

# Study: Weather might impact tone of Olympics coverage

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(Phys.org) -- Whether it rains or shines might actually have an impact on how journalists cover the Olympics, according to researchers at Penn State.

Using coverage of the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing as a basis, the researchers examined how [air pollution](#) and weather -- by producing [cloudy conditions](#) as opposed to sunlight -- might have impacted coverage of those Games. They examined four major U.S. newspapers and found that as air pollution increased and temperatures rose, journalists were more likely to use negative words in stories about the host country and about competitors from China and the United States when reporting.

Because London is know for its cloudiness and rain, researchers think the tone of coverage of the 2012 Olympic Games in London could be impacted if grey and misty conditions exit. If so, reporters might focus more on what is wrong with the Games. But if the weather is ideal, reporters are more likely to give the Olympics a higher grade, if the research from Beijing holds true.

The study -- authored by Bu Zhong, associate professor in the College of Communications, and published in a special Olympic issue of Mass Communication and Society -- suggests there is a relationship between weather and journalism coverage, and notes that negative and positive language in [news reports](#) can be further impacted by factors such as deadline pressure, living in an unknown country and personal feelings

about a sporting event.

By discovering a potential link between the environment and media coverage, the researchers caution journalists to be aware of any potential subconscious bias they are including in their reports -- whether they are covering the Olympics or some other event where weather can be a factor.

“This article suggests that journalists’ decision making could be influenced by a greater variety of factors than we previously thought,” said Zhong, a senior research fellow in the John Curley Center for Sports Journalism at Penn State. “To better understand journalists’ thinking process, it is necessary to explore not only known patterns of journalistic practices, but also some exogenous factors, such as weather.”

Still, the Olympic Games in London, scheduled from July 27 to Aug. 12, fall during two of the least rainy months of the year in England. Rainfall averages 1.8 inches in July and 2.2 inches in August. The average rainfall in London is 29 inches per year. By comparison, New York City averages 47.2 inches and Beijing 25.

Yong Zhou of Renim University of China was a co-author on the study, one of eight included in a special edition of the journal published this month. Other articles addressed topics such as: differences in Olympic viewing by traditional TV audiences and those who watch on the Internet; the relationship between athletes’ cultural norms and the reasons they give for their Olympic success; and symbolism in the opening ceremonies.

“The [Olympic Games](#) are the pinnacle of mediated sports coverage. This concentrated collection of research reveals the breadth and facets of how the Games impact us, the viewers,” said Stephen Perry, editor of Mass Communication and Society and co-editor of the special issue. “More

than 40 scholars submitted research ideas for this issue, and the eight that were selected were the best of the best.”

Two of the eight selected came from Penn State. Along with Zhong’s work about the impact of weather on coverage, professor Marie Hardin, associate director of the Curley Center, collaborated on an article that focused on differences between [coverage](#) of the same sport when played by men or women.

Mass Communication and Society is a scholarly journal focused on publishing articles from a wide variety of perspectives and approaches that advance [mass communication](#) theory, especially at the societal or macro-social level. It draws heavily from many other disciplines, including anthropology, history, law, philosophy, psychology and sociology.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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