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The historical coverage of televised media events in print media: The Case of the Eurovision Song Contest

Abstract

This study argues that, historically, televised media events managed to become prominent in the public agenda, not only through their live broadcast on television, but also through their long-term, continuous visibility in the print media. This, both on the level of the intensity of their press coverage; and also on the level of their framing as important and significant events for society. In other words, media events have enabled a content-based “coexistence” between print media and television. Through a thematic-qualitative analysis, the study describes how two Israeli, popular and elite newspapers promoted the public discourse on two of the most famous media events in Israel’s history: the 1979 and 1999 Eurovision Song Contests in Jerusalem. Findings reveal an intensive print media coverage of the two shows, from both “soft” (gossip) and “hard” (politics) perspectives. In addition, differences were found in the historical coverage of the contests in popular newspapers, compared to elite ones.

Keywords

Media history, media events, media evolution, print media, Eurovision Song Contest.

1. Introduction

A multitude of news items and reports about Israel in various areas is expected to be broadcast on television screens throughout Europe, following the Eurovision Song Contest, which attracts hundreds of thousands of viewers to the screen (*Yedioth Ahronoth*, 11 February 1979).

The Eurovision Song Contests (ESC), held at Jerusalem’s Convention Center in 1979 and 1999, were among the most prominent media events throughout Israel’s history. Media events (Dayan & Katz, 1992), such as the ESC, are broadcast on television, and therefore naturally adjusted to the televised medium in terms of their media attributes. For instance, visuals are given center stage, and they are broadcast live to large communities of millions of people.

In recent years, though, the growing strength of new media and social media has raised questions, as to the positioning of further media in the theoretical framework of televised media events. Today, these events are broadcast on social networks, such as Facebook and YouTube, where users are able to respond to occurrences as they unfold. Moreover, these networks have an important role in advertising and marketing the televised events (Tamir & Lehman-Wilzig, 2023). Therefore, to a substantial extent, media events create a reciprocal

dependency between television (as an old medium), and the internet (as a newer form of media). This practice was classified in the past by Caspi (1993) as “coexistence between different media.”

The present study aims to examine relationships and reciprocities between different media, particularly in the context of media events, from a *historical perspective*. The main question is, therefore, *what had been the role of print media in the long-term, continuous maintenance of televised media events on the public agenda*. The study method consists of a qualitative–thematic analysis of news items, published on Israeli daily newspapers, *Yedioth Ahronoth* (as a popular newspaper) and *Haaretz* (as an elite one), during the year that led to the broadcasting of both ESC 1979 and ESC 1999 on Israeli television. The study examines the intensiveness, as well as the nature of the coverage, expecting to find that *print media played an important role in the socio-cultural prominence of the ESC, both in terms of scope of coverage, and content*.

In addition, the study also aims to show how the press framing of the two contests was an expression of historical developments in the journalism industry in Israel, including: the entrance of television as a highly significant medium, to the point of its engagement with other, perhaps more traditional media as well; growing involvement in “soft news” by Israeli press during the 1990s, compared to the 1970s; and the significant role of the media in Israel in the reflection and construction of “patriotic” attitudes and national symbols.

Findings suggest that press coverage of televised media events had been especially intensive, both in 1979 (104 news items) and in 1999 (230 news items). Moreover, the two newspapers made use of a wide range of topics to contribute to the maintenance of public interest towards the televised broadcasts. Among these topics are “soft” ones, such as entertainment, gossip, and “production problems,” which were more prominent in the popular newspaper; and “hard” topics, such as politicization and social rifts, which were more notable in the elite newspaper.

The study’s conclusions contribute a further important aspect to the theory of media events, by examining these events’ long-term news framing in print newspapers, rather than merely their specific live broadcast on TV.

Finally, the study aims to sharpen our historical understanding of possible cooperation and “coexistence” between different technological platforms (newspaper and television) around meaningful cultural contents for the public, such as media events.

2. Theoretical framework: Media events and the historical evolution of the media

The classical theory of media events (Dayan & Katz, 1992) is one of the most well-known and cited theories in media studies. Its main aim is to distinguish between the functioning of television in “routine times,” and its role during “special times.” Media Events are significant, dramatic events, broadcast live, while unifying large communities of viewers, who take part in a social-media ritual, occurring in a specific time and place. Media events reinforce the role of television as “the modern campfire.” They are, thus, generally described as consisting of motifs, attributes, and terminology, pertaining to viewers’ collective identity (Hepp & Couldry, 2009).

Dayan and Katz distinguish between three main types of “traditional” media events. Contests, such as important sport events, or the ESC; Conquests, such as the landing of the first man on the moon in 1969, or Egyptian President Anwar Sadat’s visit to Israel in 1977; and Coronations, such as the US Presidential Inauguration, or funerals of globally prominent persons, such as the Queen of the United Kingdom. These events fulfill all the conditions for categorizing an event as a media event, as suggested by Dayan and Katz: they are preplanned; they create excitement in public opinion; and they unify society’s different sectors.

Later on, a number of researchers criticized Dayan and Katz’s theory, suggesting additional types of “new” media events, some having a more divisive and negative nature, such

as terror, war, natural disasters (Liebes & Katz, 2007), political protests (Sumiala & Korpiola, 2016), and even finals of reality shows (Hepp & Vogelgesang, 2003).

It is customary to refer to unique characteristics of the televised medium, such as the ability to live broadcast, and the aspect of visualization, as threshold conditions for the categorization of media events (Vaccari *et al.*, 2015). Thus, it is clear why the vast majority of studies written on media events focused on examining messages extended through the television screen. However, recently, there are growing references in the literature for the role fulfilled by new media and social media in media events. In a recent paper, Tamir and Lehman-Wilzig (2023) argue that, at least in the case of sport events, social networks sometimes serve to strengthen the status of televised media events: the audience that views them on social media is not passive, and can respond in real time, which enhances the impact and effectiveness of these events. In addition, public tension and expectation towards televised media events can be constructed on social media. In other words, a reciprocal relationship is established between different media, around the specific content of media events.

Similarly, the present paper suggests “going back in time” to examine the historical coverage of televised media events by print newspapers, in terms of their ability to preserve a lively public discussion, before and around these events’ live broadcasting on television. The assumption is that an analysis of print newspapers’ functioning in the period leading up to large and socially important media events would enable us, as media researchers, to understand changes and developments that take place in old media, while new ones gain prominence, e.g., content-based collaboration between the senior medium (the newspaper) and the newer one (the television).

Despite the current research’s concentration on media events in their technological context (i.e., the platform that broadcasts them), it is highly important to note that the theoretical framework of media events also includes critical researchers from different international contexts, who claim that the cultural, communal, and symbolic basis of these events predates television as a medium, and even modern mass media as a whole. It is worth mentioning that historians who have not accepted Dayan and Katz’s claim, as if television is the main generator of media events, argued that human culture has been creating media events for 300 years: “seen from the historical point of view, the concept of ‘media events’ as defined by Dayan and Katz cannot be applied, since it cannot account for the fact that already, in earlier times, certain events attracted an enormous amount of public attention” (Wilke, 2009, p. 45).

Ytreberg (2017) argued that “the German-language tradition of research on historical media events provides a very different approach to studying media events [compared to English-language one], starting from the 16th century advent of mechanical production and distribution” (p. 309). Bringing together these strands of research, Ytreberg’s article argues for a deepening of the historical dimension in conceiving of media events. Thus, the author expands our understanding of media events, both from technological and historical viewpoints.

However, it seems that these studies, which challenge and, to a certain extent, dispute Dayan and Katz’s claim, actually strengthen the justification for choosing ESC as a case study in the current article. Compared to media events that existed in the distant past, perhaps regardless of the mass media (for example, coronations or funerals of kings and royals), the ESC is a modern media event, created *by* television and *for* television. The history of the contest is embedded in the history of television, and the connection between the two is almost holistic and unbreakable. Therefore, it is particularly interesting to examine its coverage in other, additional media. In other words, the current research aims to support the assumption that media events have a key cultural role, which is more general than their televised broadcast per-se. This, even in cases of events created and intended for the televised medium.

Beyond the theoretical framework of media events, the study also aims to theoretically rely on Dan Caspi's "Historical model of media evolution" (1993), which views the development of the media in a more circular and adaptive manner, rather than a linear and withdrawing one. Caspi identified four stages in the historical development of the medium: outbreak, institutionalization, defensiveness, and adaptation. Through the adaptation of the old medium to a situation in which a new medium is gaining prevalence, a state of "coexistence" may be established between the two, during which a combination of the advantages of each of them is established, alongside open collaboration between them.

Lehman-Wilzig and Cohen-Avigdor (2004) suggest a number of ways, by which an old medium can adapt to the threat of a new one. One of the main ways to achieve this is defined as "convergence," or in other words, "If you can't beat them, join them." It was originally argued that convergence is usually "technological," meaning that it includes a real change in the medium's technological platform (for instance, a print newspaper, that becomes digital). Nonetheless, Caspi's suggestion of "coexistence" points to a further option: content-based convergence – a substantive change in the character of the old medium, its work methods, or the contents passed through it, in accordance with the new one.

In the current study, I propose to examine how the televised broadcast, and print newspaper coverage of media events in fact constituted a similar (content-related) "coexistence" between old and new media.

3. Historical background: "Eurovision is coming to Jerusalem"

The ESC is a classical, contest-type media event and a cultural-television enterprise, founded in 1955. The first contest was held in 1956 in Lugano, Switzerland, with seven participating countries (Ginsburgh & Noury, 2008). The idea had been conceived by Marcel Bezençon, who had been inspired by the Italian song festival of San Remo. The contest is one of the largest cultural initiatives in Europe and globally, both in terms of its production scope, and its number of viewers, which ranges between 200 million and half a billion each year (Greenwald, 2020).

As the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) also includes non-European public broadcasting networks, over the years the ESC was expanded to include middle eastern countries (such as, Israel and Cyprus [Geographically]), African countries (such as, Morocco), and Asian countries (such as, Armenia and Azerbaijan) (Jordan, 2011). The ESC is officially an a-political event, but its history reflects changes and transitions that have taken place in Europe over the past decades. The idea of Eurovision had been to culturally unite Europe after the Second World War, and in fact the first participant countries included Germany, Britain, and France. During the Cold War, it was perceived as a cultural event that unifies the west against the communist block: no communist country took part in the contest, except for Yugoslavia. With the "ideological expansion" of Europe eastwards in the years following the end of the Cold War, more and more eastern European countries were included (such as Poland, Romania, and the Czech Republic), and even some of the former USSR countries (such as Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus) (Singleton *et al.*, 2007).

Often the contest would cause "political incidents," such as the winning Ukrainian song of 2016, which mentioned the Russian oppression of the population of Crimea. Such incidents attested to the rifts and gaps which had challenged the Eurovision's "fantasy" of fraternity between peoples. Moreover, as the winner of the contest is elected based on votes by participating countries (each granting 1-8, 10, and 12 points to the count), studies have exposed "political alliances" and "block voting" (Yair, 2019).

Israel first participated in the ESC in 1973. Its participation (until 2017 through the Israel Broadcasting Authority "IBA," and as of 2018 via the Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation "IPBC") was considered a part of a growing wave to challenge the western European hegemony of the contest in the beginning of the 1970s, through the inclusion of southern

European and middle eastern countries such as Malta, Greece, Turkey, and later also Cyprus (Panea, 2018). Over the years, Israel gained success in the contest, achieving first place four times, second place twice, and third place twice. In addition, Israel hosted the ESC three times: in 1979 and 1999 at Jerusalem's Convention Center, and in 2019 at Tel Aviv's Expo (Greenwald, 2020).

The 1979 and 1999 contests were two of the most prominent media events to have ever taken place in Jerusalem. This, for multiple reasons:

- (1) They evoked an unprecedented public response in Israel and across Europe, especially in the political context, for instance, Turkey's boycott of the 1979 contest, as well as calls among Scandinavian countries in 1999 to cancel it, if it is not moved to another, less controversial city.
- (2) The broadcasting of the ESC in Israel resulted in historic changes in Israeli media, for example the introduction of color TV, and the end of TV "color killer"¹ usage in 1979.
- (3) Some scholars attached a much deeper meaning to Israel's participation in the ESC than simply entertainment. Nili Belkind argued that the Eurovision allowed Israel to establish a cultural alliance that fed the national imagination of its citizens, by which their country pertains to Europe and to the west in general (2010, p. 23). The fact that Israel was the first non-European country to have participated in the contest led to an enhanced sense of "national pride" among many Israelis (Lemish, 2004). Thus, hosting the ESC had an extraordinary meaning for many Israelis, both on national and international levels.
- (4) The ESC had often been an expression of Israeli culture (Panea, 2018), as well as of historic developments that took place in the country. For instance, the fact that the Israeli winner of the 1998 contest was Dana International, a transgender woman, expressed a growing acceptance of the LGBTQ community, especially in Tel Aviv. Following International's victory, a first of its kind pride parade took place in Tel Aviv in 1998 (Greenwald, 2020). In other words, Israel's victory and hosting of the show were accompanied by societal changes in Israel, far beyond the event by itself.

For all these social, cultural, political, and media reasons, these two contests are especially suited to serve as case studies in this paper.

According to Yair (2019), the study of the ESC is centered on four theoretical anchors: first, studies focusing on "imagining a unified and cosmopolitical Europe," including the use of the contest to promote Nation Branding (Jordan, 2011). Second, studies that focused on the contest being described as "Gay Olympics," emphasizing its meaning for LGBTQ, and especially gay culture (Baker, 2017; Cassidy, 2014; Lemish, 2004; Miazhevich, 2017). Third, the contest as a source for political disputes within Europe, including political and block voting (Yair, 1995; Yair & Maman, 1996). Fourth, studies using the Eurovision to explain wider, external events, such as economic collaborations, political conflicts, media events, and even social and anthropological aspects, such as collective and cultural memory (Highfield *et al.*, 2013; Pajala, 2011; Pérez-Rufí & Valverde-Maestre, 2020). This study aims to join the fourth category, as it uses the ESC to examine phenomena such as news coverage and framing; media cooperation; the historical evolution of media technologies, etc.

¹ The color killer was a special device, that was installed in color television sets in Israel in the late 1970s. The purpose of the device was to restore the color burst signals, after they had been removed from the broadcast signals of Israeli television. The absence of these signals meant that on color TV sets, the broadcasts were viewed only in black and white. The main motivation for introducing the color killer in Israel was ideological: the goal was to reduce sales of color TV receivers, with the view that they accentuate the gap between rich and poor in the country. Another reason was economic: the Israeli government did not want to encourage the import of color televisions from abroad. The broadcasting in color of the ESC in 1979 was a landmark in ending the historical role of the color killer in Israel (Grab, 1984).

4. Methodology

4.1. Objective

The current study examines the coverage of the ESC in 1979 and 1999 in Israeli print media, in order to understand its role in maintaining the social discourse about the two shows for many months, in preparation for their live broadcast on television. Through such an examination, the study aims to illustrate the historical function, fulfilled by a further medium, the print newspaper, in media events, which had been historically identified mainly with the televised medium.

4.2. Corpus

To ensure a comprehensive and reliable examination of the coverage, two leading daily newspapers were selected: the mass-popular newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth* and the elite *Haaretz*. From the 1970s until 2010, *Yedioth Ahronoth* was the largest-circulation newspaper in Israel (today it is a close second). *Haaretz* has a much smaller readership, but it is the only real example of an elite daily newspaper in Israel. The decision to focus on these two specific papers was due to several reasons:

- (1) As mentioned, both papers represent the two main different types of journalistic work (popular versus elite press), thus providing a varied media sample. *Yedioth Ahronoth* represents popular journalism, tending towards visual and content sensationalism. *Haaretz*, on the other hand, represents a more elite type of journalism, also known as “quality journalism,” tending towards solid, informative, and rational approach (Greenwald & Lehman-Wilzig, 2019).
- (2) To keep methodological uniformity: both *Yedioth Ahronoth* and *Haaretz* were prominent “mainstream” news sources in Israel during both periods analyzed in the study: 1979 and 1999. *Davar* newspaper, for example, was a very important, famous print media source in Israel in 1979, but it no longer existed in 1999 (the newspaper was closed in 1996).
- (3) Traditionally, the two newspapers also differ in the political attitudes they present and are therefore diverse in this respect as well. *Yedioth Ahronoth* is a newspaper demonstrating Center-“patriotic” positions; *Haaretz* is identified with a distinct liberal, left-wing orientation.

4.3. Design

The study analyzed the coverage of the ESC in both newspapers, as of the day following Israel’s winning the 1978 contest in Paris and the 1998 contest in Birmingham, until the weekend after the contest had been held in Jerusalem the following year –1979 and 1999, respectively. News items were found through searching the digital archives of both newspapers, using “Eurovision” as a keyword, during the relevant periods. These digital archives allow researchers to check news items’ location, based on search tags. Then, researchers are required to physically access the print versions of the newspapers, and to find the full news items manually. A total of 334 news items were identified and analyzed in the study (for *Yedioth Ahronoth*, $N=237$; for *Haaretz*, $N=97$).

4.4. Method

The study included a thematic-qualitative analysis², that is “a process for encoding qualitative information” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 6), used to identify, analyze, organize, describe, and report main themes found within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Following Braun & Clarke’s six step process, the study thematically analyzed all news items by creating frames to identify the

² Before the presentation of the thematic analysis, some quantitative information will be provided as well. This information includes the distribution of news items by newspaper and year; and also, the quantitative dominance of each of the coverage frames (themes) found in the study.

ways, by which the ESC was covered. Initially, each of the items was manually classified in a table, based on the following categories:

- (1) Serial number, ID
- (2) Source (*Yedioth Ahronoth*/*Haaretz*)
- (3) Years (1978-1979/1998-1999)
- (4) Visual means (0-no/1-yes)
- (5) Full names of reporters, if available
- (6) primary quotations
- (7) Coder (author/research assistant)

To become familiar with the data, two coders (the author and a research assistant) read all articles individually, and developed an initial coding framework, based on their normative interpretation and subjective, personal perspective (Ponterotto, 2006). After the completion of the individual identification of the recurrent themes, and due to possible limitations and biases in the interpretation of each of the coders, the two reviewed them together to reach an agreement, define, and name five leading themes. Finally, all news items were re-coded by the two, according to the new, agreed upon thematic scheme. At the end of this process, the intercoder reliability between the two coders, based on Cohen's Kappa statistical test, ranged between $k=0.76$ (in theme #2 – Politicization) to $k=0.92$ (in theme #3 – Gossip), with an average rate of $k=0.86$.

In other words, the various mentions, found to be consistent compared to the rest of the content, were eventually summed up into five reliable thematic coverage frames, which will be presented in the findings section. As will be described later on, the argument of the study is that the significant mass of news items regarding the two contests, as well as their framing and nature, point to a key role played by the print newspapers in the television broadcasts, and attest to the close collaboration, whether direct or indirect, between the two media.

5. Findings

5.1. Scope of coverage of media events in print newspapers

As aforesaid, the corpus of the study included 334 news items (including reports, in-depth articles, interviews, opinion columns, photographs, and caricatures), according to the distribution, presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of news items by newspaper and year.

Newspaper	News items, 1979	News items, 1999	Total
<i>Yedioth Ahronoth</i>	63	174	237
<i>Haaretz</i>	41	56	97
Total	104	230	N=334

Source: Own elaboration.

As can be seen from the data presented in the table, the press coverage of the two historical television broadcasts during the examined two years, had been intensive, with an average of one news item every 3.5 days in at least one of the two newspapers in 1979; and an average of one news item every 1.5 days in at least one of the two in 1999. Thus, there was a clear trend of increased coverage in 1999, compared to 1979. It is possible that this trend, identified in the two newspapers (although significantly more so in *Yedioth Ahronoth*), also points to a more general growing involvement of journalists in “soft” news items (entertainment, recreation, fashion, music, etc.) over the years, in parallel to a certain reduction in the proportion of “hard” news items (economics, foreign policy, national security, etc.).

It is worthwhile to also note the significant gaps between the two types of the press: while in popular *Yedioth Ahronoth* a news item on the ESC was published once every 1.5 days on

average during the two years examined, in elite *Haaretz* one news item was published every 3.8 days on average –undoubtedly, a substantial gap, pointing to a clear tendency of the popular newspaper towards “soft” news and entertainment for the masses, compared to the elite newspaper, that is normally less “generous” in this type of news. It is possible that an examination of another media event, which associatively connects to the “hard” news genre, would have led to the opposite finding. In other words, this finding does not necessarily point to a relationship between the type of newspaper and the scope of coverage of a televised broadcast, but to a relationship between the type of newspaper and the scope of coverage of an *entertainment-oriented* broadcast.

Finally, in the context of the “coexistence” between the two media, print newspapers and television, it is important to mention that the word “television,” in various variations, was repeated no less than 89 times over the examined two years in both print newspapers, with quotes such as: “At the *television* they are expecting the foreign reporters” (*Yedioth Ahronoth*, 11 February 1979); “The *television* has successfully produced the ESC” (*Yedioth Ahronoth*, 20 April 1979); “The event will also provide a lot of prestige to the workers of the Israeli *television*” (*Haaretz*, 25 February 1979); “At the *television* they are not afraid of winning [ESC] twice in a row” (*Yedioth Ahronoth*, 22 January 1999). Hence, references to the specific broadcast have “eroded” also to a discourse, created in the print newspapers, about the status of television as a medium and as a social and cultural institution.

Later in the study, news items were classified into five coverage frames and recurring themes, as can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Percentage and number of mentions of each of the themes by newspaper.

Theme	Yedioth Ahronoth	Haaretz	Total
1. Global perspective	(28/237) 12%	(19/97) 20%	(47/334) 14%
2. Politicization	(12/237) 5%	(13/97) 13%	(25/334) 8%
3. Gossip	(78/237) 33%	(23/97) 24%	(101/334) 30%
4. Negativity	(19/237) 8%	(12/97) 12%	(31/334) 9%
5. Societal outlook	(25/237) 10%	(17/97) 18%	(42/334) 13%
Other items	75/237	13/97	88/334

Source: Own elaboration.

A comparison between the two newspapers, in terms of the themes that characterized each, showed that popular *Yedioth Ahronoth* covered more gossip and entertainment topics than elite *Haaretz* (33% of the items in *Yedioth* dealt with these topics, as opposed to only 24% in *Haaretz* –see in bold in the table). Moreover, “hard” topics relating to the contest, such as Israel’s foreign relations, politicization, and society, were more prominent in *Haaretz* compared to its popular counterpart (a total of 51% of the items in *Haaretz* vs. only 27% in *Yedioth Ahronoth*). Hence, the type of newspaper was not only linked to the intensiveness of the television broadcast coverage, but also to its framing.

5.2. Nature of coverage of media events in print newspapers

5.2.1. Media events from a global perspective

This theme centers on the outlook of external actors, meaning global ones, towards the ESC held in Jerusalem. These actors may be from the media (the various European Broadcasting Associations and the EBU); or political actors (such as, governments of countries participating in the contest, as well as civil and social organizations active in these countries).

Naturally, Israeli public opinion has a special political and cultural interest, in terms of the way in which the country is perceived internationally, in Europe and especially in western Europe. Here, print newspapers made use of this public interest to raise the topic of the televised media event to the public agenda, and also to “maintain” it there over time –not an easy task, considering that news items about the contest are published for an entire year.

A prominent question in this theme pertains to public relations and political branding opportunities, which hosting the contest had allegedly opened to Israel. Some news items discussed the success of the production, as contributing to Israel's global image:

The ESC was held in Jerusalem, and it succeeded beyond expectations, raised Israel's name in the world, and brought it first place [...] all participating countries are happy, both from the organization of the show itself, and from everything that took place in it (*Yedioth Ahronoth*, 3 April 1979).

The broadcast gained unprecedented publicity for Israel, gluing viewers to the screen for the entire evening [...] the Swedish newspaper "Expressen" reported that Israel deserved first place [...] "what a great week for Israel, beginning with the Peace Agreement [with Egypt] and ending with winning the ESC," the paper wrote [...] everyone is praising Israel's perfect organization (*Haaretz*, 2 April 1979).

Other items expressly mentioned the political, touristic, and economic benefits which Israel had gained from hosting the ESC:

This festival received extensive coverage this year, and it seems that it is no longer perceived as a 'curiosity', but as a means for promoting artists and tourism (*Haaretz*, 28 May 1999).

It is extremely effective. Just think about hundreds of millions of viewers being exposed to the State of Israel for a few hours, viewing a sequence of collages about the huge range of touristic activities available in the country –from holiday locations, sports facilities, sacred and archeological sites. It's a huge exposure, and all this at a negligible cost [...] it will certainly contribute greatly to tourism in the year 2000 (*Yedioth Ahronoth*, 1 June 1999).

5.2.2. Politicization of media events

A further perspective, by which the print media have succeeded in retaining the media event at the heart of public discourse for such a long time, had been the link between this event and "explosive" political issues, which anyhow evoke extensive, social interest. In other words, the argumentation here (as will be seen in additional themes later on) is that, in order to "assist" in the construction of social expectation towards the televised media event, it is not enough to create public discourse about the entertainment event itself, but an associative relationship must also be established between it and other external, more hard-news related events, which are familiar and important to the readers, based on their social and cultural backgrounds.

In this theme, therefore, a link is identified between the ESC and diverse political issues, such as the disputed political status of Jerusalem; the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; political boycotts against Israel; the Egypt-Israel peace treaty (1979); the Israeli elections (1999), and more.

One good example is the dispute regarding the national or universal status of the city of Jerusalem:

"It is impossible that the opening video of the ESC would present the capital of Israel as a city having universal status," [member of IBA] Aharon Papo angrily exclaimed during the managing committee meeting of the IBA, referring to the video's script, allocating 59 seconds to Christian churches, compared to 39 to the Western Wall, and 32 to Islam [...] the script will emphasize Jerusalem's historical-religious aspects and its universal status [...] Papo further suggested that the video should emphasize the strong historical bond between the people of Israel and their capital, while reducing images of churches and mosques (*Yedioth Ahronoth*, 27 December 1978).

In 1999 the ESC was held in close proximity to the Israeli election campaign, which itself had been a highly charged political event:

The live broadcast from Jerusalem is scheduled to begin on Saturday evening, 29 May, at 22:00, two days before the second round of the governmental elections (if such will be

held). Such timing could lead to political pressure on contest participants [to express their political views] (*Haaretz*, 5 May 1999).

5.2.3. The gossip aspect in media events

This theme represents the composition, or balance between coverage of “hard” and “soft” topics, associated with the media event. Here, the more escapist, “voyeuristic” aspects “encourage” readers to take part in the lively public discourse about the televised event. In other words, alongside linking the contest to international and political issues, readers are also “thirsty” for information on the gossip behind the media event, and this fact may assist the print newspaper in its task of retaining the media event as a dominant topic on the long-term agenda.

Quantitatively, as can be seen in Table 2, in both newspapers this was the most prominent theme (as aforesaid, much more so in the popular newspaper). This is a reminder of the fact that at the end of the day, the ESC is a characteristically entertainment-type media event. In covering topics involving gossip and backstage occurrences of the media event, a lively journalistic discourse was established regarding celebrities and their relationships; the competition between television presenters on hosting the show; the fame of the artists in their countries; bets on winners; the character of the contest and its rules (for instance, whether singing in English permitted, and will there be a live orchestra on stage); on the stage design; on tickets to the event, and more.

Interestingly, the coverage with regard to the “competition” between different TV presenters on hosting the event was especially prominent, both in 1979 and 1999, and was characterized by sensationalistic descriptions³. In 1979, for example, it was written about Israeli singer, Yarden Arazi: “She takes first place in the list of candidates [to host the ESC], as she is able to properly pronounce the French language” (*Yedioth Ahronoth*, 10 January 1979). Israeli actress, Aviva Marks, was described as especially loved by the audience: “The people insist: Aviva Marks for the ESC!” (*Yedioth Ahronoth*, 15 September 1978). In 1999, the coverage of possible hosts for the event became especially prominent and speculative, with names of dozens of candidates raised on a daily basis, some of whom later denied any connection to these reports.

5.2.4. Sensational and negative press coverage

In direct continuation to the previous theme, negative news, and specifically news that is framed in a sensational and dramatic manner, also attracts the attention of media consumers. The construction of public tension through negative news was mostly expressed through prominent journalistic discourse around the possibility that the ESC in Jerusalem would eventually be cancelled for financial, budgetary, or production reasons (for instance, an expected strike of production workers in 1979). The possibility of the media event being cancelled in the last minute is undoubtedly dramatic, and to a certain extent even tragic for society. Therefore, a consistent journalistic discourse about this possibility is able to evoke an especially tense public opinion. Readers are “expected” to be anxious towards the possibility of the tragic “forecast” being materialized; or alternatively to remain optimistic towards the moment, in which they would be able to exhale in relief, after “the threat” has been removed.

In this case, special space had been allocated for short, catchy, and sensational headings, motivating media consumers to immediately and quickly read the relevant news items: “The ESC is a size too large for us” (*Yedioth Ahronoth*, 12 January 1979); “Uncertainties about holding the ESC in Israel” (*Yedioth Ahronoth*, 13 January 1999); “A warning to the EBU from disruptions of the ESC” (*Haaretz*, 8 March 1999); “ESC Cutbacks” (*Haaretz*, 18 March 1999).

³ The selection process of the hosts by itself is not necessarily considered a “gossip” aspect. However, the discourse it sparked around celebrity-candidates and the intrigue between them, definitely fell under this category.

Thus, it appears that the “negative news” theme, and the consistent use of this type of news items, also assisted print newspapers in retaining some level of long-term social interest in the televised broadcast, this time through the construction of significant public suspense and drama around the event.

5.2.5. Media events as a reflection of society

In this theme, the media event served as a general and wider “mirror,” or reflection of society’s culture and common symbols and characteristics. Here, the papers made use of the media event to establish a wider discussion about the attributes of society, the various groups and sectors that comprise it, and the controversies and splits between them. In this sense, it seems that the present finding facilitates an expansion of the known argumentation regarding the “national attributes” of the televised media event, also to ways in which it is covered in additional media, such as print newspapers.

The coverage of the 1979 ESC in *Haaretz* included a journalistic discussion on whether Israel is a culturally European or Asian country. This discourse was very much relevant to burning social questions about authenticity, identity, and even ethnicity. For instance, reporter Wily Sion wondered (*Haaretz*, 13 June 1978): “I am confused. We were “thrown out” of the Asian [football] games, and our request to take part in European football games was rejected. However, last year we won the European basketball championship, and this year our song won first place in the ESC. Can someone please tell me –where do we belong?” Similarly, journalist Yael Lotan wrote that Israeli society should not copy European culture, but should retain a certain level of “Middle Eastern autonomy and authenticity” (*Haaretz*, 2 May 1978):

If we have something to learn from the results of the ESC, it is that we shouldn’t make an effort to sound like western people. The Israeli fear of seeming “Levantine” is baseless [...] it is interesting to note that Europeans are not at all deterred by Middle Eastern faces and sounds [...] only when we are able to develop an undisturbed local culture here, that will be a natural synthesis of east and west, would the new Jewish creativity be able to blossom. Copying the west, and especially the USA, and the desperate withdrawal from any Middle Eastern element, are harmful to us.

In the 1999 ESC press coverage, the relationship between religion and the State, as well as the controversies between religious and secular people in Israel were very prominent on the agenda (this issue was mentioned thirty times in total in the two newspapers –a highly significant proportion). The topic of religion-State relations in the context of the ESC, centered on two main contexts: the first was the victory of Israel’s representative, Dana International, a transgender woman, in the 1998 contest; the second was the fact that rehearsals for the ESC in Jerusalem were held on the Jewish Sabbath (something that is forbidden from an orthodox point of view). In other words, the media event’s press coverage included a clear expression of two of the main controversies involving religion in Israel: attitudes of society towards the LGBTQ community; and the religious character of the country, as expressed in the public sphere.

An interesting finding is that the controversy around Dana International was often covered from a political perspective, hence centering on the disagreement between liberal and conservative politicians and parties:

The minister of Education and Culture, Rabbi Yitzhak Levi (the National Religious Party) was the only religious public official to have publicly reacted in favor of Dana International winning the ESC [...] “it was once again proven that Israel is on the European map, with Israeli songs taking their suitable and honorable place.” In contrast, the Ultra-Orthodox Jewish political parties responded with contempt and anger [...] parliament member, Shlomo Benizri, from SHAS [party] said that “this matter, not only does it not add respect and pride, but for me it is a badge of shame to Israeli music” [...] he also refused to refer to Dana as female (*Yedioth Ahronoth*, 11 May 1998).

Some of the items expressly referred to the “irony,” by which the first ever transgender singer in the ESC history represented a relatively conservative country, like Israel: “[how is it that] a conservative society such as ours has embraced such a person to its midst?” (*Haaretz*, 15 May 1998).

To conclude, it appears that, similarly to other themes, here too print media made use of wide social issues, which are highly meaningful to the public, such as cultural, ethnic, and religious controversies, in order to direct readers’ attention to the importance and prominence of the televised media event on the public agenda.

6. Discussion

Caspi (1993) defines a state of “Peaceful Coexistence” between old and new media as a possible solution for the “struggle” between different technologies (pp. 115–116). The current paper contributes to an in-depth empirical understanding of the historical evolution of the media, by showing that media events have had a unique role in creating collaboration and coexistence, based on content-related elements, between print media and television during the second half of the 20th century.

As part of this coexistence, television has made use of print newspapers, which were printed daily and reached wide circles of readers (both younger and older generations), in order to establish the media event on the public awareness over an entire year, while linking it to a wide range of political and entertainment topics. It can be assumed that the construction of social discussion in print newspapers towards the media event had been one of the ways to significantly increase the number of viewers of the broadcast (both the 1979 and the 1999 contests had been unprecedented in terms of their rating). The newspapers, on their part, were “supported” by the intensive coverage of the televised event, in order to evoke a discourse that granted them a “younger,” more updated style, as can be seen, for instance, in the coverage of gossip items about television personas, who had been nominated to host the show.

In the past, the vast majority of studies on media events centered on the televised medium (see, for instance, Dayan & Katz, 1992; Liebes & Katz, 2007). The current study joins a growing recognition in research, by which additional media, beyond television, have played a key role in the importance that society and public opinion ascribed to media events (Tamir & Lehman-Wilzig, 2023). In this context, it is important to note that media events are not the only historical example for cooperation between newspapers and television. Another well-known example are the printed TV-Guides of the 1980s and 1990s (Hartwig *et al.*, 1997). However, it appears that media events also had a central role (albeit less routine and daily compared to TV-Guides) in establishing an affinity between the two media.

This study also reinforces the argument, that televised media events are normally characterized by motifs, attributes, and terminology related to viewers’ national identity (Hepp & Couldry, 2009), and in fact expands it, beyond the one-time broadcast of the media event on television, also to the long-term coverage of these broadcasts in print newspapers. For instance, the coverage of the ESC in Jerusalem raised national controversies in Israeli society (ethnic, cultural, and religious ones); differing approaches regarding the controversial status of the city of Jerusalem and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict; and the connection between the ESC and concrete political events, such as the signing of the Egypt–Israel peace treaty (1979), or the Israeli elections (1999).

In this context, it is important to note that the coverage of the two historic shows in the Israeli press can indicate different characteristics, both of the journalism industry in Israel (including, changes that have occurred in it over the years); and also of society and culture in the country:

- (1) The tendency of the two newspapers to concentrate on political, national, and “patriotic” elements in the coverage of the two contests implies the ethnocentric nature of certain

parts of Israeli society, something that, according to different studies, is also evident amongst some editors and journalists in the country (see, for example, Greenwald, 2023; Roeh & Cohen, 1999).

- (2) The fact that the number of news items regarding the ESC more than doubled from 1979 to 1999 indicates a growing tendency of the Israeli press industry to incorporate “soft news” (entertainment, culture, leisure) into the news contents⁴. This corresponds with a general trend in the Israeli media of increasing contents related to gossip, talk shows, music, and reality shows, a trend that has continued even more strongly since the late 1990s (see, in the context of soft news, Seletzky & Lehman-Wilzig, 2010).
- (3) Undoubtedly, the two contests had a great significance in regard to changes that took place in television in Israel in the 1970s and 1990s. Television was introduced in Israel as early as 1968, but, as mentioned, only in 1979, in preparation for hosting the ESC in Jerusalem, did it become a color television. Similarly, ESC 1999 was, for many years, the most watched TV broadcast in Israel’s history (with a rating of 49%). The idea here is that it is possible that the structural changes and achievements of television in Israel, around the two shows, sharpened the “threat” felt by other, more traditional media (such as, the print newspaper), and forced them to engage and focus more strongly, both on the ESC as a meaningful televised event; and also on television as a dominant and important medium per-se.

A further contribution of this study is in its conclusion, that some of the differences between the two types of the press (Greenwald & Lehman-Wilzig, 2019) can also be ascribed to the way in which they cover media events and television broadcasts. In this regard, it was found that the popular newspaper, being sensationalistic and sometimes “yellow,” covered the dramatic media event more comprehensively than the elite newspaper (237 items in the popular newspaper, compared to 97 in the elite), and it seems that this trend was further strengthened by the “entertaining” nature of the contest. Furthermore, the differences between the two types of newspapers were not only expressed in the scope of coverage, but also in its nature. While the popular newspaper tended to cover gossipy aspects of the media event – “soft news” (33% of items), the elite newspaper tended to link it to current, political, and international events – “hard news” (51% of the items).

Finally, the argument, according to which differing and diverse points of view (internal/external; societal/media; “soft”/“hard,” current-affairs/escapist) regarding the media event assisted the print newspapers in their attempt to maintain it on the agenda over a long period of time, can be linked to a seminal article by Galtung and Ruge (1965) on newsworthiness. In this context, the themes identified in the study echoed a number of “news values” categories in their paper (which increase the likelihood for a certain event to be covered in the media). Among these categories: composition (balance) between “hard news” and “soft news”; a discourse about celebrities (“elite people”), as seen in the coverage of candidates for hosting the ESC; and negativity, as seen in the large headlines, threatening cancellation of the contest in Jerusalem.

7. Limitations and future studies

A few limitations of the study should be mentioned and explained. Firstly, similar to other empirical research, one needs to take into account, that the current study is situated in particular geographic, social, and national contexts, that is, Israeli society and media. Therefore, the study’s generalizability is obviously limited. On the other hand, the fact that it explores the coverage of a media event, characterized by a broad European and international scope (a prominent event in Western popular culture as a whole) does strengthen the ability

⁴ Both newspapers were larger (more pages) in 1999 than in 1979, but this by itself cannot explain the huge difference between the two periods.

to apply its conclusions to other, additional arenas. Likewise, the fact that the newspapers selected for the study have been, for many years, “mainstream” media outlets in Israel (and not sectoral or local ones), also contributes to the validity of the results. However, in order to gain a further understanding of the role of print media in constructing social discussion towards televised media events, future studies would need to continue this examination in various historical and cultural contexts, involving different types of classical and new media events.

Secondly, the research is based on content analysis, rather than on data related to newspapers’ (seemingly) growing circulation due to their engagement with televised events. Therefore, the article focuses on print media’s *potential* to shape the social discourse around televised media events, as well as on *content-based cooperation* between the two types of media platforms (television and newspaper). Has this also affected the *actual long-term* ability of the print media to survive? Future studies, which will engage with data related to circulation/rating, will be able to provide a better insight.

Thirdly, in order to examine the impact and effectiveness of the longstanding media coverage of the ESC, i.e., the excitement, tension, and anticipation among audiences towards the contest (especially in cases where their country is a prominent candidate for victory, or is hosting the show), future studies could also present surveys, questionnaires, and interviews with media consumers, as a complementary component to the media content analysis.

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