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B. Hutchins & J. Sanderson (2017) 'The Primacy of Sports Television: Olympic Media, Social Networking Services and Multi-Screen Viewing during the Rio 2016 Games', Media International Australia, No. 164.

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The Primacy of Sports Television: Olympic Media, Social Networking Services and Multi-Screen Viewing during the Rio 2016 Games

Abstract

The Olympic Games are a global sports mega-event where the aggregation of mass audiences is still observable at a time when multiplying forms of personalized connective media – digital, mobile and social – are making inroads into media consumption habits. Using the 2016 summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, as a case study, this paper examines the intersections between: (i) broadcast television coverage of the Games; (ii) digital live streaming of Olympic events via desktop computing and mobile apps, and; (iii) the social networking services, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat. It is argued that broadcast television anchors the flow of content across screens, with social networking services both extending the televisual logics of media sports coverage *and* emphasizing their own commercial influence and command of massive user numbers. This arrangement ultimately bolsters the power of television as the primary means through which sports mega-events are experienced.

Keywords

Sports media, media sports, social media, mobile media, connected viewing, Snapchat

It is this doubling of the communal, “mass” audience, shared cultural experience, *and* personalized, individuated, “à la carte” potential of sport that defines its centrality to the continued market strength and cultural significance of network television *and* to the promotion and realization of the post-network era’s multi-platform model of “networking.”

(Johnson, 2009: 123; original emphasis)

This observation made by television studies scholar Victoria Johnson seven years ago speaks to sophisticated multi-screen “connected viewing” practices, centered on live elite level sports (Holt and Sanson, 2014). The significance of these practices lies in the unique ability of sports to highlight the connections between broadcast television coverage, and the deployment of mobile and social media technologies by television networks, digital media operators and social networking services. As the national and global audiences for the 2016 summer Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro attest, sports mega-events are sites where the long-standing cultural and symbolic purchase of mass media events can still be observed, albeit in contested forms (Couldry et al., 2010; Dayan and Katz, 1992; Price and Dayan, 2008). Mega-events also offer important insights into how television coverage intersects with the individuated address of “connective media” platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (van Dijck, 2013) and the live streaming services provided by broadcast networks online.

A perhaps unanticipated consequence of connected viewing over the past decade is that the distribution of content across television, computer, tablet and smartphone screens has enabled many viewers “to watch *more* television” in domestic and public settings (Lotz, 2014: 55; original emphasis). This development has reinforced the significance of television as a commercial medium, social ritual and industry. The screens that television and television-related content travel across may have diversified, as have the revenue streams attached to them, but television continues to reliably command large-scale audience attention that is sold to advertisers. Nowhere is the capacity to watch exhaustive amounts of live content by audiences more apparent than multi-event and multi-fixture sports events such as summer and winter Olympic Games, the FIFA World Cup and the ICC Cricket World Cup.

Promotional announcements by broadcast rights holders prior to all these events boast of hundreds or thousands hours of coverage being made available to audiences and users across all platforms. The popularity and structure of these events also underpins the intense competition for live coverage rights among television networks, telecommunications carriers, and video streaming service operators around the world, all of which offer television content in one form or another (Evens et al., 2013; Rowe, 2011).

Yet, the capacity described here reveals a tension that requires investigation if the logics through which television continues to exercise its social reach and cultural influence are to be understood. As Amanda D. Lotz (2014: 89) expresses it, “media events have become more personalized.” The socially integrative and ritualistic dimensions of collectively witnessed sporting contests are potentially undermined by the individuating effects of watching different parts of the same event across different screens, digital streams and social networking services. For example, during the 2016 Olympics, users of the NBC Sports website in the US could select their own online live stream of individual sports (e.g. archery, sailing, diving, synchronized swimming, shooting, etc.), offering a concentrated focus on a single medal event compared to NBC’s roaming broadcast television coverage and commentary. Similarly, the choice of a “second screen” social networking app by a viewer (Tussey, 2014) – Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and/or Snapchat – to access coverage-related content elicited converging and diverging user activities and content derived from Olympic competition. The predicament for television networks is how to organize and harness the personalization of consumption across multiple screens in the process of articulating a collective televisual address, and to connect with social networking services in such a way that audience attention is directed back towards the live television coverage and the advertising interspersed throughout it.

Live Olympic television coverage and Games-related content is now spread across multiple screens. During Rio 2016, these screens encompassed: (i) broadcast television coverage of the Games; (ii) digital live streaming of Olympic events by broadcast networks via desktop computing and mobile apps for tablets and smartphones, and; (iii) the social networking services, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter

and Snapchat. The approach taken in this article recognizes that the commercial success and cultural prominence of sports on television – and popular media content more generally – now pivots on an understanding of “the relationship *between* screens”:

Television, computer, tablet, and mobile phone screens connect different dimensions of live fixtures and events, as well as the secondary and complementary news and social media discussions that occur around them. (Hutchins and Rowe, 2012: 76)

This situation entails examining the corporate relations, technologies, textual features and media practices that structure these relationships, particularly as these factors determine an ongoing recontextualization of television in changing media systems and conditions. Described as “a product of television’s power to produce and distribute live global spectacle” and “an incredible juggernaut of mass media power and influence” (Horne and Whannel, 2012: 47; Billings, 2008: 13), the summer Olympic Games is an ideal site to investigate these developments. Sizable investments are made by Olympic broadcasters and, as will be discussed, social networking service operators in the delivery of high-quality content and the attraction of audiences to live, catch-up and/or supplementary coverage. The fact the summer Olympics are held only once every four years further emphasizes their use-value, supplying a vivid sense of the latest coverage arrangements and multi-screen strategies.

This paper adopts a critical media studies perspective sensitized to the exercise of economic and symbolic power in changeable media environments, and the continuing centrality of television in this landscape (Turner, 2016; Turner and Tay, 2009). It responds to Inge Ejbye Sørensen’s (2016: 397) call for “further and more nuanced research” into connected viewing strategies in line with the proliferation of variable multi-screen coverage and user activity during live media events, including sports. This is achieved by tracing Olympic programming and content across television, computer and mobile screens in Australia during the first week of the 2016 Olympics (5-11 August) and in the US for the remainder of the Games (12-21 August).¹ It is argued that live broadcast television coverage anchors the movement of content across screens, with social networking services reflecting the rhythms of this coverage *and*

leveraging the popularity of Olympic sports to emphasize their own commercial influence and command of massive user numbers. This dual function ultimately bolsters the power of television as the primary means through which sports mega-events are experienced, and pinpoints the role of social networking services in extending the televisual logics of media sports coverage.

Tracing Content Across Multiple Screens

As a key example of a multi-screen global media event, the 2016 Rio Games are of analytical use-value for two reasons. First, an historically unprecedented amount of content for a single sports event was produced and distributed by television networks in Rio. Immodestly proclaiming their coverage of the Games as “the most successful media event in history,” NBC Sports claimed to transmit “6,755 hours of programming” across television and digital platforms to a total audience delivery average of 27.5 million viewers over the 17-day period (NBC Sports Group, 2016a). Similarly, the Olympic broadcaster in Australia, Channel Seven (Seven), simulcast a reported 7,000 hours of coverage via free-to-air television, live streaming, and a dedicated mobile app for tablets and smartphones (Idato, 2016). Second, the Olympics were spoken of as “the most social games ever” even prior to their commencement (NBC Sports Group, 2016b), suggesting that social networking services were embedded in broadcast and coverage planning. This approach was confirmed by NBC’s hosting of a “Social Media Opening Ceremony” at the outset of the Games, with a projected reach of almost 50 million people (NBC Sports Group, 2016b). Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat also refined their features in different ways in the lead up to the Games and/or signed video, image and news content deals with host broadcasters and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) (discussed below). These arrangements capitalized on usage patterns indicating that 77 percent of Facebook users in Australia now access mobile devices while watching sports on television to discuss the event/match and check other live results, as well as industry research showing that an estimated 51 percent of all

online video plays internationally now occur on a tablet or smartphone (Lockwood, 2016; Ooyala, 2016).

Focused observation is needed to make sense of multi-screen coverage, particularly when critiquing strategies used by broadcasters and digital media companies. Our qualitative research methods involved purposeful observation of Olympic coverage and thorough note-taking during each day of the Games. Taking place in domestic residences, workplaces and a hotel room, these sessions lasted between one and five hours and were spread over different parts of the day, categorized as morning, afternoon, primetime and late night. This time consuming procedure enabled sustained “immersion” in and across a profuse amount of Olympic media content (Altheide and Schneider, 2013: 27). The daily routine involved using the following screens and apps on their own and together in shifting combinations: (i) live broadcast television coverage in Australia and the US; (ii) desktop computer streaming and mobile streaming apps (for tablet and smartphone) operated by Seven Sport and NBC Sports, and; (iii) Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and Instagram mobile apps offering Olympic video highlights, photographs, news, announcements and information. The profiles and accounts monitored daily on the four social networking services were: 7 Sport, 7 Olympics, NBC Olympics, NBC Rio, NBC Sports, The Olympic Games (an official IOC account), Rio 2016, the Australian Olympic Team and Team USA.² These accounts were selected because of their centrality to the circulation of up-to-date Olympic content for domestic and international audiences.

Notes were organized according to date, time, event, screen and service, with screenshots intermittently captured and stored to support note-taking and serve as a visual memory prompt during the writing process. Another set of “mental notes” was kept containing thoughts, interpretations and rudimentary analysis of the Olympic media experience (Brennen, 2012). As the Games proceeded, these notes outlined predictable differences in the national focus of media coverage and content in Australia and the US, particularly in terms of the teams, athletes and events featured during the broadcast coverage and on social networking services. But a surprising level of uniformity in the style,

format and structure of coverage and content was also observed. These similarities are likely due to the influence of the wealthy North American sports media market on other parts of the globe, and the fact that all four social networking services are headquartered in the US despite their international reach. Furthermore, it was in this latter set of notes that the dense, often circuitous, but nonetheless structured presentation of media emerging from Rio de Janeiro became apparent.

Olympic Media: Presentation, Sequence and Visualization

The headings of presentation, sequence and visualization frame our discussion with sports a meta-category that overarches each. News travels across the three headings in different ways because of how the Olympics are organized to produce a constant churn of results and highlights, stories about events and athletes, images of sporting action and the host city, and controversies and scandals.

Presentation

Deals between host broadcasters, social networking services and the IOC helped to determine the presentation of the 2016 Olympics on television, computer and mobile device screens. These pre-arranged relationships performed a pivotal function in the strategic planning of each organization, setting parameters around the control and distribution of live coverage, and conventions for the redistribution and sharing of content. However, it is the extraordinary value of live broadcast rights that positioned television networks in the lead role of deciding how content circulated. NBC paid a reported US\$4.38 billion dollars for US television and online rights to the four Olympiads staged between 2014 and 2020 (Sandomir, 2011). Operating in the smaller Australian market, Seven outlaid AUD\$170 million for rights between 2016 and 2020 (Idato, 2016). The power accruing to broadcasters because of these sums limits their incentive to incorporate extensive interactive features into live streams presented on desktop computer and mobile apps, thereby encouraging viewers to watch “big screen” television if one is available to them. Streams offer (an almost) simultaneous transmission of

the broadcast coverage, with the addition of pre-roll advertisements and the opportunity to watch individual Olympic sports events in an uninterrupted fashion. Few other features were made available beyond an ability to link to Twitter and Facebook at the bottom of the computer screen on Seven's live stream. The lofty figures paid to the IOC also ensure that coverage rights are policed assiduously to combat infringement by outside media operators.

Sitting alongside the sale of television coverage rights for the Brazilian Games are a series of deals regulating the presentation of secondary Olympic content, including highlights, news and images. This creeping formalization contrasts with the comparatively underdetermined structure of multi-screen online content at the Beijing Olympics in 2008 (Hutchins and Mikosza, 2010). Capitalizing on growth in "multi-screen audiences," Seven signed an agreement with Twitter prior to the commencement of the Rio Opening Ceremony to distribute "short high impact video" excerpts sourced from their broadcast coverage (Griffith, 2016). Similarly, NBC completed a deal with the cross-platform news and entertainment company, BuzzFeed, to curate daily content for Snapchat (Rains, 2016). Featuring in Snapchat "Stories" and the "Discover" feed, the NBC account featured often light-hearted multimedia content sourced directly and indirectly from their television coverage. NBC also partnered with Facebook to share news, highlights and interviews on Facebook (including Facebook Live) and Instagram (Shaw, 2016), with the logos of Facebook and Instagram a persistent on-screen presence throughout NBC's broadcast coverage.³ This deal mirrored alliances between Facebook and local broadcasters in over 10 countries (Elias, 2016).

An outcome of these coordinated corporate media relations is the centrality of television to the presentation of the Rio Olympics, even when consuming the Games via desktop computer, tablet, smartphone and/or social networking service. This centrality is realized in narrative and presentational terms. Formulaic narratives of achievement and courage generated by the Games – of "history making," "stunning" and "inspiring" performances by the likes of US swimmer Katie Ledecky, Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt, and New Zealand distance runner Nikki Hamblin – are instigated and grounded by the

broadcast coverage. Edited video highlights of performances are posted to social networking services, but the branded footage and commentary are sourced from the official television coverage. Both NBC and Seven pushed out constant reminders of upcoming sports events across connective media platforms, directing viewers back to the television coverage to witness the unscripted drama of live sporting competition. The conspicuous presence of broadcaster logos in live streams of events, and on social networking services in the communication of news and results, hailed the televisual origins of Olympic content. Seven (7 Sport and 7 Olympics) and NBC (NBC Olympics, NBC Rio and NBC Sports) logos featured when accessing and using mobile apps. They were also a ubiquitous presence in mobile video highlights and in the profile images for official social networking accounts.

In the presentation of the 2016 Olympics, social networking services were in many ways reliant on the schedule of the live television coverage. This subordinate position extended the televisual logics across multi-screen coverage and second screen activities. Our experience of Olympic media was, at least for a short time, overwhelming when faced by the sheer amount of content available across different screens and services. Depending on how and when each service and platform was accessed, an almost giddy level of personalization appeared possible. Yet, routine viewing revealed a persistent centralizing dynamic built around the live broadcast of the Games. Buttressed by a series of formal commercial partnerships, this dynamic worked to center multi-screen consumption around television.

Sequence

The structure of the Olympic sports schedule plays a major role in the experience of the Games for viewers and users. The timing of Opening and Closing ceremonies, individual sports, heats, play-offs, gold medal matches, etc., over 17 days imposes a rigid temporal linearity on the conduct of the Games, which is reflected in the daily television coverage, studio commentary, live events, and news and interviews. A continually repeated three-step pattern can be observed, with in-program advertising and ad breaks interspersed throughout:

1. Announcements, messages and segments about upcoming events and athletes that viewers can look forward to watching (e.g. the 100-metre sprint finals, the women's single sculls rowing, the men's marathon). These are designed to create differing levels of anticipation depending on the popularity of the sports, event and/or athletes in question.
2. Live coverage of events, reporting of results, and immediate evaluation of performances. This step involves communicating the immediacy and excitement of competition and who won gold, silver and bronze medals. It is often accompanied by commentary pinpointing a "decisive moment," lauding of the athletes or teams that performed well, speculation on competitors who performed below expectations, and/or evaluation of the implications for national team performance now and in the future.
3. Post-event summaries, highlights, news and interviews. These items take the form of regular in-program recaps and news about the session's or day's events, repeated replays of gold medal event footage, post-event interviews with successful and/or famous athletes, and follow-up appearances by athletes on magazine style breakfast and late night shows (e.g. Seven's *Sunrise* and NBC's *Olympic Late Night* from Copacabana Beach).

The exceptions to this sequence are unexpected scandals or controversies, which are incorporated into regular updates, news segments and commentator analyses. In Rio, "breaking news" included announcements about performance enhancing drugs (e.g. the suspension of Russian long jumper Darya Klishina) and athlete misconduct (e.g. the juvenile antics of US swimmer Ryan Lochte and his team mates). Interviews with scandalized figures, experts and/or sporting "insiders" accompany these items. The overall result is a sequence that repeats well-worn formulas in the assemblage and framing of television sports coverage (Whannel, 1992).

A parallel temporal sequence to the one just described can be observed on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Posts by Seven, NBC, Team USA, the Australian Olympic Team and the IOC informed users about upcoming events, the progress of athletes and competitions, and results. Messages of

congratulations were communicated to competitors and teams, informing users about the colors and numbers of medals won, with action images, short video highlights or graphics appearing throughout. A complicating factor in this sequence is the user comments and messages posted to platforms. Reflecting patterns seen at other major international sports events (Highfield, 2014), these messages split along national lines in terms of timing and focus, and included messages of luck, congratulations, sympathy, humor, condemnation and abuse. A noteworthy feature of social networking services was the foregrounding of their role as providers of news coverage and related information about the Games. Detailed mobile video stories on Snapchat and Instagram, and news and highlights on Facebook allowed users to catch-up with events and sports, including images and messages sourced from athletes. Twitter revamped their “Moments” tab for this purpose in the lead up to Rio (Perez, 2016). The edited compilations of tweets, images and videos drawn from broadcaster, news and user accounts supplied an engaging summary of events, especially after unusual occurrences. An example of such a Moment was news media and user reactions to a photograph of Usain Bolt running that went “viral” (Hinchliffe, 2016). The striking photo captured Bolt smiling as he ran in a 100-meter sprint semi-final.

Olympic news and content achieved high visibility and considerable scale on social networking services. Yet, even the messages posted to social networking services were drawn back into the television coverage. This appropriation was achieved by the integration of social networking content in broadcast programming. Replicating the logic of showing sports highlights, NBC’s television coverage featured an “Olympic Tweet Patrol” that recycled high-profile tweets from the likes of golfer Bubba Watson and messages and images taken from Instagram. The host of *Olympic Late Night*, Ryan Seacrest, also hosted a pre-show segment on Facebook Live that was promoted during prime time television coverage. Seven in Australia broadcast a social media “snapshot” segment of two-to-four minutes in length each day, which was also uploaded to Facebook and YouTube. Hosted by a former gold medal winning Olympic diver, Matthew Mitcham, and television presenter, Teigan Nash, “Buzz from Brazil” was a daily highlights package of Olympic-related activity and content on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.⁴ The

function of the segment was to monitor and edit the surfeit of content posted on social networking platforms for the benefit of television and online viewers, constructing a light-hearted and comprehensible narrative from it. The package was then inserted into a sequence of broadcast programming each night. The pre-Games publicity for this segment promised “fresh” mobile, social and video content, but also asserted the primacy of the host broadcaster in offering the “best access” to “unique content”:

Rio 2016 is the first truly mobile and social Olympic Games. As athletes and fans alike flock to social, so too Seven will be front and centre – bringing unique content to our audience across all platforms and leveraging our position as rights holder for the best access to viral video content. (Knox, 2016)

As the quotation intimates, Seven (and NBC) promoted the inseparability of live television coverage and social networking services on multiple screens. This strategy was then “leveraged” to incorporate social networking content into daily Olympic television broadcasts and coverage, normalizing it as a feature of programming.

Visualization

The domain that uncovers differences in the multi-screen coverage of the Games is visual presentation. The coverage produced both conventional and unique visual forms and styles, mixing traditional television sports coverage with unorthodox, playful and touristic Olympic social networking content. As hinted at in previous sections, the growing presence of social networking logos, messages and content in broadcast transmissions represents a distinct shift to an explicit multi-screen address to viewers and users. This address was, nonetheless, integrated into the enduring realist conventions of live television sports coverage. The realist promise to the viewer is that live events are transmitted as they happen, even as this realism is manufactured by audio-visual technologies that manipulate space and time,

including multiple camera angles and ranges of vision, instant replays, slow motion, on-screen graphics, statistical information, cut-away footage and split screens (Whannel, 1992; Galily, 2014).

The biggest changes in the visualization of the Games appeared on social networking services that restyled and expanded the visual field of the Olympics. User comprehension of posts required familiarity with the daily progress and setting of the Games, as it often involved the recontextualization of Olympic television, media and news content. These practices were most apparent on Snapchat and Instagram and their emphasis on video and images in the creation and delivery of ephemeral posts.

In the case of Snapchat, a spike in the popularity of this connective mobile media platform among younger sports fans saw NBC invest in the generation of extensive Olympic “infotainment” for Rio 2016 (Billings et al., 2015; Thusssu, 2008). This investment coincides with other commercial efforts to create short-form “television style” productions targeted at international audiences for this service (Davies, 2016). As referred to earlier, an arrangement between NBC and BuzzFeed spawned posts on the Discover channel, encompassing news and entertainment items framed in a colorful and humorous fashion. With changing music played intermittently in the background, slideshow format posts included news, results, video, photographs, quizzes, games and television-style advertisements. An example of a NBC Rio Discovery post from 19 August featured 18 discrete components, categorized as follows:

- Highlights (2) of athletes competing and celebrating
- News updates (3), including day 13 results, the medal tally and the Ryan Lochte “robbery” story
- A quiz (“Can you guess the Olympic event by the emojis?”)
- Human-interest and curiosity items/stories/videos (7) (e.g. “How much do Olympic medals weigh?” “Who’s your secret international Olympic crush?” “19 photos that prove equestrians are actually super badass”)
- Mid-stream video advertisements (3) (one for The Angry Bird’s Movie and two for Walmart)

- Invitations to watch the television coverage (2) (the forthcoming 400-metre women's running relay final and "5 reasons to watch water polo")

NBC's shorter Snapchat Stories entered into the circulation of content by, amongst other things, repackaging supplementary dimensions of the broadcast coverage. Posts displayed behind-the-scenes photos and videos taken in the television studio and on-set, on-screen presenter comments and images (e.g. Seacrest), and interviews with US athletes and celebrities scheduled to appear on *Olympic Late Night* (e.g. gymnast Simone Biles and actor Zac Efron). Superimposed on-screen effects were used throughout, with flamboyant lenses, face filters and drawings introducing an unconventional visual style to the presentation of Olympic media on mobile devices.⁵

Videos and images were also posted to the Instagram "Stories" feature, including the use of text and drawing tools. Located above the images and photographs on the familiar Instagram interface, Stories launched just three days prior to the Opening Ceremony (Instagram Blog, 2016). Bearing an uncanny resemblance to Snapchat, Stories posted by NBC Olympics and Rio 2016 offered content that appeared in slightly modified form on both services. In addition to their style, posts expanded the visual scope of Olympic coverage. The official Rio 2016 account drew on smartphone images and videos taken from the stands by spectators during events. Collected, edited and then posted, labels such as "Superfan", "BIGGEST fan" and "British fans vs American fans" were overlaid on images of excited and cheering fans from different countries, with videos communicating the atmosphere and noise of the crowd. For example, this content afforded an affective charge when the Brazilian team scored a goal in the men's and women's soccer at the cavernous Maracanã Stadium. Snippets of shaky handheld smartphone footage recorded by spectators captured the stunning roar and movement of the crowd as it celebrated. Consumed in the course of catching up on a day's news and events, these posts offered a complementary perspective on soccer matches shown during the live broadcast coverage.

The other characteristic of all four social networking services was a deluge of touristic videos and images taken in the host city and venues over the course of the Games. These were presented on

the accounts of attendees, athletes, Olympic teams and official broadcasters, and depicted iconic landmarks in Rio such as the Christ the Redeemer statue, Copacabana Beach and Olympic Boulevard. This content augmented the standard tourism and lifestyle segments inserted throughout the television coverage of the Olympic Games, which cover local sites, cuisine and people. These segments seek to accentuate the appeal of the sports coverage and host city for viewers, and dovetail with coordinated promotional strategies that structure the Games to “showcase” attractive cityscapes during competition (Weed, 2008: 91). Social networking services added to these segments by visualizing individual user perspectives and circulating a plethora of images. Content ranged from the spectacular (e.g. video footage taken from the perspective of someone hang gliding over Rio) to the engaging (e.g. the cultural variations evident in the various hospitality houses hosted by nations such as China, France and Qatar⁶) and the irritatingly repetitive (e.g. seemingly endless shots of fans from different nations). Lamentably, the fraught political and economic conditions of everyday life for many residents of Rio de Janeiro were largely unsighted in much of this content, with the exception of occasional interventions by social justice activists on Twitter and in other forums (Boykoff, 2016; Zirin, 2016).

Conclusion

The presentation, sequence and visualization of Olympic media capture a structure germane to the experience of connected viewing. It is planned by broadcasters who expend substantial resources to control the live presentation of the Games on television, computer and mobile screens, which serve as primary access points to their live progress. This planning is supported by formalized commercial relationships with social networking services that circulate super-abundant secondary content that is reliant directly and indirectly on this coverage. In addition, these services command a formidable independent capacity to generate and organize large-scale and restylized video, images, information, news and advertising. This content is used, to differing degrees, in the course of second screen viewing practices and standalone media consumption. Viewers and users enter into the planning of this process

by their individual and collective screen preferences, varying intensities of television viewing and social networking use, and aggregated consumption patterns. They are able to watch more live Olympic broadcast coverage than ever before *and* increasingly personalize their interaction with a plenitude of content through interlocking screens. Indeed, it is the sheer magnitude of content, screens and platforms that announces the unifying power of the Olympics as a media event at this moment in history. The overall media experience of the Games is, therefore, a dynamically emergent outcome of broadcast coverage strategies, social networking service activities, and viewers and users who help to determine the relationship between television, computer and mobile screens at the level of production and consumption.

In returning to the opening quotation, the analysis presented throughout this article suggests that the centrality of network television in the transmission of live sports has been further consolidated in the years since Johnson presented her analysis. The fragmentation of audiences across different television genres, formats and screens has actively worked to increase the value of major sports for broadcasters, underlined by the sums paid to secure coverage rights. These investments are based on the “perishability” of live results that guarantee concentrated audience attention on a routine basis (Hutchins and Rowe, 2012: 21). This focused attention is a source of significant advertising revenue, as highlighted by NBC’s boast of making over US\$250 million from their Rio Olympics coverage due to a 20 percent increase in ad sales volume (Crupi, 2016). This popularity and economic potency contributes to the continuing power of broadcast media in the experience of top-flight sports on multiple screens, and the extension of televisual logics by social networking services in the course of mega-events. It also suggests that any understanding of the future of television must engage seriously with the future of sports on television, particularly during those moments when the collective attention of viewers gravitates towards media events.

Notes

¹ After watching the first week of the Games in Australia, the lead author travelled to the US on 12 August, while his co-author observed the entirety of the Olympic coverage in the US from 5 to 21 August.

² Seven did not operate a Snapchat account during the 2016 summer Olympics, instead focusing its energies on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

³ Facebook purchased Instagram in 2012 for an estimated US\$1 billion in cash and stock.

⁴ For an example of the Buzz from Brazil segment, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqwfBILpzAE>

⁵ Two attempts have been made to gain permission to reproduce screenshots in this article. These attempts remain unsuccessful at the time of writing.

⁶ See <https://www.rio2016.com/en/news/round-the-world-in-rio-a-z-to-the-rio-2016-hospitality-houses>

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