interviews with athletes to investigate the motivations for employing account managers, who is given this task (family, friends, agents, media professionals), what instruction they are given, and whether the athlete maintains a role in post approval. Similarly, interviews with account managers examining which content they believed suitable and appropriate for posting, could be analysed for values motivations that underpin decision making. Such analyses could yet broaden understandings of athlete public relations, particularly in the space of social media, and their relationship to sport and societal values.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

The fact that the results of the research were so consistent across the stages, and so easily aligned with existing scholarship regarding historical perspectives on sport in New Zealand society, has challenged me to think deeply about what there is to distinguish about their contribution. Having established the distinctions of this study- the media-centred approach, and the combined applications of values theory and mediatization theory- it seems pertinent to resolve how these conceptualizations distinguish this thesis amongst the surrounding literature. For one, the varied sampling of media that underlay the analysis constitute representative selections that essentially serve as a time capsule; contextually located discourses that specifically relate to the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. This selection afforded an analysis of the Games as they were performed in real time, in a varied dispersal invoking contributions at all levels of the Olympic institutional, media, participant and audience strata. These media selections are thus not vulnerable to recollection, or attribution by secondary historical enquiries, and are communicated within a common media ecosystem indicative of the interconnections between media and society. As such, the collective media constitutes a mediatized discourse that can be understood- especially in light of the considerable consistencies in the findings- as indicative of both media and societal values pertaining to the Games.

When presenting elements of this study to my academic peers over the course of my research journey, I have been confronted with the question- What does this thesis have to say about what Olympic sport represents in society (or indeed sport in general) that we don't already know? It is true that many of the findings align with existing literature across various spaces- Olympism values, sporting media narratives, nationalism in the Games, and New Zealand's reverence for sport and athletes. By way of a response in addition to the above, I postulate that this contention is inherent to values research, wherein the values unveiled as representing those held by media and society are immediately recognizable, particularly to members of the society in which they are identified. Values analysis, by nature, is to reveal the social understandings that implicitly underpin language, interactions, attitudes and behaviours, and thus the findings do not typically endear themselves as surprising or unexpected. Raymond Williams' (1958, 1961) claim that culture is ordinary resonates here, wherein the reproduction of human thought and experience is evident throughout vast material manifestations of society, many of which are taken for granted as known or normative. Similarly, Goffman's (1959, 1974) sociology theorizing on the presentation of self and conceptions of frames in communication, effectively unpicks the micro-nuances of human behaviour, offering frameworks for what are familiar, social and societal tendencies. Such studies do not aim at startling revelations, but rather serve to hold a mirror to humanity, invoking a greater understanding of ourselves and our socio-cultural constructs. In such cases, the difference between the familiar and the known, in an academic sense, is of key distinction. In aligning with these micro-sociological approaches; this thesis has made the

familiar explicit, offering a comprehensive catalogue of the values communicated in media coverage regarding a recent iteration of the Olympic Games, capturing and conceptualizing values as normative understandings underpinning communication, serving to define the contemporary mediated Games within a specific time and place. Not only did the research enact a novel approach to understanding the Games and values communicated in terms of media dissemination and mediatization, it also represents the first academic catalogue of values as they relate to New Zealand Olympic sport, offering a broad base for further nationally-based research, or similar comparative projects in other Olympic nations.

Furthermore, the research reveals that the values communicated do not form a static order; a doctrine seamlessly and wittingly adhered to. The theoretical applications of Foucauldian discourse analysis and frame analysis alongside mediatization theory and values theory, enabled the research to reveal values communication as an exchange, sometimes one directional, at other times interactional. The Foucauldian approach to these exchanges foregrounded the power relationships and institutional structures behind the selected media communication as prioritizing certain elements of discourse, while Goffman's (1974) frame theory applied methodologically revealed the micro-sociology governing interactions between journalists and athletes before the media audience. This approach effectively interpreted where values were performed within a contrived awareness of the Olympic context, and where external values transgressed into the otherwise insulated media space. Finally, the thematic analysis of athletes and their social media commentators, further revealed how values are assigned to athletes via their participation in the Olympic Games, and how audience communicators use interpretations of shared values to highlight their own identities, cultures and sense of nationhood. Thus, the values identified are not merely a list of assignations or associations; they invoke and describe a very real relationship between the Olympic Games and society, across various degrees of involvement, awareness and socio-cultural belonging.

This burden of exposing the familiar was two-fold in the Olympic context, owing to the established, explicit espousing of Olympism in association with the Games over more than a century. That New Zealand Olympic values, although nuanced, largely align with Olympism values, threatens to complicate suitable appreciation of the findings: A cohesive, yet socio-culturally specific presentation of values consistent with existing literature surrounding sport in New Zealand society and the wider Olympic movement. However, having reached these conclusions over the course of this thesis, my position is not to contend that these values are surprising or necessarily unique unto themselves. Rather, as a collective, mediatized discourse dispersed through media and across societal layers from the institutional to digital news, broadcast media, athlete and journalist contributions, and social media audiences; they represent a considerably invulnerable values proposition, reflected and reinforced by both media and society. That this could be the case in 2021, some 127 years after the

establishment of the modern Olympic movement, despite the relatively rapid developments in the Games widely attributed to macro-processes of increasing globalization, commercialization, mediatization and associated digitization- is what makes these findings remarkable. Furthermore, given the considerable political and ideological challenges across modern Games history: the Nazi propaganda of 1936, two world wars, the cold war, the political boycotts of 1976,1980 and 1984, the terrorist attack in Munich 1972, and of course the COVID-19 pandemic (to name a notable selection); it is even more surprising (and in some ways, impressive) to consider that the mediatized constitution of Olympic values remains considerably reflective of the antecedents raised at Sorbonne in 1894 (T Real, 1996; Tomlinson, 2017). The mediatization discussion suggests that this sustained continuity speaks to the strength of IOC control over the Games and its mediation, the successful integration of Games values within commercial logics, the Games as a platform for assertions of national identity, and- at least in New Zealand's case- the considerable embeddedness of sporting values in contemporary society.

The stubborn consistency of the communicated values in terms of Williams (1958,1961) ideas regarding culture as a reflection of societal understandings; intuits that the culture of the Games- although challenged by external processes- has remained steadfast. That the values of the contemporary Games have their roots in late 19th century aristocratic imagination, or even earlier where appropriate to their Ancient Greek antecedents, make this consistency even more significant. Considering the direction of 20th century academic inquiries into purposive construction and influence on moral understandings in society as discussed by Middleton (2020); the Olympic example may well present a case for the successful promotion and education of values as projected by the contrived Olympic constitution, amplified by media. Yet, the universality of this idea that the Olympic Games serve as a considered, educational force for social morality is unclear, requiring broader, contextually-specific research to delineate across nations and cultures. It must also be considered that the agreed upon values, as manifested in the Games structures and their subsequent mediatization, are in fact moored throughout human history, captured in the seductive tales of heroic trials and triumphs, that can ultimately be considered vestiges of an ancient values-playbook (Lunt, 2010). As Rahman and Lockwood (2011) touch upon, that such narratives are so seamlessly appropriated to the sporting context is perhaps what makes the Games the ideal vehicle for their continued promotion to society. Thus, in weighing the ability of the Games to inform moral education in society, it can be considered that they pluck from values notions already deeply embedded in the wider human psyche, endowing them with a cultural resonance that is readily understood by the audience. That mediatization of the Games has evolved around these roots, perhaps explains the values constancy as those palatable to both media and society- endearing themselves equally to media logics geared towards capturing and maintaining audiences, and to the enduring relevance of the Games themselves.

Perhaps above all else, the findings reveal that the values communicated in the New Zealand media coverage represent a facet of human nature, the philosophical roots of which (at least in the western world) are more chronologically proximate to the Ancient Greek Games. I return here to the ancient western philosophy foreground at the beginning of this thesis, that is, early theorizing as to individual and societal 'goods', *where* they manifest and *how* to go about reaching them. Artistotle's concept of 'Eudaimonia', the idea that there is that which is ultimately desirable, an end-state towards which individuals and collective societies must orient themselves towards; resonates as an ethos explicitly instrumentalised by Pierre De Coubertin in the foundation of Olympism (Chatziefstathiou & Henry, 2012; Ross, 1998). Herein, sport is a means by which to endear oneself to the 'good', with Olympic success emblematic of its achievement. The values interred in the constitution of the Games, so thoroughly echoed throughout its mediation: Olympic prestige, excellence and athletic excellence; demonstrate the ongoing triumph of the idea that Olympic sport both facilitates hope for betterment, and promotes and offers an instrumental means for achieving it. This consistent consolidation of values, I consider, is perhaps the most potent imagining interred in the modern Olympic proposition, revealed here to be enduringly resilient- throughout its (ongoing) mediatized transformation, and in the face of extreme challenges.

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Appendix D.

Research Stage Two (Chapter Four): Frames and Values Outside the Upper Quartile Including Number of Occurrences and Notes.

Frame	Value	Occurrences	Notes
	Focus	6	
	Grief (Historical grief and grief combined.)	6	
	Excitement	5	
	Normalisation	5	Exclusive to Laurel Hubbard
	Intention	5	
	Belief	5	
	Mental Strength	5	
	Volatility	5	
	Recognition	5	
	Good Fortune/Luck	4	
	Preparation	4	
	Dream	4	
	Cultural Identity	4	
	Inspiration	4	
	Sacrifice	4	
	Discipline	3	
	Stage	3	
	Divine Intervention	3	
	Family Proximity	3	
	Future	3	
	Respect	3	
	Praise	3	
	Meaning	2	
	Order	2	
	Motivation	2	
	Ambition	2	
	Challenge	2	
	Enjoyment	2	
	Community	2	
	Celebration	2	
	Coach Value	2	
	Value/Worth	2	
	Altruism	2	

	Team Development	2	
	Solidarity	2	
	Elusiveness	1	
	Surprise	1	
	Appreciation	1	
	Potential	1	
	Acceptance	1	
	Commitment	1	
	Vulnerability	1	
	Restraint	1	
	Friendship	1	
	Reflection	1	
	Delivery	1	
	Encouragement	1	
	Adherence	1	
	Execution	1	
	Unity	1	
	Youthfulness	1	
	Self-Development	1	
	Achievement	1	
	Contentment	1	
	Learning	1	
	Potential	1	
	Humour	1	
	Faith	1	
	Aspiration	1	
	Distinction	1	
	Camaraderie	1	
	Accountability	1	