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For the Fans ^[1]

APDS Blogger: [Sulagna Misra](#)

The Olympics are never free of controversy. The competing agendas of Olympic stakeholders lead to clashes--tensions are born and re-awakened. Everything from the problematic omniscience of the International Olympic Committee and NBC's intense focus on the United States to the London Organizing Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games' many bouts with disgruntled Britons has contributed to an Olympic Games that is, per usual, a mixture of excitement and annoyance.

The most constant part of the Olympics is the fans. Not necessarily the intense sports fans; just the people who love the Olympics, who weave their enthusiasm into their everyday lives. The Games will just never want for fans because they appeal to everyone to some degree, whether casual or passionate. Even if you're not a particular lover of sports, the opening ceremonies promise to entertain (thanks to Danny Boyle bringing in elements such as sheep and Daniel Craig as James Bond). And perhaps a new sport will catch your eye; if not because of the novelty of a sport like synchronized swimming being showcased on an international scale, then perhaps because of spellbinding Olympic moments with athletes like Michael Phelps and Usain Bolt. Then there are the people who want to see the bliss of the Olympics in real time and come to the actual place – maybe for the first time or the fifth, but nevertheless with passion.

As a Master's of Public Diplomacy student at the University of Southern California, these are the people that are of most interest to me. I want to see the people who want to be mired in the exhilaration of the Games. Before entering my degree program, I was already vaguely interested in the Olympics, but through my studies, specifically in cultural diplomacy, I focused my perspective on the Games as an international diplomatic event that has several combating schemas with everyone in the world potentially watching.

To take a closer look at the Olympics as a tool of cultural diplomacy, I am making a documentary focusing on the motivations and desires of these fans. I chose a documentary because of my past experience in production and to be able to tell these fans' stories in their own words. Through them, I will also analyze the magnetic draw of the Olympics that entices broadcasters, corporate sponsors and host countries to pay billions of dollars merely to be associated with the Games, even if they do not gain from it monetarily. In terms of the visibility, the profit is enormous, even more so now that approximately one third of the world's population is connected by the Internet; and, this Olympic Games is the most social-media fueled ever thanks to the popularity of sites like Tumblr, Twitter, and Facebook.

This latter element is another part of my project – connecting with fans around the world as they gather either in London or in front of their screens through my blog and other social media. Fans connect in different ways through this media: Tumblr focuses on sharing photos (such as that of the Olympic Torch going through their respective towns); Facebook has a

special page for fans to focus on athletes; national broadcasters host Q & A sessions with athletes on Twitter.

Before the Opening Ceremony, I am focusing on the various news stories surrounding the Games: the IOC's gender regulation, ticket controversies, and the frustration of the fans at the policing of their entertainment, which can range from a restriction on using "London 2012" on anything to banning gifts to the athletes because "free" will compete with corporate sponsors. During the Games, I will go directly to London and meet with the fans – specifically at the London festival, fan-hosted events, and any areas where fans congregate, such as Olympic concerts.

For such a politicized, monetized, and overwrought event, it is inspiring to find sincere anticipation. Of course, every type of event where there are winners and losers has cynicism, but the problems feel more pronounced on an international scale. The fans may be the main audience for all these different agendas and the most irritated by the various mishaps and missteps, but they are also the ones who will be watching no matter what.

Sulagna Misra is a graduate student pursuing a Master's degree in Public Diplomacy from USC's Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism.
