

Channel 4 and Paralympics coverage

- how a UK broadcaster is reframing



Project Overview

WP 1:

C4 Interviews [24]

WP 2:

Audience Focus Groups [216 audience members / 24 follow-up interviews]. Audience survey [2011 nationally representative participants]

WP 3:

Qualitative & Quantitative Content Analysis

WP 4: IPC Archival Analysis

WP 5:

Documentary Film & Public Exhibition

Channel 4 and the

▣ Paralympics

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Took over rights for the Paralympics for 2012

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Previously held by BBC (highlights only)

- Very different approach

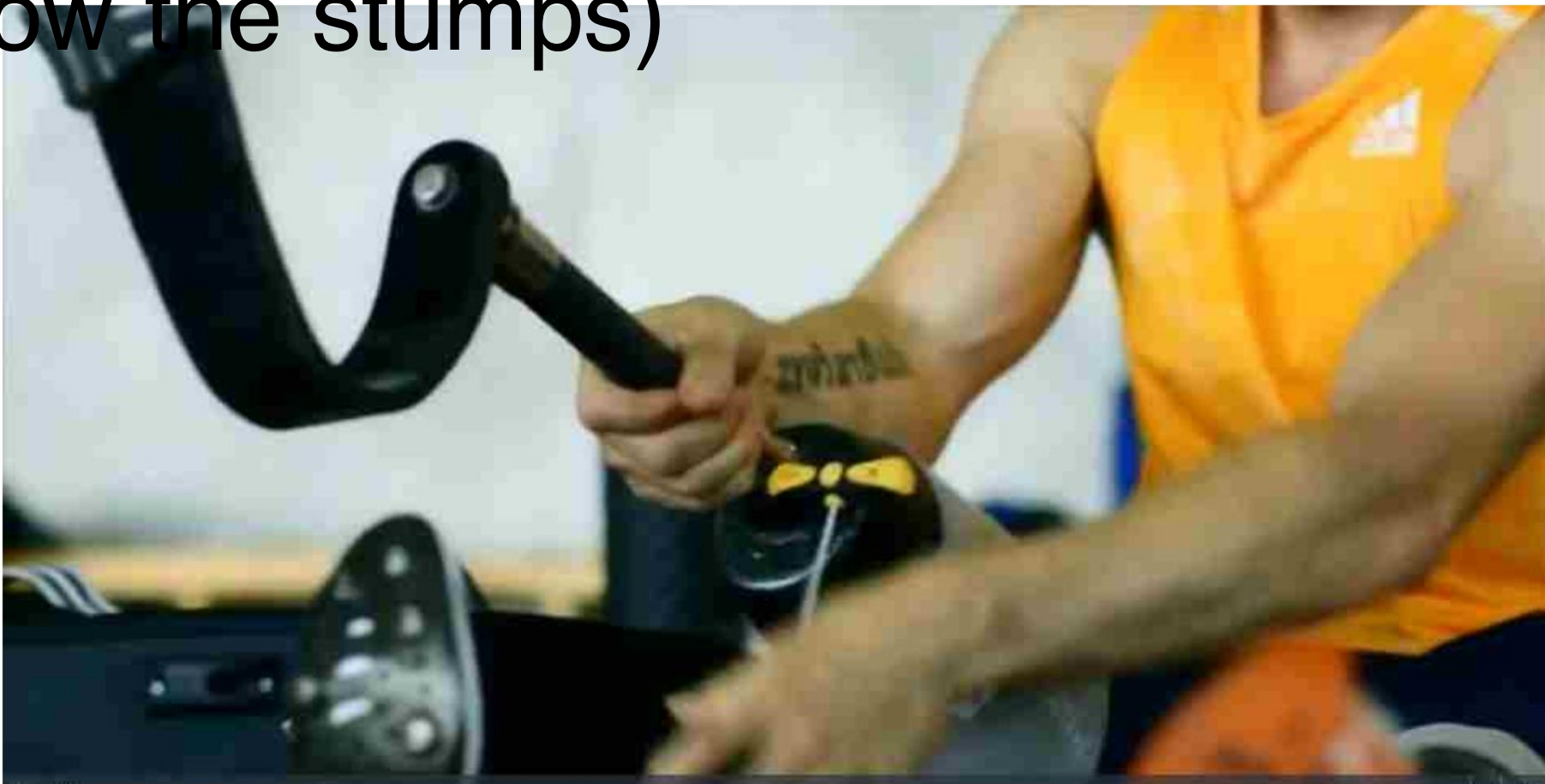
1. Unprecedented exposure

4 Tomorrow Evening's TV Schedule
Rio 2016 Paralympic Games

8.35pm	Track Cycling - Women's C1-3 Individual Pursuit, Final Megan Giglia
9.20pm	Track Cycling - Women's C5 Individual Pursuit, Final Sarah Storey
9.40pm	Swimming - Men's S8 400m Freestyle, Final Ollie Hynd & Josef Craig
9.40pm	Track Cycling - Men's B Tandem Pursuit, Final Steve Bate & Adam Duggleby
9.50pm	Swimming - Women's S8 400m Freestyle, Final Stephanie Millward

@C4Paralympics

2. A 'no holds barred' approach to disability (show the stumps)



3. Developing disabled talent (on and off screen)



4. Integrating humour



5. Re-positioning para-athletes as 'Superhumans'





The Hollywood Treatment

If you have been in some terrible accident or some terrible war zone and you've got scarring... **this is not a tea party, let's see it.**

Actually most people will be able to deal with the reality of that, particularly if you do something that's never been done before...

it's giving it the **Hollywood treatment** and giving it *attitude* and a *sexiness* that isn't normally associated with that side of life

(senior executive, our emphasis).

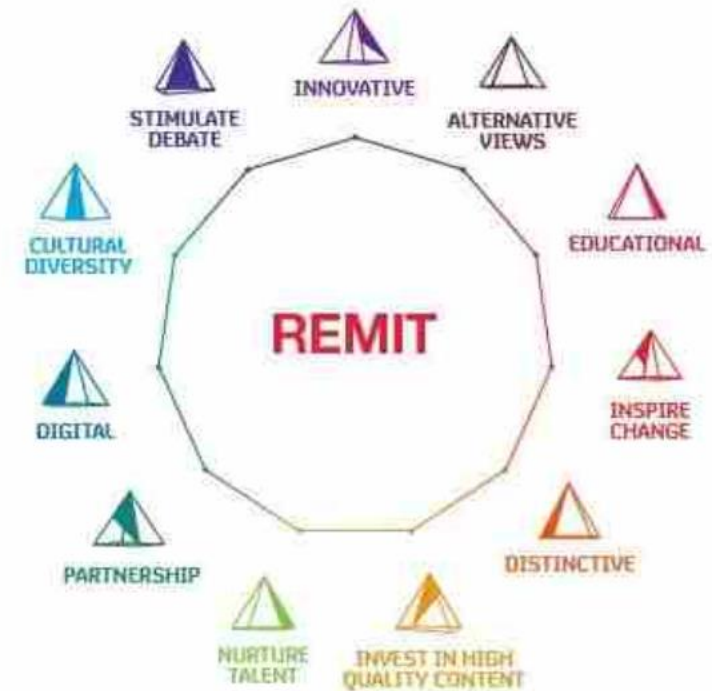


Arts & Humanities
Research Council



“Channel 4 has a remit which is set out in law and Channel 4’s job is to challenge the status quo, **to give a voice to people who don’t always get heard, to take risks, to inspire change** and obviously we do that commercially and **that’s the difference between us and the BBC**. We have to fund that so we have programmes that are very commercial ... but the Paralympics in a way this is the best example of us doing something that is entertaining but also makes a **broader bigger point about society...**”

...”because that’s what Channel 4 is here to do, its part of our DNA” [Senior Executive]



A bold new marketing strategy for 2012...

“2012 was about kind of **placing the sport as an equal to the Olympics** framing it and showing it in a way that had never been shown before. So making the marketing feel like something that Nike would do for other sports... **spend lots of money, lots of posters, lots of TV ads, this is a big deal, shoot it with a gritty style** and all of that. But the ingredient that obviously made it different and we confronted head on the **stories of the athletes** ...that was controversial and quite a lot of people disagreed but our view was for people to connect to it....

“...Paralympic sport is unique in that it has this **unique set of stories about people**... you had to shake things up and **be quite confrontational** and be quite in your face but authentic” [Executive producer]

The "superhumans" was a new brand. But brand associations were sought after in order to leverage the social meanings

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*My one advice:
Focus on what
you have - not
what you've lost.*

Katrin Green, sprinter

Believe in yourself.
We are supporting the Paralympic spirit.
allianz.com/believe

With you from A-Z

Allianz

Official Partner of the International Paralympic Committee

This advertisement features a Paralympic sprinter, Katrin Green, in a starting crouch on a track. A large number '1' is in the top left. A quote from her is in a white box. The Allianz logo and slogan are in the bottom right. The Paralympic logo is in the bottom left.

BT Infinity. Incredible broadband speeds, for times faster than the UK average.

bt.com/infinity

BT

This advertisement shows a Paralympic athlete in motion, with a blue energy trail behind them. The BT logo is in the bottom left.



...and a superhuman narrative...

“The idea of athletes being super human emerged , and actually initially the whole development we had came out of **X Men**. So X Men is an unusual piece of **mainstream populist entertainment where disabled people are heroes and it’ a fantastic insight X Men because some impairment produces a strength in another part of who you** are and we wrote some scripts about that and actually we were talking to a film director who had made one of the X Men films about making it”



...that paved the way for Rio 2016

*“2012 was all about let’s sell a major sporting event and then by the way the outcome of that will be changing attitudes to disability, with the marketing of 2016 we were like let’s start with changing attitudes to disability and by the way the outcome of that will be a successful sports event. Hence why we decided that we wanted to do something in the marketing that wasn’t just about sport so the advert that we made, the **yes I can advert**, didn’t just feature athletes it featured disabled people doing extraordinary things in all walks of life. That was quite a step change which we never would have been able to do before 2012. I think it gave us a licence to say there’s a bigger prize here which is about using the platform of the Paralympics to really make people think differently about the potential of disabled people in all walks of life...” [Communications manager]*

THE
SUPER-
HUMAN
BAND

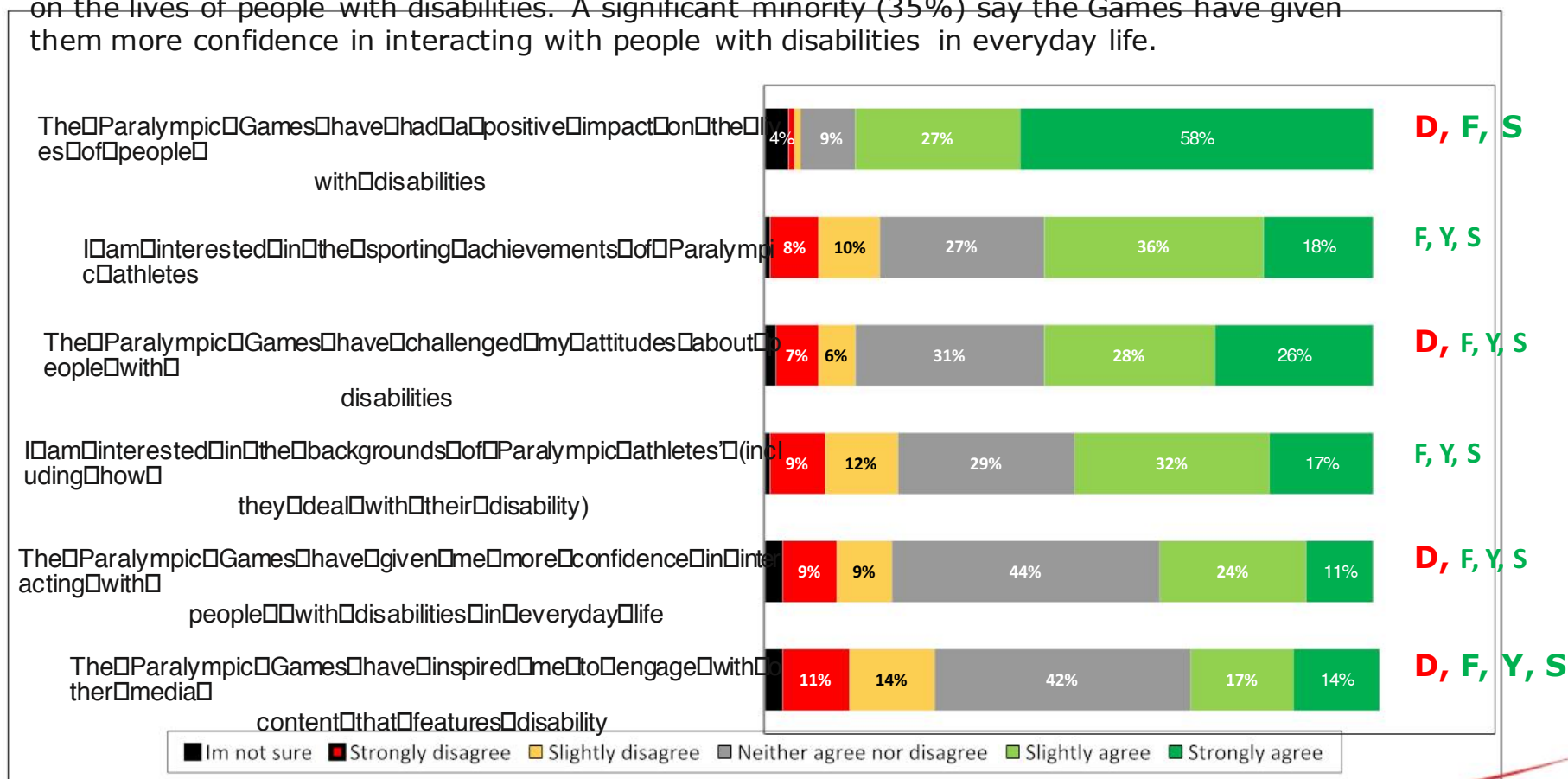


YES
I
CAN



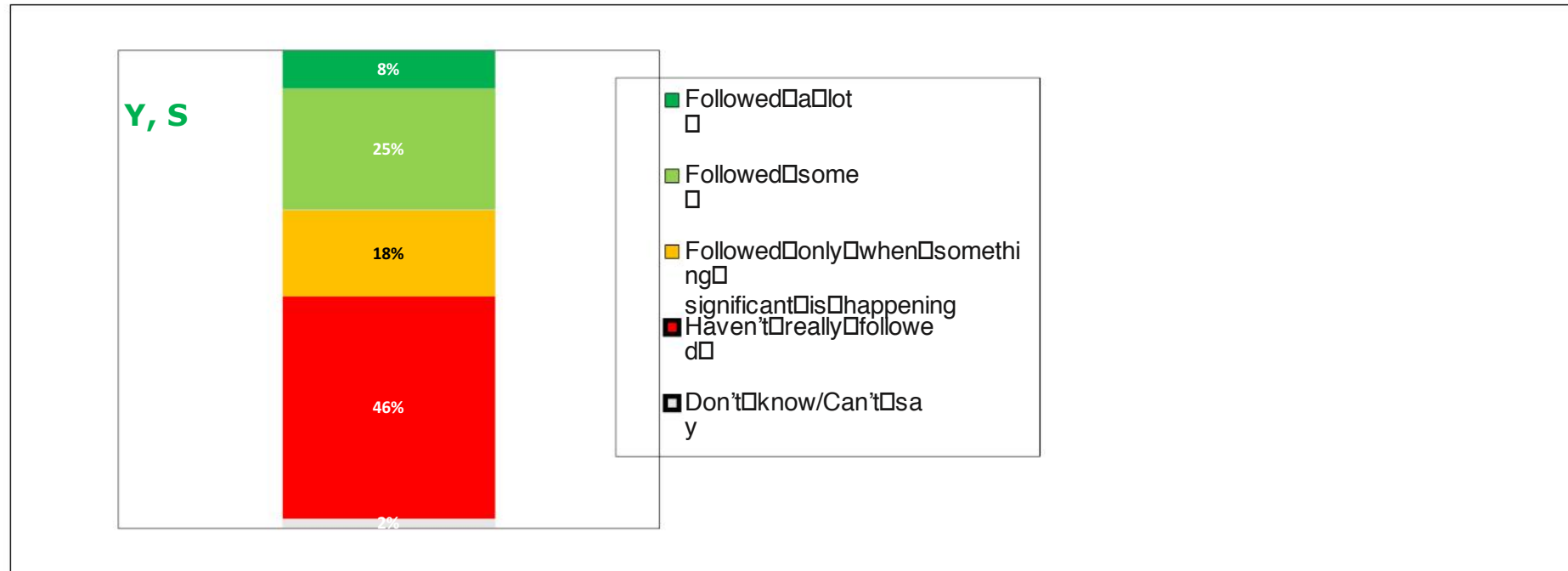
ENGAGEMENT AND IMPACT

The vast majority of respondents (85%) believe the Paralympic Games have had a positive impact on the lives of people with disabilities. A significant minority (35%) say the Games have given them more confidence in interacting with people with disabilities in everyday life.



FOLLOWING THE PARALYMPIC GAMES

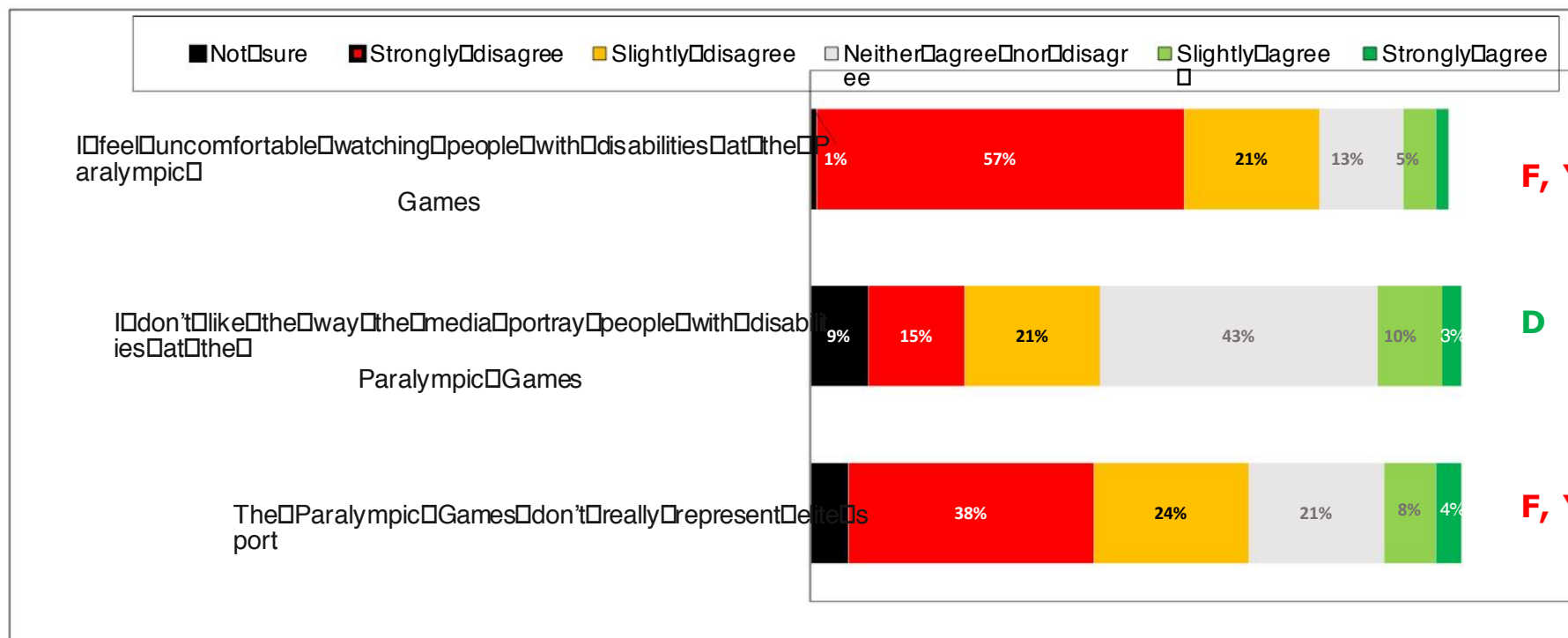
There is a fairly even split between respondents who have or haven't followed the Paralympic games (51% compared to 46%, respectively).





PERCEPTIONS OF PARALYMPIC SPORT

Significantly, only small minorities of respondents agree with any of the statements exploring possible reasons they may have for not being interested in disability sport. Opinions are more divided on the issue of the manner in which athletes participating at Paralympics are portrayed in the media.



Base: All participants (N=2,011)

Source: Q13 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Focus Groups

Audience perceptions of the Paralympic Games

211 members of the public

Insights (I)

Viewing the Paralympics as an elite sport event...

"I think it offers, it has offered, something different from just sport before, I think

Channel 4's coverage for the last Paralympics offered sports as well as something

different, so it kind of combined the two, less of, for lack of a better word, a

spectacle like watching just Olympic sport. I think disability comes into it. Perhaps

before the London Olympics I probably wouldn't have been so keen to watch it

but after watching that I thought oh there is no difference, it's sport, and as I

said the Channel 4 coverage was excellent"

"I just feel that, I think coverage now is... you know, I think they try and portray

people as a lot more normal, it is not as patronising as it used to be, you

know... they're (C4) actually educating people around what people can do"

Insights (II)

Athlete stories as a way to understand disability...

“I think it’s very useful and if there are athletes that are willing to put their stories

out there to educate people then that’s the best way people are going to learn”

“You can relate to the problems that they have like for day to day tasks. So like just

doing day to day things you can relate where they have to overcome something

that you do. So it’s not all about like running 100 metres or throwing a discus, it can

be just day to day tasks, and that’s like part of bringing that story”

“People are immune to or just don’t choose to know what different disabilities are

out there, how severe, like the severity of the same disability it can range. So two

people with the same disability can be completely different, and I think you’re only

going to get the population to know and educate about that by doing these stories”

Insights (III)

A platform to progressive social change...

“It’s definitely had an impact... but things just move forward progressively, I think the

Paralympics has probably helped”

“it’s made me much more willing to try and engage with people I come in daily life

with a disability that previously I might have not. I have found over the last 6 years,

having been exposed to it more on tv, that I want to talk to people and try and

understand what their needs and wants are, not opposing anything on them, but I feel

much more comfortable engaging with people and seeing what I can do. Just because somebody has that [a disability] and they’re not able to do

something, a little bit easier for them”

that’s exactly what the Paralympics shows, that’s exactly what the advert is trying to

show, just because they weren’t born able bodied they are still like completely able to

Insights (IV)

The normalisation of disability on screen...

“It’s the awareness I think isn’t it, just getting more people, like younger generations that are watching it [Paralympics] and like it’s just making it more common”

“I have noticed reporters on shows like Watchdog and The One Show, disabled reporters, but not talking about a disability issue but now they are talking about anything and everything which is how it should be and I think that since the Paralympics in 2012”

“I think in the last 5 years it has almost normalised it, my granddaughter has been brought up with it being accepted and just on tv and it’s, you know, people should be judged on their abilities rather than a disability”

Tensions and Challenges

Tension within disabled communities and wider disability awareness

“An intellectual impairment I think is not mentioned so much, there’s not, it’s not talked about so I think there’s certain disabilities that you know more about”

“I think that more awareness should be done because my sister has cerebral palsy and it affects the way she processes information, if you see her you wouldn’t think she has a disability, but she can’t follow long, like pieces of information kind of thing. So, I’m sure there’s people in the Paralympics that actually do have that but we know less”

“I think we’re getting better but I think, well I feel as a nation we’re still probably trying to understand some of those disabilities where it’s not as obvious”



Four take-aways

1. Remit counts. Regulatory structures enabled C4 to take risks.
2. Athlete backstories were key way of making the audience care (commercial logic).
3. C4's broadcasting of the Paralympics has led to progressive social change.
4. 'The Hollywood treatment' for Paralympians was double-edged.

To see more...



Tracking changes in everyday experiences of disability and disability sport within the context of the 2012 London Paralympics.

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Thanks for
listening



Keep up to date with the project at www.pasccal.com @ [pasccalproject](https://twitter.com/pasccalproject)

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