

The Promotion of Marquee Personalities to Increase Viewership in a World Event

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The promotion of marquee personalities to increase television viewership in a world sporting event.

Abstract

Past research into sporting events has suggested that broadcasters often exhibit bias in their telecasts. Analysis of the commentary from the Australian and Dutch broadcasters of the 2006 FIFA World Cup games featuring the Netherlands' team confirmed that the method of announcing and promoting key personalities within the Dutch side differed. The results of this study indicated that both broadcasters varied how name mentions of influential Dutch personalities were utilised and the promotion of these individuals indicated that the commentary by the Australian broadcaster was skewed towards the background and personality of these marquee personalities, while the Dutch coverage focused more of the play-by-play coverage of the games.

Keywords: FIFA World Cup, media, football, soccer, bias

Introduction

There are very few events on the sporting calendar that can capture a nation's attention like the Federation Internationale de Football Associations (FIFA)'s soccer World Cup. It is an event that is held every four years with over 200 teams attempting to qualify for this spectacle. Broadcasts of this event generate an audience second only to the Olympic Games as nations not competing in the tournament broadcast games as well. Real and Mechikoff wrote that world class events, such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup have the ability to

capture a nation's attention and make viewing the event as "virtually mandatory" (p. 325). To achieve such attention nations broadcasting the World Cup need to "round out" the content of the broadcast to engage, entertain, and thus, retain audiences. Accordingly, the 2006 FIFA World Cup presented an opportunity to investigate broadcast commentary of this televised major sport event. More specifically, this study examined the cultural significance of announcer discourse into the promotion of marquee personalities utilised by broadcasters to engage viewers.

Each nation provides its own broadcasters to provide live play-by-play coverage of the games to the "home" nation. Therefore, broadcasters usually have two or more announcers to provide colour commentary to enhance the content of the broadcast. The nature and content of this commentary must engage the audience. How this is accomplished, at least partially so, is to use history and biography to augment the commentary, this study analysed the how this discourse is completed around marquee personalities from the sport.

Comparisons were made of announcer discourse of marquee personalities associated with the Dutch team that were broadcast by two separate networks i.e., Dutch Nederlands Omroep Stichting (NOS) and the Australian Special Broadcast Service (SBS) when telecasting the same game.

Literature Review

In the nineteenth century sport and the media began their symbiotic relationship. This relationship has been extended from early game summaries to the current trend of Internet based consumption and video on demand. Thus, both institutions benefit greatly from this arrangement. Consequently, media events are often framed to ensure that the television coverage is consumed in the manner in which the media outlet intended .

Football matches would be classified as contests according to Dayan and Katz' definition of media events, because two competitors participate against each other in a game with agreed upon rules. As a result, the media are able to frame these events, which is based

around the notion of recognition and recall by pairing what is occurring on the pitch with another aspect that a viewer might identify . As such, background information that includes biographical information or personality, is frequently spoken about when a person is being depicted on television providing the audience with more knowledge of participants which increases interest in players or the sporting event. Thus, it is possible that a viewer might be hearing commentary that is not related to the game being played . It is therefore important to study announcer discourse, as each individual commentator's dialogue provides meaning to the audience through the choice of words and visuals by the broadcaster which can impact on viewer retention.

Large scale sporting events are often studied to discover whether there is bias in its reporting . During Olympic telecasts it has been found that broadcasters will show "home" country athletes more often as this increases the likelihood of viewers watching the event which aids in maintaining audience ratings . Billings and Eastman and Real and Mechikoff noted that mega sporting events draw casual viewers who merely watch because a special event might be occurring so profiling athletes, and in particular marquee personalities from a viewers home country serves, not only to attract these casual viewers but hopefully to maintain their interest..

Method

Each of the Netherlands' four games was videotaped for analysis. It represented 100 percent of the time that Holland participated in the 2006 FIFA World Cup. All announcer discourse was transcribed and studied. Discourse is defined as "language-in-use or stretches of language" and Fairclough referred to spoken or written words and visual images.

According to Tudor (1992) there are many stories told by commentators during sporting events and they are not limited to game related events. Announcer discourse of football games can be analysed from half to half and game to game. This study focused on the discourse of the first and second halves of each Netherlands game of the 2006 FIFA World Cup. Commentary that occurred at half time breaks was not included in this study. Each time a comment was

made about a marquee personality it was recorded and placed into one of two groupings: Game Related or Non-game Related.

Results

Results suggested that commentators for the Dutch broadcaster utilized marquee personalities more often during description of game related events than commentators for the Australian network. The Dutch broadcaster mentioned marquee personalities in game related commentary approximately one and a half times more.

However, the result was reversed for non-game related commentary. Here, commentators from the Australian broadcast network related to marquee personalities from the Dutch team more often than commentators from the Dutch broadcaster. It was found that commentators from the Australian network utilise Dutch marquee personalities in their broadcast of non-game related events up to five times more often than Dutch commentary.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to discover whether there were differences in the way in which announcers from different nations address the coverage of players and coaching staff of the Netherlands from the Australian and Dutch broadcasts. Announcer discourse was analysed and statistically compared to detect any variance in the coverage.

This study successfully pinpointed differences in the way in which the 2006 FIFA World Cup personalities of the Netherlands were spoken about during the live telecasts in both Australia and Holland. In particular, it seems that the Australian broadcaster has placed more emphasis on the background of the major personalities of the Dutch team.

Larson and Rivenburgh (1991) found that during opening ceremonies of the 1988 Seoul Summer Olympic Games television networks created multiple realities out of the same event. In similar fashion broadcasts of 2006 FIFA World Cup by both SBS and the NOS appear also to have

framed their respective coverage's to provide realities pertinent for their respective audiences in attempts to engage them capturing interest and maintaining viewership.

At an applied level, one could surmise that the NOS would provide fewer comments of a player's background and personality, because the Dutch society would likely already be familiar with these players, as the players and coaches are frequently shown on television and spoken about in sport news. Conversely, SBS might have instructed its announcers to use this type of commentary more often in order to frame the coverage and possibly increase interest in nations participating in the 2006 FIFA World Cup to enlarge overall ratings and viewership. Similar results were found in a study on the 2002 FIFA World Cup as Brazilian players' personalities were mentioned more often in American coverage than the personalities of the United States' players .

At a theoretical level, this study provided further indication that sports broadcasters "provide the audience with engaging narratives through which the world can be made to make sense" . In contrast to other sport studies which have been conducted on mega-events , the Dutch broadcaster mentioned athletes of opposing nation more often than the Dutch personalities. Thus, the broadcasting of mega-events should continue to be studied cross-culturally to detect differences in the manner in which "home" country announcers narrate sporting events.

In summary, this study was able to pinpoint differences in the way in which two broadcasters telecast their coverage of identical matches to their respective audiences. It shed light on the way in which these two networks televise major sporting events. The Dutch telecast focused on the play by play of the games, while the Australian broadcaster regularly featured background information.