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The Global Event?

The Media, Football and the FIFA World Cup

The Olympics, fragmented into thousands of competitors, hundreds of nations and dozens of sports, cannot attract the interest of so many, nor can it plausibly offer the same simplicity of narrative comprehensible to the world in a mere ninety minutes. [] In an era of unprecedented global economic, ecological and cultural interdependence, in which the community of fate in which we live is nothing less than humanity as a whole, the greatest singular opportunity we possess for looking at ourselves and each other together is a football tournament.

David Goldblatt (2007, p. 901), discussing the 2006 football World Cup.

It's live [2014 World Cup in Brazil], it's public and it's controversial so we are set up for this to be possibly the biggest Twitter event in history.

Lewis Wiltshire, Head of Global Partnerships, Twitter UK, Benady (2014, p. 38).

The FIFA football men's World Cup can be characterized as a global universal sporting mega-event, which is increasingly married with large-scale cultural events for investment in tourism and attracting a broader audience via global media (Roche, 1992). More recently, Muller (2015, p. 638) has suggested a refining of the definition of mega-events, with the FIFA World Cup sitting with an elite group of what he calls 'giga-events' above 'major' and 'mega' events. In other words, the World Cup is so ubiquitous as a major international sporting event that it is almost impossible to avoid across all media outlets and platforms. The circuits of promotion that focus on the event are now so overwhelming that the entire month of the tournament occupies vast areas of media content in a manner consistent with what

Whannel (2001) calls a ‘vortextual’ media event: all consuming and culturally hegemonic.

Since the late-1960s, audiences in developed countries have taken for granted the opportunity to watch major sporting events such as the World Cup on television. This sense of expectation has been socially and culturally shaped by the mega-event’s evolving relationship with television, which many would agree dominates the timing, structure and framing of the event. Increasingly concerned with the centrality of media to its global success, the mediatisation of the World Cup has, therefore, been historically formed and shaped by a range of social, cultural, economic and technological processes (Frandsen, 2013). These processes are also historically uneven - in both time and communicative spaces (Schlesinger, 2000) - and are contingent on specific interventions by individuals, organizations and advances in technology that have created a complex set of inter-relationships between the global event and the media. Exploring how the particular systemic features of FIFA’s premier tournament have evolved, as well as how particular broadcast technologies and operations have sought to bring the event to audiences can help explain why the World Cup has an extensive global reach and a seemingly universal appeal.

The four-year cycle of the men’s World Cup produces an omnipresent context of global football culture, which includes prolonged qualification prior to the mega-event itself. When allied to the perpetuation of FIFA Rankings, the U20 World Championship, the Women’s World Cup Finals and a plethora of other FIFA branded tournaments, activities and products, it is easier to understand how the media and everyday reference to the ‘World Cup’ circulates in what Silverstone (1999, p. 6) once called the ‘texture of our lives’. Through this process – increasingly referred to as mediatisation - the World Cup has, alongside the Olympics, become the *sin qua*

non sports-mega event (or giga-event) characterized by the merging of sport, culture and communications (Muller, 2015, p. 638) The social influence of this process can be recognized in how we expect major events to be televised; we expect to see the World Cup Finals; we expect to be presented with analysis and commentary; we expect to be entertained--and, in the context of sporting nationalism--we often expect to be uplifted by victory or deflated in defeat. For some, the World Cup is also the antithesis of their social and cultural worlds, but its universality makes it virtually impossible to ignore. The mediatisation of the World Cup therefore, has a socially and culturally powerful presence in our lives whether we want it to or not.

If one traces the development of television technologies alongside a regular tournament like the World Cup in a longitudinal context, what one finds are similarities in the marketing and rhetorical power of such technology as ‘modern’ and symptomatic of the times they were being introduced. However, such claims of ‘modernity’ often failed to recognise either continuities in the production of television, or the differences in the reception of the event by nations, ethnicities, genders and ages. We want, then, to consider two threads of the mediatisation of the World Cup in this chapter. The first traces the historiography of the rhetorical use of the televised coverage of the World Cup, which helps us understand how new technologies are accommodated in the institutional structures of global sports organisations and broadcasters to make a sport mega-event ‘televisual’. The second focuses on the nature of the World Cup as a global media event and how it is consumed. Transformations in the socio-technological consumption of football, in the home, in public spaces and via networked-mobile media and the carnivalesque nature and heavily mythologized meanings associated of the World Cup raise important questions for how we understand the concept of mediatisation in the context of the

World Cup as a unique global media event. The World Cup as a global media event has developed its own dynamics of spectatorship (Rowe, 2000), and these dynamics have been socially and culturally transformed by the rise of what Hutchins and Rowe (2012) have termed ‘Networked Media Sport’.

Of course, in tracing these transformations in the media coverage and reception of the World Cup, we cannot avoid recognition of the contemporary crisis in the governance of the sport. The charges of corruption and money laundering, reaching the highest echelons of FIFA’s executive, have sullied the gloss, which the Swiss-based governing body and its tournament may once have enjoyed among its various stakeholders. The public scandal of FBI investigation and dawn raid arrests in Switzerland of senior FIFA executives at the behest of the U.S. Department of Justice in May and December 2015 confirmed long held beliefs by some scholars (Sugden & Tomlinson, 1998) and investigative journalists (Jennings, 2006, 2015) that the World Cup and associated activities of FIFA had become part of a dynastic fiefdom headed by its now defamed former President Sepp Blatter. Ironically, the media’s role in the deposing of Blatter and corrupt FIFA executives served to emphasize the divergent and contradictory relationships media have had with football’s world governing body over several decades.

The Televisual World Cup

Following Tomlinson’s (2014) use of Robertson’s (1992) temporal-historicising of globalisation to characterise the evolution of FIFA as an organisation from ‘take off’ to the ‘struggle-for-hegemony’ and finally a phase of ‘uncertainty’, we propose a similar historical schemata for assessing the televising of the World Cup. How did the World Cup become *televisual* through organising itself for television?

Loosely drawn, we identify three eras of rhetoric about the technological transformations in the televising the World Cup. These are:

- I. The initiating phase of international television football, 1954 to 1962
- II. The hegemonic struggle for control of the media spectacle, 1966 to 1998
- III. The uncertain age of convergent processes and divergent media, 2002 – present.

In creating these schematic eras we want to emphasise there are overlaps and continuities across these periods of World Cup television history. Nevertheless, we believe it is important to differentiate between some key eras of technological, operational and cultural transformations in the televising of the tournament as a global sport mega-event.

The Initiating Phase: 1954-1962

The World Cup, like television, began in the 1930s. In the British context, pre-war abstention by its four national associations – England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland (later Northern Ireland from 1953) - certainly influenced the lack of media reporting of the event in Britain and its lack of visibility in public life. None of the 1930s tournaments were televised, although all were filmed and the 1938 World Cup finals appeared in cinema newsreels across the world. The 1938 finals were also extensively covered on radio across mainland Europe and Brazil, via shortwave transmission. Elements of internationalisation of communications were, therefore, embedded from the start of the World Cup (Geraghty, Simpson & Whannel, 1978).

In 1950, following suspension of the World Cup during the Second World War, British teams entered the tournament for the first time. This had some effect on

the coverage of the event in Britain, and the BBC carried some radio commentaries and eye-witness reports from England's games, including ignominious defeat to a team of amateurs from the United States. Brazilian plans to launch their first television service were delayed by two months, and therefore missed the opportunity to televise the World Cup for the first time (Varela, 2014).

The year 1950 also represented a watershed in the history of British, and indeed European, television with the development of new portable radio links that enabled BBC engineers to transmit a television signal from Calais to the English south coast and on to London. The Anglo-French experiments paved the way for the first televising of the World Cup from Switzerland in 1954 as part of a 'Television Continental Exchange' involving eight countries, which formed a new collaborative organisation, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU). A series of programmes were transmitted between June and July 1954, and the Swiss contribution from Berne included ten matches from the World Cup, which represented the largest contribution to the exchange by any one country by a significant margin (Fickers, 2012). For the BBC's chief engineer Michael Pilling, the experiment represented an opportunity 'to advantage the universality of the picture as a way of overcoming the language barrier' (Pilling, 1954).

This rhetoric of 'universality' reflected the collaborative tenor of the post-war age. Each participating national broadcaster – many of them less than one year in operation, many borrowing equipment and expertise from the BBC – had their own commentator for the same pictures, situated either at the stadium or in a remote studio. The technique of segregating background sounds or 'effects' from commentary had first been used during the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953,

when the BBC's live broadcast had been successfully transmitted across Europe (Fickers, 2012). The 'Eurovision' experiment – a phrase coined by British journalist George Campey of the *London Evening Standard* in 1951 – represented the beginning of a now standard global broadcasting format for the delivery of international sporting events with a combination of 'unilateral' and 'multilateral' feeds, thereby enabling each national broadcaster to appropriate international broadcasts for local audiences. It remains an important device for national cultural and linguistic identification with a global media event (see Haynes, 2014).

The 'Eurovision' links once again proved a successful means of relaying live transmissions of the matches across Europe during the World Cup Finals from Sweden in 1958. Symbiotic relationships between broadcasters and World Cup organisers began to emerge, as stadia were adapted to accommodate commentators from European broadcasters and the Swedish Football Association were pressured for the first time (albeit unsuccessfully) to schedule the timing of games to accommodate the needs of television. For instance, FIFA had scheduled many of the games on the same date and the same time, and in an attempt to relax this policy the BBC's Head of Outside Broadcasts, Peter Dimmock, wrote to request FIFA revise the timetabling of significant fixtures. It was the first time television had attempted to interfere with the organization of the World Cup, but Dimmock's request fell on deaf ears.¹ The World Cup finals in Sweden introduced a new level of partnership and commercial opportunism on the part of FIFA (The EBU paid the Swedish FA 1.5million Kronar in rights), but it also opened up opportunities for television producers to pursue more interventionist strategies with World Cup hosts, such as ensuring stadia accommodated cameras and commentators. The 1958 World Cup consolidated television's transnational role in bridging territorial divides, and cemented the

position of football as an emergent point of transnational cultural universality. As Tomlinson (2014) has argued, FIFA's profile exponentially grew as it shifted through the phases of globalisation, driven by values of internationalisation and harmony in world football. Nevertheless, in spite of exposure to new styles of play and international stars, the coverage of international football remained rooted in a very strong national frame. For example, the handling of British coverage of the 1958 Finals by the BBC centred on the performances of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and a film crew from the BBC's flagship programme *Sportsview* were sent to Sweden to provide additional footage for British audiences (Haynes, 2017). In this way, by blending unilateral feeds from host broadcasters with multilateral coverage of national broadcasters, television evolved to play a compelling role in fostering strong nationalist sentiment and emotion around the World Cup.

In 1962, live television transmissions to Europe from the World Cup in Chile were impossible. European broadcasters therefore turned to some extraordinary measures to get footage of the event to viewers. The BBC coverage aimed to get recorded action of key matches to British viewers approximately forty-eight hours after each match had finished (*Radio Times*, 1962). The process of transporting and developing the film was meticulously planned and described in the *Radio Times*:

Each film must be flown from Santiago to Lima, Peru – from Lima to Panama – Panama to Miami – and Miami to New York. That takes approximately fourteen hours. Then the ninety minutes of film must be processed in New York and rushed to Idlewild Airport to be put on the first available transatlantic jet. (*Radio Times*, 1962)

The resources invested by the BBC in their coverage from Chile, was symbolic of the emerging perceived importance of the World Cup among broadcasting elites. BBC

Audience Research from 1962 indicated the enforced delay and unusual scheduling meant the BBC's coverage of the 1962 finals received a fairly subdued public response. The delayed recordings from Chile in 1962 simply did not carry the same sense of spectacle and suspense as the live coverage from Switzerland and Sweden. However, in this 'initiating' phase, broadcasters fostered an appetite for the public adoption of television through its commitment to invest in transcontinental coverage of the World Cup as an emergent mega-event.

The Hegemonic Struggle for the Control of the Media Spectacle, 1966 to 1998

Television coverage of the 1966 World Cup in England represented both the pinnacle in the pioneering epoch of World Cup coverage, and the starting point for a new, televisual age of international football on television. Again, the introduction of new technologies played a significant role in transforming the visual language of World Cup coverage, and a discursive turn in the cultural, political and economic significance of the World Cup represented by the breadth of television coverage and the increasing focus on stars (Whannel, 2001). From 1962 FIFA took control of the television rights negotiations, and the portent of the inflation of television rights began in 1966, when the EBU signed a deal worth \$800,000, whereas it had only offered \$75,000 for the tournament in Chile (Chisari, 2006). By the end of this era, in 1998, FIFA's licensing rights to television were worth Sfr. 130 million. With this, the commercial value of television became central to FIFA's finances. Beginning in 1974, following the election of Joao Havelange to supersede Sir Stanley Rous as President, how this income was distributed among the FIFA's national members became increasingly politicised and open to corruption (Tomlinson, 2014).

The increased investment by broadcasters in the World Cup was met by an increased desire by broadcasters to manage the scheduling of the tournament to suit the needs of television (in 1966 kick-off times were staggered wherever possible) and also innovate new methods of coverage. The BBC had introduced video recording technology to its sports programming in 1964, which helped accelerate the editing process and enabled the innovation of action replay technology. Bryan Cowgill, who headed up the BBC's 1966 World Cup coverage, had seen slow-motion technology while visiting tennis commentator Jack Kramer at his home in Los Angeles (Cowgill, 2006), reverse engineered ABC's video replay machine for use on the BBC's airing of England's opening match against Uruguay. Bemused viewers telephoned the BBC to ask if something was wrong with the transmission. In subsequent letters to the *Radio Times*, viewers reported being left 'breathless' at seeing the technology for the first time (*Radio Times*, 1966).

The 1966 World Cup proved to be a landmark event in the manipulation of the image and the subsequent conventions of televised football. It was the first World Cup to be transmitted to South America (Mexico) via satellite, and the level of professionalization in planning the broadcasts was, at that time, unsurpassed. Part of our argument here is that the World Cup had become a premier showcase for the techniques of television and televising sport. The introduction of new technologies, often in synchronicity with sport mega-events is negotiated and contingent on a variety of factors that can relate to the innovative vision of television engineers and sport producers, market conditions and consumer appropriation. One technology that producers in 1966 wanted to be made available but were denied was colour transmission, which, according to broadcaster Peter Dimmock, was scuppered by the

British Government who felt the domestic manufacturing industry was not yet ready to compete with American and Japanese rivals.²

Throughout this time, the World Cup also became an important site for innovations in the presentation of football, particularly from the studio. Television producers, in varied ways in different nations, constantly innovated new styles of World Cup coverage, including reliance on panels of analysts, pundits and ‘telexperts’ for each and every match (Tudor, 1975). The then new processes of ‘scene setting’, half-time analysis and full time ‘post-mortem’ remain generic conventions across the world in television coverage of the sport (Tudor, 1975). The focus on footballers as personalities, which in turn legitimised the television anchors own claims to ‘star’ status, became a standard strategy in covering the World Cup (Whannel, 1992).

World Cup coverage in the 1980s and 1990s continued in this vein. The use of technology to manipulate the television image, with replays, stop frame and virtual overlay of graphics, such as various tracking devices and so on, became standard tools for analysing and setting the parameters of knowledge and understanding of the game (Whannel, 1992). The time given over to these techniques has also increased and one panoptical effect of such intensive scrutiny has been the gradual undermining of the authority of the referee. The moral high ground of governance over football now firmly rests with television whose critical gaze constantly and consistently challenges the credibility of referees (Colwell, 2000), something FIFA tried to remedy with the introduction of goal-line technology in 2014 (FIFA, 2014).

To summarise the transformations in the relationship between television technology and the World Cup during this era, it is important to stress the shift in emphasis in technological rhetoric that occurred from 1966 onward. A preoccupation with the technological efficacy of television reflected in the ‘initiating phase’ of

World Cup television, was eclipsed by the need to produce heightened narrative pleasures through the patina of a ‘star’ system, with its associated entertainment values and increased competition for the attention of viewers. Competition between rival networks in any one nation – in the UK, between the BBC and ITV – meant the viewing experience was guided far more by the personalities on the screen and engagement with narratives of entertainment and stardom, rather than narratives that focused on the technological wizardry of television to create a co-presence for viewers as if they were at the live event. However, the period of relatively small incremental changes in television technologies between the late-1960s and late-1990s would be disrupted by significant transformations in the television sport environment caused by increased competition from Pay-TV and the influence of the Internet.

The Age of Convergent Processes and Divergent Media, 2002 – present

The final era of televising the World Cup began in earnest in 2002 and in the age of convergent, networked media sport continues to develop in complexity with each new World Cup tournament. A significant indicator of change was the decision by FIFA to sell its television rights for 2002 and 2006 through two intermediaries, the Swiss marketing company ISL and the German media group Kirch in a deal worth £1.45 billion (Tomlinson, 2014). The move broke the decades-long relationship with the EBU in Europe and opened the door for nation-by-nation deals including Pay-TV companies. The deals proved apocalyptic to both ISL and Kirch, who could not finance the huge credit required to service the deals, but in Brazil (SportTV, ESPN Brazil, Fox Sports and BandSports), Spain (Gol Television), France (beIN Sports) and Italy (Sky Italia) and a number of other nations part of the television coverage of the World Cup now resides under subscription television services because of FIFA’s

changing commercial strategy (Tomlinson, 2014). Major event legislation in Europe that sought to protect public access to the World Cup could not, in some instances, prevent a premium being placed on many of the matches with the exception of the semi-finals and final themselves. The only exception here has been in the UK, where FIFA's challenge against the 'listed events' legislation that protects the entire World Cup tournament being on free-to-air television, was overturned by the European General Court (Wilson, 2013).

This turn of events emphasised the important role that football has played around the world in the evolution of new media modes of delivery and consumption. Football has an enthusiastic, ready-made audience, who, in significant numbers, also happen to mutually belong to a demographic of young male 'early adopters' of new information and communication technologies – a fact not lost on the sports media industries and advertising companies eager to market new services to affluent, predominantly male, consumers (Sweeney, 2010).

Evidence of football's commercial appeal abounds in the way that new digital media products and services, from HD television, 4G mobile 'smart' phones and online betting have targeted this group to understand what is at stake. The list of companies that have used football in their promotional strategies reads like a who's who of the global media and telecommunications industries. Sky, Virgin, BT, Vodafone, Orange, T-Mobile (now EE), Nokia, Sony and Apple have all, at some point, invested large sums of money in promotional campaign's, particularly pushing the 'second-screen market, including advertising and sponsorship to woo football fans (Johnson, 2014).

As we have seen, the World Cup has frequently provided an umbrella for the innovative introduction of new technologies by broadcasters. Where the 1998 FIFA

World Cup could be equated with the 'take-off' phase of domestic Internet use, the 2002 event took place in a progressively mature Internet environment and this convergent and complex viewing experience has continued through 2006, 2010 and 2014. For example, the panoply of communication services for the 2010 and 2014 World Cup's from the BBC were impressive: high definition and interactive television, video-on-demand including every game and a selection of highlights from previous World Cups, live online streaming using the BBC's iPlayer technology (available online, through games consoles or internet enabled televisions), and there were increasingly ubiquitous online commentaries, blogs and Twitter postings. Information-rich sources were produced on mainstream websites, often authored by television studio pundits. But there were also a range of other sources including links to social media, which again came from television football pundits, which became more expansive as they engaged in broader conversations with their network of followers and readers.

The remainder of this chapter focuses on the patterns of media consumption of a World Cup. While recognising change, we argue that television's dominance is far from being usurped in this age of uncertainty.

One World Cup: Many Narratives?

Throughout this chapter, we show how the football World Cup has become a well-established mega-media or giga-event. The FIFA World Cup 2014 secured an in-home television audience of 3.2 billion, with the tournament final being watched by an in-home television audience of over 1 billion (Kantar Media, 2015, p. 8). While audiences around the world may watch the same matches, how they are made sense of, framed and discussed takes place often through a national lens, driven by both

ideological and commercial imperatives (Boyle & Haynes, 2009). What is striking in an era characterised by the networked media sport economy (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012) is how patterns of continuity in terms of media-audience relationships run parallel to significant changes.

As Joe Moran (2013, p. 371) observes about the relationship between television and the viewing public in the UK, 'If the television era was over [] it didn't feel like it'. He was commenting on the end of analogue television in the UK in 2012 and its termination as it was replaced by digital transmission, hence digital became the only way to watch television, and the perception that new forms of social media were replacing television as a cultural form. We argue that his sentiments are equally applicable to the public's relationship with television coverage of the football World Cup. While the aggregation of global television audiences must be approached with caution, the research (Kantar Media, 2015) on international and domestic television audiences for the 2014 World Cup held in Brazil are still illuminating for a number of reasons. They identify the residual strength of television as the central platform for watching live sport, but also highlight how people are accessing mediated sport via a variety of screens.

Television is Dead?

Television audience data remind us that there is no other event that attracts consistently high television viewing figures internationally as the World Cup. While global figures were similar to the 2010 World Cup held in South Africa (Asian viewership was down, in part as a result of the significant time difference), all-time record average audiences were generated in countries such as Germany (the final attracting 34.5 million television viewers), and the Netherlands. In the USA, we saw

the most-watched football match on American television with 18.2 million watching ESPN's coverage of the USA and Portugal (Kantar Media, 2015), with the figure rising to 25 million when Univision viewers are included (Kissell, 2014). Without becoming fixated with numbers, it remains the case that television remains the crucial conduit for bringing the World Cup to publics around the world, and football remains a compelling form of television to deliver large audiences in an age where mass and simultaneous television viewing is waning.

What the research also highlights is the importance of acknowledging 'out-of-home' viewing of football and television (and the difficulty in capturing this data) and the 'non-TV consumption' via broadband and mobile of the event, reflecting the growth in the public and collective experience of watching live football, not at the arena, but rather in designated public spaces. This is, of course, not new and the beaming of live matches back to home stadiums has a long tradition in British football culture. However, the rise of both formal and informal 'fan zones' have now become an established part of the physical and cultural landscape of cities hosting major sporting events since the first official Fan Fest was held at the FIFA World Cup in Germany in 2006 (Klauser, 2011).

The commercial value for pubs and bars of screening live coverage and the collective experience of watching events with others is a key artefact of events such as the World Cup. Reflecting on how collective public viewing of major football tournaments such as the World Cup has grown in tandem with the rising commonality of HD and big screen television, Moran (2013, p. 300) observes:

Such public television was, of course how Baird [one of the inventors of television] had once imagined the future of his invention. His former laboratory at 22 Frith Street in Soho was now an espresso bar [] and much of

the back wall was taken up with a huge TV screen, which lit up the room when football matches, especially Italian ones, were shown. When a goal went in the customers celebrated with a fervour that would have astonished the forty scientists from the Royal Institution who once queued up in evening dress along a narrow staircase in order to inspect a quivering image of the head of a ventriloquist's dummy.

Indeed, the residual popularity of collective television viewing of football was also vividly captured by Stockdale and Platt's (2014) photographic journey through the crowds at the 2014 World Cup in Brazil. Their photo essays (see www.watchingtheworldcup.com) document the ubiquity of World Cup media coverage. Stockdale and Platt (2014, p. 7) argue:

From waiting rooms to bus stations, beauty salons to banks, shops to supermarkets, everyone in Brazil seems to be tuning into the matches. For the entire month – everywhere you go – you can't escape the World Cup.

This perception is borne out by the in-home viewing figures that saw, for example, 42.9 million people watch the opening game between Brazil and Croatia on TV Globo (Kantar Media, 2015). This figure does not include the collective viewing, captured dramatically in Stockdale and Platt's (2014) work and also the 600,000 visiting fans who travelled to Brazil to watch live matches in the stadium, but did so also on television.

Kelner (2012) reminds us of how national television coverage of major football tournaments such as the World Cup have become cultural touchstones for audiences, becoming part of shared collective memory. Thus, for England fans (and a wider television audience), the tears shed on the pitch by the England player Paul Gascoigne during their defeat in the semi-final of the 1990 World Cup in Italy was a

moment that captured television's ability to transform a player and team's relationship with its audience. Kelner (2012, p. 267) argues:

Clearly, in a multi-platform, time-shift, niche market world, there will be fewer of those landmark occasions when the nation unites in a common cause, and increasingly the experience will be shared through social networking. But sport will still create unforgettable moments, like Gazza's tears, than live more vividly on TV than at the live event. The tears were not even visible to those in the stadium.

What we have is a more complex--and often layered--media experience around events such as the World Cup, with television coverage (in the home, via a variety of screens, both large and small, both public and private) sitting at the centre of this mediated experience. Hence, the 2014 World Cup in Brazil saw:

More online coverage than any other previous FIFA World Cup with 188 licensees offering 2014 FIFA World Cup Brazil coverage via websites, media players and apps. Not only was there more coverage but also there were also more people than ever watching via these channels. (Kantar Media, 2015, p. 27)

In the digital and social media age, television remains central to this 'new media' ecology (Boyle, 2014). It is also worth noting that television is not operating in isolation from other media. Major sports broadcasters such as the BBC or Sky in the UK will offer their content - often in real time - across a range of platforms, allowing the viewer to watch the television coverage on PC and mobile, as well as seeking to deepen their engagement with viewers through a provision of a range of World Cup related content across all platforms.

The growth of social media platforms allows debate, discussion, comment and information to flow around these touchstone television moments before they occur and, of course, long after the event has finished--in this sense more accurately reflecting the cycle of fan talk, which has always existed well beyond the actual event. This is a tendency that radio recognised many years ago in the creation of the fan phone-in format. Of course, this more complex mediated environment is also well recognised by those whose interested in events such as the World Cup for corporate commercial reasons, rather than being motivated simply to increase the communication flow between fans.

For example, at Brazil 2014, Adidas, one of the main corporate sponsors, deployed 50 people at its social media 'war room' during the World Cup to both manage social media promotion in real time across a range of platforms, as well as rebutting adverse or inaccurate material pertaining to their brand on social media. Again, the notion of corporate brands running 'war rooms' as part of event promotion is not new and predates the digital environment. However, the focus on the social media dimension of the brand is a significant shift; brands now seek to influence and shape the online conversation taking place around events such as the World Cup. Social media offers the opportunity for individuals and groups to construct a counter narrative to that being carried by mainstream media. It although it also worth remembering that it often requires more mainstream media to pick up on this counter narrative before it gains traction and wider public attention. It is also important to recognise that social media chatter can also serve to act as a form of echo chamber, with groups simply reinforcing their already well established opinions (Wenner, 2014).

The challenges faced by journalists and the print media of this more complex World Cup media environment are considerable than their counterparts working for rights holding media organisations. As Rowe and Hutchins (2012, p. 150) note about the role of sports journalists in the networked media sports environment:

The field of sports journalism has revealed how its 'structures and principles' are in flux, the 'rules of the game' have become loose and contentious, and the once relatively robust habitus of (especially male print-based) sports journalists has turned fragile and permeable.

Even if one agrees with this analysis, sports journalism remains an important part of the process by which often similar narratives get produced and reproduced around such mega-media events as the World Cup.

For example, Hammett (2011) argues that British media representations of the South African 2010 World Cup relied on remarkably similar discourses about South Africa (the high crime rate in the country, the fear of security at the tournament and potential travel difficulties). Across whatever media platforms you were seeking out information about the country from They note that these diversified only as the tournament progressed and journalists began reporting on their own experiences in the country rather than relying on conventional wisdom about life in South Africa. Critical work (c.f., Tendai & Mhripiri, 2014) on that World Cup highlight the contested nature of social and national identities, and the differing narratives around the tournament and South African culture and society that domestic and international media generated. The work shows how a more complex media environment, facilitated by a more fluid media space, revealed diverse identities being expressed as the country attempted to use the World Cup to initiate and redefine its own sense of collective identity.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we argue that, if we take a long view on the media's relationship with the World Cup, what becomes evident is the growing layers of complexity that characterise both its mediation and the mediated event's engagement with supporters, fans and viewers. This complexity masks strong elements of continuity, such as the centrality of television, or 'television-like' content providing access to the live event, and that 'liveness' remains central to the value of football on television.

Furthermore, our analysis provides reminders about the crucial central role that forms of nationalism and expressions and representations of mediated collective identity continue to play in shaping the popularity and compelling appeal of an event such as the football World Cup. We see no reason to think this appeal will not remain despite the ongoing reputational difficulties, that show little signs of abating, that continue to plague the governing body of the world game, FIFA.

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¹ The issue of scheduling of matches for the 1958 World Cup was discussed in a memorandum from Jack Oaten to Peter Dimmock, 21 October 1957. BBC Written Archives Centre (WAC) T14/1,869/1

² Author interview with Peter Dimmock, 20 January 2009.