Preface

Media Events in a Global Context

It is now over twenty years since Dayan and Katz (1992) published their seminal work on the nature of media events. In identifying what a media event could be, a live broadcast of either a major news story, sporting competition or large public gathering, the research enabled a sea change in the perception of how broadcasters selected and prioritised what was placed in front of the audience. What the work additionally enabled was a change in the perception of the audience at a time when viewing television was still seen as a passive experience. In the ensuing period of time there has been much that has changed in the way that media is presented and observed. Geo-political change has meant that the world is not as bi-polar as it was and the resulting spread of free market economies means that broadcasters have now become global conglomerates providing content to many different countries simultaneously. The broadcasting of sport has become a multi-billion pound industry, sparking frequent bidding wars by those media conglomerates for the rights to show sporting events. News broadcasting has moved away from the traditional bulletin placed in amongst other programmes as part of a schedule, what instead have emerged are 24 hour news channels, placing an emphasis on breaking news providing a constant stream of information. Audiences now subscribe to packages of channels, leading to traditional broadcasters such as the BBC in the UK struggling to justify their existence as a publicly funded entity. Technological change means that there is now a variety of ways in which the public can access content, either through desktop computers to wireless tablets and smartphones. The emergence of social media networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram means that communication between not only individuals but a potentially much larger spectrum of the population has finally broken down space, time and distance as Marshall McLuhan (1974) envisaged when describing his global village. Applications like Periscope and Bambuser provide the opportunity for anyone with a smartphone to stream live video through their social media platforms.

While Dayan and Katz’s (1992) definition of the media event is still relevant, after all royal couples still get married and FIFA World Cups are still played, we have to re-position the debate to take into account the manner in which the world has changed, sociologically, politically and technologically. The diffusion of television content has led to the emergence of genre specific channels across the spectrum resulting in the problem that content is needed. Therefore we have constant re-runs of old comedy shows, a repetitive news cycle or a constant re-hashing of one particular story and a plethora of sporting events which fill the schedules of these genre specific channels. All this means that channels resort to more spectacular ways of trying to grab the attention of the audience and has a profound impact on the definition of the media event; with so much live television, particularly for sport and news, are we being
subjected as an audience which consumes rather than views to a series of media events on a daily basis? The answer to this is, of course, no, but the broadcasters want us through the use of kaleidoscopic graphics, dramatic montages and hyperbolic scripts that we are constantly experiencing something special; a news broadcast which offers something different to that other 24 hour news channel or the opportunity to witness a more action packed football match then is on offer on other sport specific channels. Likewise the genre specific channels increasingly rely on a more vocal public voice. This is particularly true in news with the advent of social media tools and the emergence of 24 hour channels in Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

What this volume aims to do is re-position the media event within the context of all of the above. In this respect this work acts as a companion and a response piece to Mitu and Poulakidakos’s (2016) work. However, such is the re-invigorated interest in the media event that the two volumes sit together comfortably. What is clear is that there is a high degree of interest in stipulating just what constitutes a media event, how it is realised and how the attitudes of the broadcasters and the audience have changed since 1982. This volume approaches the media event from four perspectives. The first of these is Television, New Media and Media Events. Secondly there is a series of chapters which look at the media event from the historical perspective, followed by another series of chapters on ceremonial media events before the volume closes with a final section on sporting competition as media events.

TELEVISION, NEW MEDIA, AND MEDIA EVENTS

The first section of the volume begins with Christian Morgner’s analysis of the media event as a global phenomenon. Citing three examples, the sinking of the Titanic, the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the Fukushima disaster in Japan, Morgner provides a fascinating discussion as to how in reality the media reaction to a disaster has not changed over the past century. The only significant change has been the technology relaying the information, so the telegraph and telex for the Titanic sinking, television for the Kennedy assassination and the internet for Fukushima.

Morgner’s final points about the internet driven mediscapes which currently exists links in neatly with Chapter 2, Andy Fox’s examination of the how the audience has become more pro-active in shaping a media event. Again three case studies are used, in this respect, the Charlie Hebdo and Tunisian beach terrorist attacks and the live on-air murder of Alison Parker and Adam Ward, all of which occurred in 2015. The central theme of the chapter is that in each case television broadcasters relied on social media to help tell the stories that were unfolding. So, a campaign of support for Charlie Hebdo, video shot by tourists on the beach in Tunisia and the perpetrator himself posting footage of the moment that he murdered Parker and Ward, stills of which were seized upon by the mainstream media.

Moving the discussion forward, in Chapter 3, Diego Oswaldo Camacho Vega analyzes the impact of social networking sites in shaping terrorist media events using as a case study the Ayotzinapa massacre, Mexico. This event is used an example of digital activism and cooperative behaviors related to extreme events. The author argues that social networking sites and blogs have become an important tool to monitor terror and protest, and also prevent extreme events.

The first section is beautifully rounded by Monika Verbalyte’s analysis of the critical role of emotions in media events. The chapter starts with a short overview of the way media events were understood by the founders of this concept and then explores how research of the political scandal fits into the context.
of ongoing debates on the nature of media events. The author argues that the right definition of emotions could enrich the analysis of both, media events in general and media scandals in particular.

HISTORICAL CRises AND MEDIA EVENTS

The second section of the volume with Cesar Jiménez-Martínez’s chapter, “Integrative Disruption: The Rescue of the 33 Chilean Miners as a Live Media Event,” that problematizes some current perspectives concerning disasters and media events, using a remarkable ‘Southern’ episode as a case study: the broadcast of the rescue of the 33 Chilean miners in October 2010. Using Critical Discourse Analysis to examine the narratives constructed during the live coverage by local television station TVN and global broadcaster BBC World News, this chapter argues that, from a theoretical point of view, traditional categories such as “integrative” or “disruptive” appear to be ill equipped to deal with the current complexity of media events. In addition, in spite of the different accounts constructed by local and global media, media events seem to be much more cohesive and restricted to what has been recently argued by some scholars (e.g. Hepp & Couldry, 2010).

In Chapter 6, Valentina Marinescu aims to identify the impact of the media narrations regarding the events that took place in Romania in January-February 2012 on the way in which the Romanian public reconstructed these protests. Two research methods were used in collecting the data: a survey on two hundreds Romanian respondents and quantitative content analysis of five national Romanian newspapers. As the results show, the high consumption of mass media messages does not determine whether the public adopts the media narratives concerning the events from the beginning of year 2012. At the same time, the analysis showed that in the case of the media events that took place in Romania in January-February 2012 the impact of the media narrative on the way in which the audience from Romania rebuilt those protests was a minor one and other factors had played a major role in triggering massive mass protests in Romania.

Robin Vandevoordt’s chapter (“Humanitarian Media Events: On the Symbolic Conditions of Moral Integration”) links very well with the first two chapters of the second section by introducing the concept humanitarian media events. The chapter analyses NGOs appeals as ‘humanitarian media events’ by drawing attention to their distinctive features, in line with recent trends to broaden the notion of ‘media events’ (Liebes, 1998; Katz & Liebes, 2007; Dayan, 2010, cited in Hepp & Krotz, 2010; Couldry, Hepp, & Krotz, 2010). The theoretical reflections are applied to the case of the Belgian appeal for the Syrian refugee crisis, launched in April 2013. The analysis consists of three components: the media, by comparing the coverage on Syria during the most important period of the appeal; the campaign, relying on in-depth interviews with campaigners and campaign material; and the audience, by drawing on interviews with audience members who organised a small-scale fundraising activity. This chapter thereby develops a neo-Durkheimian, symbolic-cognitive framework to understand the nature and course of national humanitarian appeals, and the role played by a variety of social actors.

In Chapter 8 Bogdan Bucur offers a few pages of history by focusing on the ideological orientation of two of the most important interwar Romanian publications endorsed by Academician Dimitrie Gusti and scientifically sanctioned by the Sociological School of Bucharest: Curierul Echipelor Studențești [Student Teams Courier (STC) issued between 1935 and 1938] and Curierul Serviciului Social [Social Service Courier (SSC) issued in 1939]. The two magazines played an important part in strengthening the personality cult of King Carol II (who ruled in Romania between 1930 and 1940) and in legitimiz-
ing his regime of monarchical authority, established in February 1938. Moreover, the abovementioned publications were used by the monarchy to support the politico-ideological actions of the Romanian youth enlisted in the mass paramilitary organizations of the time, intended as an alternative to the similar structures of the Legionary Movement (which was experiencing a significant boom in the interwar period). The paramilitary youth organizations of the 1930’s, established under Carol II’s regime – mobilizing young people of all ages and levels of education, at first voluntarily and later compulsorily – served as models or precursors for similar structures that would later be set up by the Communist Party, after its accession to power (March 6, 1945 – December 22, 1989) as a result of the Soviet military occupation.

CEREMONIAL MEDIA EVENTS

In Chapter 9 Yoel Cohen focuses on the role of the media in religious holidays and argues that religious holiday editorial matter contributes to religious identity in the contemporary era. Interesting results emerge such as differences in editorial patterns between the different religious holidays, and between the secular and religious media. The chapter is followed by Julia Sonnevend’s chapter, “More Hope! Ceremonial Media Events are Still Powerful in the Twenty-First Century,” which provides an interesting and challenging discussion on the changing views of Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz by using three contemporary case studies from three national contexts: the Obama inauguration (2009), the royal wedding of Prince William and Catherine Middleton (2011) and the most recent World Cup (2014). These three events represent the three basic scripts introduced by Dayan and Katz: “conquest,” “coronation” and “contest.” The selected case studies and many other events as well, still bring societies and nations together in our “disillusioned” media environment, providing momentary hope for local and cosmopolitan citizens. With the help of the three case studies, Sonnevend argues that ceremonial media events are still essential and powerful in what many scholars describe as a “fragmented” and “disillusioned” new media environment.

Moving the discussion forward, Martha Evans in Chapter 11 argues that Dayan and Katz’s 1992 theory of media events must be extended to include the spontaneous live broadcasting of historical tragedies. Evans examines Nelson Mandela’s funeral broadcast and its implications for media events theory and asserts that, contrary to expectations of media events’ waning fate, in the age of social media, we should not be too hasty to dismiss audience desire for shared experience and the possibilities of integrative events.

The final chapter of this section, “The Black Panther has Died: Or How Ceremonial Television Hosted Public Mourning,” starts with asking whether the Media Events genre is still a major theory for understanding contemporary forms of social integration attained through mediated communication and analyses the live coverage of the funerary ceremonies of Eusébio, the Portuguese world-wide football legend. Samuel Mateus argues that the Media Events category is not just an invaluable frame to understand contemporary television but it is also a vital process on the way societies re-work their solidarities, negotiate collective belonging and publicly stage social rituals.

SPORTING COMPETITION AS MEDIA EVENTS

The final section of the volume begins with Marica Spalletta and Lorenzo Ugolini’s chapter, “Between Sport Event and Media Event: The Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games in Italian Newspapers.” Through a qualitative media content analysis, the chapter examines the way in which two Italian significant
newspapers (Corriere della Sera and La Gazzetta dello Sport) covered the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympic Games. The research shows that the analysis of Sochi 2014 as a media event cannot abstract from the current main features of sports journalism that are hybridization, mediatization and popularization. Therefore, the authors assert that Sochi has represented a break of journalistic daily routine because of a journalistic coverage strongly hybridized but, on the other hand, it can’t be fully considered as a “media event” because of the lack of mediatization and popularization.

In Chapter 14, Diana-Luiza Dumitriiu moves the debate on the media-sport nexus in order to understand the impact that this hybridization process between the two social fields has on sport events and aims to answer to the following questions: How do media reflect and redefine sport competitions as media events? What are the main aspects that make sport events so competitive on the wider entertaining (media) market? The chapter approaches sport omnibus events as media shows by analyzing their multilayered structure: the dramaturgical dimension of sport acts and its corollary management of impression, the ritual dimension of sport ceremonial practices, the axiological dimension of sport events as social values’ system, the commercial dimension of sport events as products on the entertaining and celebrity market, the aesthetic dimension of sport acts as expressive media constructs and their emotional dimension in terms of spectatorship experience.

The final chapter of the volume identifies Indian Premier League as a ‘media event’ and, equates and evaluates the ways in which this qualifies as a media event by juxtaposing it with the major aspects provided by Dayan and Katz (1992). Sony Jalarajan Raj and Rohini Sreekumar claim that the Indian Premier League (IPL) has evolved as a popular event for the large entertainment savvy middle class as well as sports enthusiasts who equally enjoy the new live spectacle on television. The chapter argues that the concept of IPL as a media event is identified by the public as a glorified Bollywood film where it set an ideology that every second should be enjoyed with a similar enthusiasm of a masala Bollywood film.

This volume proposes a wide but critical perspective on media events and it is intended to be an invitation to a cultural understanding of the role of media events in contemporary world, a re-conceptualization of the relationship between the media events and the recent technological changes. Without this cultural approach and criticism of media events theory there cannot be any hope of improving this theory in the context of the contemporary media practices of the 21st century. The articles enclosed in this volume offer a unique innovative approach to the study of media events attempting at moving the debates further in the age of media convergence. In summary, the present volume aims to widen the debate by taking into account the manner in which the world has changed, sociologically, politically and technologically and stands as an instigation to future research as it present insights and ambitious attempts to expand a rigorous methodology on the study of contemporary media events. We therefore hope that the debates generated by this volume will inspire both scholars and media practitioners to study this further.

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REFERENCES


