Social Media Events

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Social Media Events

Abstract
Audiences are at the heart of every media event. They provide legitimation, revenue and content and yet, very few studies systematically engage with their roles from a communication perspective. This dissertation strives to fill precisely this gap in knowledge by asking how do social media audiences participate in global events? What factors motivate and shape their participation? What cultural differences emerge in content creation and how can we use the perspectives of global audiences to better understand media events and vice versa? To answer these questions, this dissertation takes a social-constructivist perspective and a multiple-method case study approach rooted in discourse analysis. It explores the ways in which global audiences are imagined and invited to participate in media events. Furthermore, it investigates how and why audiences actually make use of that invitation via an analytical framework I elaborate called architectures of participation (O'Reilly, 2004). This dissertation inverts the predominant top-down scholarly gaze upon media events – a genre of perpetual social importance – to present a much needed bottom-up intervention in media events literature. It also provides a more nuanced understanding of what it means to be a member of ‘the audience’ in a social media age, and further advances Dayan and Katz’ (1992) foundational media events theory. The findings offer new theoretical, methodological, and practical insights, which carry implications for communication and media scholars, as well as practitioners alike.

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SOCIAL MEDIA EVENTS

Katerina Girginova

A DISSERTATION

in

Communication

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Supervisor of Dissertation

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To my family.
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Metiu, I started the PhD adventure on my own but looking back, it wouldn’t have been complete without you.
ABSTRACT

SOCIAL MEDIA EVENTS

Katerina Girginova

Marwan M. Kraidy, PhD

Audiences are at the heart of every media event. They provide legitimation, revenue and content and yet, very few studies systematically engage with their roles from a communication perspective. This dissertation strives to fill precisely this gap in knowledge by asking how do social media audiences participate in global events? What factors motivate and shape their participation? What cultural differences emerge in content creation and how can we use the perspectives of global audiences to better understand media events and vice versa? To answer these questions, this dissertation takes a social-constructivist perspective and a multiple-method case study approach rooted in discourse analysis. It explores the ways in which global audiences are imagined and invited to participate in media events. Furthermore, it investigates how and why audiences actually make use of that invitation via an analytical framework I elaborate called architectures of participation (O’Reilly, 2004). This dissertation inverts the predominant top-down scholarly gaze upon media events – a genre of perpetual social importance – to present a much needed bottom-up intervention in media events literature. It also provides a more nuanced understanding of what it means to be a member of ‘the audience’ in a social media age, and further advances Dayan and Katz’ (1992) foundational media events theory. The findings offer new theoretical, methodological, and practical insights, which carry implications for communication and media scholars, as well as practitioners alike.
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INTRODUCTION

Audiences are at the heart of every media event. They provide legitimation, revenue and content and yet, very few studies systematically engage with their roles from a communication perspective. The following dissertation aims to fill precisely this gap in knowledge by asking the following research questions: how do social media audiences participate in global events? What factors shape and motivate their participation? What cultural differences emerge between nations in content creation, and how can we use the vantage point of global audiences to better understand media events, and vice versa?

To answer these questions, this dissertation adopts a social constructivist ontology rooted in discourse analysis. Using a multiple-method case study approach and an analytical framework based on the concept of architectures of participation\(^1\) (attributed to O’Reilly, 2004) it inverts the predominant, top-down scholarly gaze upon media events – a genre of perpetual social importance – to present a much needed bottom-up practical and theoretical intervention in media events literature. As far as can be ascertained, this dissertation provides the first systematic and comparative empirical study of media events from an audience-centric perspective.

The specific context I ground my work in is the Olympic Games. They are the world’s biggest media event, frequently reaching over half the world’s population, and the largest gathering of nations in one place, outnumbering any other sporting event and even the United Nations assembly. The Olympics are also the world’s oldest media event. With a history spanning over 2,500 years, the Games have been described as a microcosm of

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\(^1\) O’Reilly’s original use of the term was in the singular, ‘architecture’, whereas this dissertation opts for the term in the plural, ‘architectures’. This choice is explained in more detail on pages 45-47.
society (Girginov & Parry, 2004; Toohey & Veal, 2007), where the basic Olympic ideas have been written and re-written to reflect humanity's own evolution. Thus, we can think of the Games as a palimpsest (Dayan, 2009); one, whose fundamental script is sufficiently familiar at this point that the Olympic processions have come to be seen not only as specific messages but also as media and platforms, that convey a range of other issues beyond themselves. True to form, the Games provide ample amount of myth, inspiration and scandal and as one of the most widely recognizable symbols in the world their five rings, symbolizing the five continents, invite much audience involvement that stretches beyond the realm of sport. This, I argue, is why media events like the Olympics prove to be such enduring forms of social action that continue to be an important object of study. The Games provide important social structure and collective moments of respite for the reflection and refraction of reality. As a media event they also allow us, often via comparative means, to expose our current circumstances and imagine alternate ways of being.

To better understand the Olympics as a media event from the vantage point of global audiences I bring into conversation two primary bodies of literature; media events and active audience studies. Despite much material being written on both, and despite numerous studies on various angles of the Olympic Games, there has been no attempt thus far to bring together media events and active audience literature to provide a critical account of the making of global Olympic audiences. In the literature review I detail more thoroughly how these two bodies of research complement each other through a process of theoretical bricolage (Denzin & Lincoln, 1999; Rogers, 2012), and what a focus on Olympic audiences, specifically, can do to further advance this synergy. Next, I outline the structure of this dissertation and present a synopsis of each case study.
The first chapter critically interrogates the available literature to help situate the Olympic Games as a media event, which is increasingly communicatively constituted by social media audiences. I argue that audiences have always been of great concern to the Olympic movement and to media events more broadly however, different periods of history have seen them conceptualized, practiced, and valorized in different ways. Despite an increasing territorial creep of media events like the Olympics to further and farther regions of the world, there is still relatively little work on how global audiences engage with and create Games content. Yet, it is precisely when blown up on an international scale that the tensions between media events as sites for unity, versus media events as terrains for difference, become clearest and in most urgent need of (re)examination.

The first chapter also introduces the concept of architectures of participation (O’Reilly, 2004), which I expand in purview into an analytical framework for unpacking how Olympic audiences participate in the construction of the Games via Twitter (the particular social media of study2). In brief, as advanced by this dissertation, architectures of participation are the institutional, technical, and socio-cultural structures through which audiences are imagined, invited and initiated into becoming content producing members of an event. It is my hope that this analytical toolkit can provide some guidance for how to operationalize and holistically study audience participation and can be employed in contexts beyond this study, too.

Chapter two provides the methodology of the dissertation. It introduces Discourse Theoretical Analysis (Carpentier & De Cleen, 2007; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985), the study’s key analytical approach, and grounds it within the social constructionism tradition (Berger

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2 I strategically focus my literature review on broader-level concepts and aim to be relatively social-medium agnostic where possible. A more in-depth discussion about Twitter can be found in the methodology section.
& Luckmann, 1966/1991; Searle, 1995). To do justice to what is an intricately complex and multi-modal set of events, this chapter describes the design and data of a multiple-methods, comparative case study approach to explore the practices of Olympic audiences. By designing and subsequently testing this multiple-methods framework I combine quantitative approaches (automated content analyses and numerical data), with qualitative approaches (personal observation and discourse-based analyses) or, what can also be thought of as big and small data, respectively. This, I argue, is an increasingly necessary practice for the capture and analysis of complex, multi-layered media events and audiences. It also contributes to a small but growing body of research that uses multiple-methods and modalities to explore intricate and contextually embedded social media phenomena.

The second chapter also introduces Twitter, the particular social medium under examination. In the relatively short lifespan of this platform (Twitter was launched in 2006) the company has managed to amass a global base of over 300 million active users, who send out about 500 million tweets per day (Cooper, 2019). Twitter is sustained through advertising and data licensing however, despite its public popularity and adoption within the media industry, the company struggles to make a profit. While the platform leaves much to be desired by academics, Twitter remains one of the most research-friendly social media in terms of free ease of access to public data3, which has resulted in a boom of studies.

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3 In fact, Twitter has been criticized for being overly liberal with its user base both, in terms of not sufficiently vetting the authenticity of those who use the platform and, for allowing harmful content to circulate freely. This has sometimes been pinned down to Twitter’s relentless desire for the acquisition of a bigger user base with the hope that this would eventually lead to more income (see for example Sofiness, 2016).
Case study synopses

Chapter three, the first dissertation case study, examines the UK’s 2012 London Olympic Games; these were advertised as being the first real social media Olympics, and lamented by some for being the last. While there is credible opposition to claims of being ‘first’, it is unquestionable that London’s Games became pivotal for effectively introducing a wider array of social media and audience voices into the Olympic communications milieu and for strictly codifying their use. In this context I examine the hugely successful #savethesurprise hashtag; a Twitter-enabled campaign launched by the Games organizers to deal precisely with the tension of including social media and thus, audience voices into the Olympic narratives, while maintaining control over the storyline. #savethesurprise launched weeks before the opening ceremony for the London 2012 Olympic Games because details about the £27 million ($42 million) event, including photographs and a music playlist, had already leaked to the press. In turn, the Games organizers had to find a way to keep the remaining details of the opening ceremony, one the most anticipated, expensive, and widely viewed media events in the world a secret whilst simultaneously channeling the image of being the social media Olympics to their live dress rehearsal audiences of over 100,000 people. I critically unpack the specific architectures of participation that allowed for this campaign to work and argue that while strong legal and technological frameworks undergirded the shape of the campaign, it was ultimately a ritualistic sense of creative citizenship through opportunities for fair play and patriotic appeal that rendered #savethesurprise a success.

Chapter four, the second case study, explores Russia’s 2014 Sochi Olympics; an event held in a country that remains embedded in Cold War era global tensions. The
broadcasting of these Olympics saw, for the first time, a majority of people in the US using a second screen device to accompany their television viewing, the result being a highly contested and renegotiated Games on Twitter. With this case study I pay particular attention to one example of contestation, the #NBCFail hashtag. While protests against the Olympics and controversies about their broadcasts are nothing new, #NBCFail is the first hashtag specifically created to serve as a consumer watchdog against a corporation (first used in the 2008 Beijing Olympics). #NBCFail was created to troll and patrol NBC, a subsidiary of Comcast, which is the largest broadcasting and cable telecommunications conglomerate in the world. By critically tracing the evolution of the hashtag in English and in Russian, I comparatively study how various contradictions in the 2014 broadcast of the Games gave rise to a bottom-up re-narration of the media event. I show that #NBCFail simultaneously presented a critique and a continuation of traditional broadcast logic. I also argue that national architectures of participation fuel content creation but can serve to limit the effective transfer of practices and ideas across cultural and linguistic boundaries.

Chapter five, the third case study, analyzes Brazil’s 2016 Rio Olympics; the first to be held in a South American country. These Games took place against the perfect storm of political upheaval, a Zika epidemic outbreak, compounded economic crises, and unfolding, domino-like athletics doping scandals. These Games also became Twitter’s top global trending topic of 2016, surpassing #Election2016, #BlackLivesMatter, #Brexit and even #PokemonGo. Yet, what exactly does the trending #Rio2016 reveal and just as importantly, what does it conceal? I comparatively analyze the life of this hashtag as used by English, Portuguese and Russian speakers to find that the trend was overwhelmingly driven by retweets and thus, content curation rather than creation. Institutional and technical factors
exerted a strong influence on the life of #Rio2016 yet, through close, comparative attention to the retweets, important cultural nuances still emerged. I show that the content people produced differs across nations not just based on what people talk about but also, on the ways in which they do it. Thus, despite the international appeal and universalist ambitions of certain events, or the globalizing rhetoric and potential of social media platforms like Twitter, the Games emerge as spaces for rather localized practices of audiencing. These spaces ultimately reinforce the concept of the nation, albeit through modes of complex or hybrid globalization. Further, I argue that social media trends themselves become a technology and a logic of participation – one that is simultaneously sensitizing and hyper-visible yet, also neutralizing and concealing.

Chapter six, the concluding chapter, revisits media events theory and addresses some of the limitations that prevent it from being able to effectively explain audiences’ mediated co-construction of events. It proposes the descriptive term social media events, which acknowledges the decades of media events research it builds upon and advances our understanding to account for the active, co-mediating roles of global, social media audiences in event construction today. The final chapter discusses the important differences that separate a social media event from the media events that Dayan and Katz (1992) imagined, but also notes some of the former’s limitations. For instance, whereas global television penetration is near complete and everyone has more or less the same view and access to events via a television set, social media events become inherently hierarchical. They depend upon a certain level of access and skill and they unfold according to specific, often highly institutionalized architectures of participation, which promote ‘productive’ audiencing and can limit democratic potential. The chapter concludes with a summary of
the main theoretical, methodological and practical contributions of the dissertation, as well as some comments about its limitations and suggestions for a future research agenda.

In sum, this dissertation is about global audiences, that have always been at the very heart of the Olympic Games, arguably the world’s oldest and boldest media event. It explores the roles audiences play there, which have largely and remarkably remained invisible to the academic eye, thus far. While the findings are contextual to the Games, it is my hope that some broader ideas of audience participation can be extracted beyond the Olympics and beyond the platform of Twitter. In turn, the results will hopefully enrich media, communication, audience, and Olympic studies scholars. The findings can certainly also be applied to deepen the communicative approaches used by Olympic, media, and event practitioners, in order to create more culturally appropriate and contextually conscious content for future audience engagement. Finally, the knowledge generated form this study can provide a more nuanced understanding of what it means to be a member of ‘the audience’ in a social media age; this is important for helping us all to become more critical and well-informed creators and consumers of the media.
CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following chapter comprises a review of the two key bodies of literature informing this dissertation, media events and audience studies, as well as their debates and synergies with a specific focus on the Olympic Games. First, media events are examined in practice, by focusing on the questions of what they are and where the Olympic Games fit in. Then, media events are surveyed in theory, by looking at the dominant conceptions and features that have framed this genre, as well as some of the important critiques that have been leveled against the extant research. Lastly, media events are examined from what I argue to be one of their key, missing pieces particularly from a theoretical standpoint: active audiences. The chapter concludes with a discussion about the genealogy of active audience research, how it can advance existing work on media events through the process of theoretical bricolage (Denzin & Lincoln, 1999; Rogers, 2012), and how this resulting synergy will be employed in the dissertation.

Media events in practice

What are global media events? They are a specific genre of event that captures the imagination of the world. As opposed to regular, casual television viewing and social media browsing, media events seize audience and media organizations’ attention, sometimes unexpectedly, and command large, loyal followings. They also often serve as historic moments that define a time, a place, and occasionally a generation. Some early examples of media events include Orson Welle’s 1938 ‘War of the Worlds’ radio broadcast; the 1943
radio, round-the-clock singing marathon, during which singer Kate Smith encouraged listeners to pledge contributions to the US war bonds effort (Jun & Dayan, 1986); the 1979-1981 Iranian hostage crisis; and South Korea’s 1983 ‘Family Reunion Program’, which was aimed at reuniting an estimated 10 million Korean families that had been dispersed during the Korean national liberation in 1945 and the Korean War (Jun & Dayan, 1986). More recent or recurring examples of media events include New York’s September 11th attacks, the Oscars, and of course, the Olympic Games.

*The Olympic Games as the Media Event*

The Olympic Games, the context of this dissertation, are our society’s oldest and boldest media event. The fact that they are the oldest, stretching back to 776 BC, means that there is a significant accrual of socio-cultural and economic capital accumulated within them over time. The fact that they are the boldest means a number of things; for one, the Games are our biggest and thus, most ambitious broadcast and social media event, attracting global audiences of around 4 billion – over half the world’s population (Global Broadcast Report, 2012)! The Olympics are also the only venue other than the United Nations (UN) where the majority of the world’s nations meet on a regular basis to engage

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4 Curiously, Jun and Dayan wrote their 1986 article about audience involvement in the Korean ‘interactive media event’ years before the publication of Dayan and Katz’ 1992 *Media Events*. Nonetheless, neither author has returned to explore this line of inquiry.

5 A similar way to frame the extraordinariness of the Games via these two characteristics is through Roche’s (2002) two defining features of mega events; time and space accumulation and compression.

6 For example, the Olympics in London 2012 were not only the most watched television event in US history but also the “largest online, social media, and mobile event,” (Tang & Cooper, 2013, p. 855). Similarly, the 2014 Games in Sochi continued the trend of online and broadcast media expansion by setting a Winter Olympics record with over 1,539 hours of coverage across a range of media platforms (NBC Universal Press Release, December 19, 2013). Rio’s 2016 Games set records, too, for new highs in digital engagement and viewership (NBC Universal Press Release, August 22, 2016).

7 Whereas precise figures are debatable, the enormity of the Olympic media event, and the scale of its audiences (and often socio-economic impacts) are not.
in self-conscious, common activity (MacAlloon, 1984, p. 267). Nonetheless, as of 2012, more nations gather at the Olympic Games than the UN assemblies – and the Olympic audience is certainly far larger. Furthermore, the Games are the only sporting competition in the world that explicitly uses sport as a vehicle to pursue a social and ideological agenda, which aims to change the world for the better (IOC, Olympic Charter, 2015).

It follows that, as a public event, the Olympics are based on a consequential logic: by showcasing human excellence on the sport field, the Games aspire to affect social life by inspiring people to take up sport, to appreciate other cultures, religions, and genders, and more broadly, to bring about change by making the world a more peaceful place. The Olympics are the practical manifestation of Olympism, a social anthropological philosophy promoting an idealized vision of the human being and world peace through sport and education. Olympic ideals are promoted by the Olympic Movement, which seeks to engage, educate and empower audiences, particularly young people (Girginov, 2012a). Thus, one of its perpetual aims is the very creation of participating, Olympic audiences. As Handelman (1990) argues, this is a functional relationship which “lies at the epistemological core of any conception of public event. The features of the public event indicate that it points beyond itself, or in other words, it is symbolic of something outside itself” (p.12). Therefore, both in theory and in practice, the Games represent a normative developmental project (Girginov, 2010), which transcends the mere sporting contest.

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8 The second fundamental principle in the Olympic Charter states: “The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity” (IOC, 2015, p. 13). The modern Olympic Games are the practical manifestation of Olympism, and since their inception in 1896, they have achieved the status of a global cultural event, with significant symbolic, economic and political appeal.
To further underscore the global, communicative importance of the Games, we might also note that the Olympics have been designated as a ‘free-to-air event’ in many European countries and in some additional regions of the world (Rowe, 2011; Solberg, 2007). This means the Games are deemed to be of sufficient societal significance to be made, by law, freely available via broadcast to many citizens globally. As Rowe (2011) elegantly put it, being able to watch the Games is considered like “a sign of membership to the ‘human family’,” (p. 1; also in Rowe & Scherer, 2012). Of course, the cost of this membership is not unproblematic and the striking, opposite example is also increasingly true; the mega, socio-economic nature of the Games is so engulfing that locals who do not wish to participate in the Olympic spectacle for any number of reasons are increasingly driven to physically leave their host countries for the duration of the event in order to ‘get away’ (Rowe, 2011).

Escaping this media spectacle of the Olympics is likely to get harder however, because the very idea of audience expansion is built into the DNA of the Games. The Olympic Charter mandates that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) secure “the fullest coverage by… different media and the widest possible audience in the world,” (IOC, 2015, p. 92). A variety of efforts – like the addition of new sports and their audiences to the Olympic program – are regularly and systematically made to ensure the sustained growth and interest of spectators. Of course, the Games are also wrapped up in complex webs of public, government and private sponsorship deals, which means that audience making and expansion becomes the business of many organizations beyond the IOC.

While the Games belong to a roster of mega sporting events that includes the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup, Wimbledon Tennis
and the Superbowl, they nonetheless hold a unique position. What makes the Olympics different, in addition to their universalistic appeal, is that they attract more people and more media coverage than any of the other sporting events thus, they consistently rank at the top of the special ‘free to air’ category noted earlier. The Games also often attract different kinds of people – for example, in the US they command a bigger female than male television audience, which is untrue for any other sporting event and impacts broadcast editorial decisions to better appeal to this ‘unusual’ demographic (Billings, 2008; Rothenbuhler, 1988). Of course, the socio-economic impacts of the Games, both positive and negative for host nations, are also arguably larger than those of any other sporting event, further underscoring the Olympics as a unique media phenomenon (Preuss, 2000; Roche, 2006; Zimbalist, 2016).

Last, but certainly not least, the Olympic Games have historically served as platforms for varying scales of innovation. In fact, it is possible to see the whole Olympic institution as an engine for societal change, development and innovation (Roche, 2002), albeit one that is not always successful. For one, the Games are an instrumental component behind the growth of sport, a modern concept, which emerged in the 19th century along with new ideas and practices of production, self and society (Elias & Dunning 1986; Rowe, 2011). Moreover, the Games could first, be conceptualized as strategic platforms for ‘creative’ state positioning at the intra-national level (Burchell, O’Loughlin, Gillespie, & McAvoy, 2015; Girginov, 2008; Price & Dayan, 2009). Second, they could be seen as commercial imperatives for technological innovations at the national level (Roche, 2002)

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9 For instance, the Games follow an ambulatory principle, meaning that each rendition takes place in a new country and culture. This, by default, provides a level of interpretation and creativity in representing the core Olympic symbols and values.
and third, the Olympics could be analyzed as a creative enterprise at the collective and individual levels, too. This latter framing takes place through a couple of concepts related to meaning making, such as Olympic ‘polysemy’ (Chalip, 1992; 2000), the Olympics as boundary objects (Oswick, 2005; Star & Griesemer, 1989), and specific, creative actions of individuation (Goriunova, 2012) that take place in and through new media practices and processes.

To further conceptualize the Olympic Games as collective and individual platforms for creativity, we may think of them as miniaturized, rule-based and dramatized enactments of society; or, quite literally, as games. The constitutive nature of a game is such that it lies somewhere at the intersection of reality and make-believe (Winnicott, 1953). Thus, through digital play, creation of texts and active engagement with different media we test out various communicative realities, try out forms of “creative citizenship” (Hargreaves & Hartley, 2016) and (re)create our own subjectivity (Goriunova, 2012). As Jenkins (2006) notes, “we are trying out through play patterns of interaction that will soon penetrate every aspect of our lives,” (p. 135).

Still, in spite of the colossal symbolic, economic and communicative importance of the Games, there are many gaps in our knowledge. For instance, the Olympics have rarely been systematically studied as a significant object for empirical, comparative global communication on their own – especially not with a focus on the meaning-making processes of social media audiences across Games and cross nations (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012; O’Loughlin & Gillespie, 2015; Sugden & Tomlinson, 2012; Tamm, 2015). Furthermore, while in recent years, audiences have taken on an increasingly central role in shaping the visible mass media spectacle of the Olympics, from an academic perspective,
Olympic audiences have played a relatively static and low-profile role in research. These audiences have primarily been studied as a source of revenue (Lenskyj & Wagg, 2012; Preuss, 2000), or as a product of the broader shift toward digital journalism (Miah & Jones, 2012). Few scholars have empirically, systematically and longitudinally studied media event audiences, let alone Olympic audiences, as active agents in constructing Olympic narratives and in shaping the Olympic movement (Laskin, 2014). This is a place where this dissertation intervenes.

**Media events in theory: public, mega, and media events**

We cannot understand the Olympics as a media event without first and foremost understanding them as public (Handelman, 1998), and mega events (Roche, 2002) and thus, paying attention to their audiences. Dastur (2000) notes that the word ‘event’ comes from the Latin ‘e-venire’, which means to come, or to happen\(^\text{10}\). According to Dastur, an event is fundamentally “always a surprise, something which takes possession over us in an unforeseen manner,” (2000, p. 182). We may see echoes of this unexpected or creative characteristic of events in Sewell’s (1996) work too, who defines an event as “an occurrence that is remarkable in some way – one that is widely noted and commented upon by contemporaries,” (pp. 841-842); characteristics that can rather readily translate to the social media era.

The ‘widely commented upon’, collective, or social dimension of events is clearly encapsulated in many other scholars’ works. For example, Merkel’s (2015) definition of events highlights that they are socio-cultural processes that “create and offer distinctive

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\(^{10}\) Notably, Scannell (1995) differentiates between happenings; occurrences that happen to us and that are not pre-planned, versus events; occurrences that we make happen and that are pre-planned.
meanings, which help individuals to form communities and make sense of who they are,” (p. 5). This view is certainly echoed in several canonical works on the importance of ritual in society as a genre of event that marks the passing of time and of life stages (Durkheim, 1912/1976; Geertz, 1957). According to Roche (2003), the enduring popularity of events “derives from their social functions both for elites and mass publics in making history in a social world characterized by incessant intergenerational change,” (p. 100). Events, for Merkel, have historically served to shape individuals and collectives and the ways in which they do this is by apprehending the social world thereby, helping us deal with its various orders and realities. For Handelman (1998), there are three types of ‘heuristics’ for public events that help us apprehend social life: events that model, present and represent reality. Subsequently:

If events that model make change happen within themselves, that directly effects social realities, and if events that present are axiomatic icons of versions of such realities, then events that re-present do work of comparison and contrast in relation to social realities. (Handelman, 1998, p. 49)

In short, events are important to study not only because they help us to meaningfully structure our social lives, or because they present and represent us with a mirror through which we can look at our society, but also because they give us a shared crystal ball through which we can gaze into the future and collectively begin to model it. Thus, the public dimension of events is absolutely key, precisely because it serves these important functions in our society. However, the public dimension of events takes on some interesting characteristics in the media era and certainly does not mean equal access – or unison interpretations – for all. For example, Prince Charles and Diana’s wedding in 1981 was a
public event and yet, the type of access one could have to the event – whether live or mediated – was strictly stratified by social hierarchy and editorial decisions. Public, then, also refers to a multiplicity of publics embedded within society and events like the royal wedding and the Games serve as a good reminder of this.

Defining the Games as a public event is crucial because then, the creation of audiences becomes not just a responsibility of the Olympic or other media organizations, but of a whole host of additional organizations (as mentioned above), too. For example, public authorities are contractually obliged to engage their audiences with the Games (IOC, Olympic Charter, 2015). Local authorities will communicate the relevant transport and security arrangements with their citizens; the central government will communicate a number of other messages to the whole country; environmental agencies will communicate how to best use natural resources throughout the event to relevant audiences; and the IOC’s 11 ‘The Olympic Program’ (TOP) sponsors will each spend around $150 million to communicate their associations with the Games, too. By doing this, all of these organizations create parallel discourses that directly contribute to the creation of different audiences. Therefore, it is not only the language of sport and its subsequent messages that are used by event organizers and media organizations, but a number of other channels and themes, too. After all, the whole point of Olympic legacy is about engaging the population and even the world with the Games – that is, creating all sorts of audiences.

Defining the Games as a mega event is a key conceptual move, too (Roche, 2002). According to Roche, a sociologist who was amongst the first to systematically apply sociological analyses to the Olympic Games, mega events are “large scale cultural (including commercial and sporting events), which have a dramatic character, mass popular
appeal and international significance,” (p. 1). As a genre, mega events were born in the late 19th century along with enlightenment logic, industrialization, and empire-nation building (Roche, 2003); processes that Hobsbawm has cited as being central to the period of the invention of traditions (1992). Roche analyzes mega events on the axes of modern/non-modern, national/non-national and local/non-local in turn, concerning himself with the various temporalities and scales and sizes of events. Furthermore, Roche makes an argument that the production of the Games is the production of intermediate meso-sphere processes that allow us to connect individual, micro, and mass levels of society to collective, macro and elite levels11. For the purposes of this dissertation, it is important to highlight the connection between public, mega, and media events; as becomes clear in Roche’s analysis, the grandeur behind the scaling of events like the Olympics and their publics was directly connected to the mediation of these events and publics. It would be impossible to have a mega event, on an international scale like the modern Olympics, without the work of the media and the engagement of mass publics. Thus, by definition, the Games become not only a public and mega event but also a media event; and one that is equally dependent upon large audiences.

Yet, perhaps, this is obvious. Scholars like Fiske (1994) have long, provocatively argued that the term ‘media event’ becomes a tautology in our day and age12 – but does it also become obsolete? As Chun (2016) notes, ‘new’ media, like television once was, and like social media now claim to be, are at their most potent when they move from being new

11 The Games thus, serve as bridges between what Castells (1996) has called the spaces of flows and the spaces of places (Roche, 2003).
12 With this remark Fiske also channels a deeper, ontological concern, which is akin to Boorstin’s (1964) work on pseudo-events; namely, how can we distinguish between real events and those that are made for the media anymore? Where does one end and the other begin?
to being habitual. As such, the fact that global, public events are fundamentally mediated does not imply that their mediation is to be taken for granted and on the contrary, actually makes the study of their habitual mediation even more important. So while any public, mega event by definition also implies it is a media event, it is important to retain a focus on its mediations not least because they can reveal naturalized power dynamics, societal values, and social relations.

Of course, television and social media aside, events have always been mediated (Ytreberg, 2017), which only makes the focus media events theory brings on the processes of mediation all the more significant – and in need of a broader encapsulation or definition. By expanding the purview of the concept of architecture(s) of participation (O’Reilly, 2004) into a significant, medium agnostic, sensitizing analytical framework this dissertation takes one step toward achieving this goal. In sum, what distinguishes a media event and its subsequent body of literature from any other form of event conceptually and practically is the focus on the work of mediation(s), as well as the event’s close relationship to media institutions. Thus, retaining and refining the analytical focus of media events theory is important, even at the risk of sustaining a naming tautology.

Nonetheless, with several notable exceptions (Hutchins & Mikosza, 2010; Hutchins & Rowe, 2012; Miah & Jones, 2012), there is a scarcity of research on the processes and logics behind mediation in contemporary media events and specifically, in social media settings. There is also a continuous hiatus on the role of audiences (and specifically, global, comparative audience perspectives) throughout the majority of the events’ literature – whether it be public, mega, or media events focused. While modern audiences are key economic and social constituents of events – and increasingly mass narrative creating
stakeholders – they seem to fall under the radar in most academic analyses. Next, I outline the core tenets of the media events framework, its modern updates and critiques, and then its missing piece; active audiences. I argue that media events theory would be enriched by taking its audiences seriously as a content producing and constitutive events force and conclude with an examination of active audiences in the Olympic context.

*The five fundamentals of media events*

By bridging ideas from anthropology, sociology, linguistics and mass media, Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz (1992) played an integral role in introducing the concept of media events into the modern academic vocabulary. In brief, the authors define media events as “the high holidays of mass communication,” (p. 1), that spotlight some central value, idealized version of society or aspect of collective memory. An example of the majestic media event envisioned by Dayan and Katz would be the broadcasting of the Olympic Games opening ceremony or, the first live NASA broadcast of the Apollo 11, Neil Armstrong moon landing in 1969.

According to the authors, media events are aspirational because they offer society a vision of what it hopes to be – they suspend time and reality for a short while and take the viewer through a ritualistic rite of passage (1992, p. 119). During this journey, the viewer finds him or herself in a liminal/liminoid space (Turner, 1974) of possibility and it is here that the imaginative and potentially transformative power of media events lies; as viewers suspend their belief and collectively enter into the unfolding of a media event the potential for transformation is ripe. In fact, Dayan and Katz argue that the most significant media events are those that work; “those that become real because they are real in their
consequences,” (Dayan & Katz, 1992, p. 155) and because they engender some form of social change beyond their bounded selves. Dayan and Katz’ media event can be summarized according to five fundamental dimensions: liveness, organization, semantic factors, audience involvement, and structural features. In short, liveness means that a media event is broadcast live or in near synchronization with the actual occurrence. Organization refers to the idea that media events are pre-planned, advertised, and importantly, originate outside of the media. The semantic factors encapsulate the notion that while the outcomes of media events are unscripted, their overall themes fall into three possible scripts of action: the contest, conquest and coronation. An example of a contest is the 100m finals of the Olympic Games, a conquest is Pope Paul John II’s first trip to Warsaw in 1979, and a coronation event is Prince Charles and Diana’s wedding in 1981 (Dayan & Katz, 1992). Audience involvement is also key because to succeed, media events require large audiences and a certain amount of buy-in from them; all parties (particularly audiences), must suspend some amount of belief and comply with the narratives put forth. According to Dayan and Katz “media events have an openly integrative ambition,” (Jun & Dayan, 1986, p. 74), which results in a level of cohesion of meaning-making and, ultimately, a sense of audience unity and solidarity. Finally, the structural feature is premised on the liveness of media events that comes as an interruption of broadcast routines and audiences’ daily lives. Notably, live, media events are rarely interrupted themselves and their occurrence commands a normative, mass viewing, which also monopolizes media organizations’

13 The archetypal examples Dayan and Katz (1992) provide for transformative events are the Pope’s 1979 visit to Poland before the fall of the Communist regime, and President Sadat’s 1977 visit to Jerusalem for peace talks.
broadcast plans. As Dayan and Katz note, these five dimensions may be found individually in a range of other media genres, but it is their combination that allows them to form media events as a unique one.

Dayan and Katz also note some limitations to their media events framework of which, perhaps, the most significant one for this dissertation is the idea that “certain events do not fall neatly into the tripartite classification of contests, conquests and coronations. Their distinguishing mark… is that they do not have individual actors but collective protagonists,” (1992, p. 49). This is probably as close as Dayan and Katz come to envisioning the content producing audience and digital media landscape of today. Dayan and Katz even hint at the idea of a need to re-conceptualize media events with a focus on the collective audience and this is precisely the intervention that I wish to make with this dissertation.

Since the initial media events framework put forth by Dayan and Katz most cohesively in their 1992 book Media Events: The Live broadcasting of history, there have been a number of more contemporary critiques and developments. Below, I outline what is probably the most audible – and certainly most relevant to this dissertation – set of critiques, grouped under the theme of fragmented and polysemic audience reception. I then propose five additional contributions and critiques, which are important for the development of this dissertation.

**Media events: contemporary contributions and critiques**

Conceptually speaking, Dayan and Katz take the idea of ‘ritual’ (Durkheim, 1912/1976; 1976; MacAlloon, 1984; Turner, 1969, 1979) and transpose it into the mass
According to them, media event broadcasts “integrate societies in a collective heartbeat and evoke a renewal of loyalty,” (Dayan & Katz, 2009, p. 9). Thus, in the process of their theoretical transposition, Dayan and Katz retain Durkheim’s key idea of ritual (1912/1976), as based on social solidarity and integration, but argue that in the broadcast era it takes place via mass media. Consequently, Dayan and Katz argue that if all parties (broadcasters, organizers and audiences) do not play their role in the script of media events, they simply will not work. Yet, if ritual, in the Dayan and Katz sense, means solidarity and consensus then it is precisely this interpretation of the ‘extraordinariness’ of media events that has come under most intense academic scrutiny – including from Dayan and Katz themselves (Dayan, 2009; Katz & Liebes, 2007). As Rivenburgh (2002) notes, society has grown increasingly suspicious of uniting narratives presented by media events organizers, such as the International Olympic Committee, and it is precisely the breakdown of belief in the meta or grand narratives that marks the condition of modernity (Alexander, 2005; Giddens, 1990; Lyotard, 1984).

Of course, the suspicion behind media events and their powers to produce new and better visions and versions of society is nothing new. In the 1960’s Boorstin coined the term pseudo-event to describe the synthetic reality of events manufactured for the purpose of becoming media events, often without real world referents. The Olympic Games certainly do not fall neatly within Boorstin’s vision of pseudo-events but to complicate matters, an argument could be made that the Games have become primarily an event for the media today. For example, competitions are held at times not best for athletic performance but most conducive for large broadcast audience viewing; competition rules and athletic uniforms are altered so as to be more television friendly; and the Olympics are
so financially dependent upon ginormous broadcast fees that often, their ultimate call comes under question. In the words of the Rio Organizing Committee for the 2016 Games: “after the inauguration of the Main Press Centre, on 6 July, Games Time will begin,” (The Rio Strategic Communications Plan, 2012, p. 16). In short, the Games begin once the media spectacle begins.

Prior to Boorstin, other authors have also long contemplated the veracity of media in accurately portraying our lived in reality (Lang & Lang, 1968; Plato, 330-380 BC/1956). In fact, a central intellectual niche of the Frankfurt School, predecessors of the active audience theorists, was precisely a disbelief and cry out against the structures of media institutions that represent our reality (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972; 1947; Kraidy, 2005). While an important debate to note, the veracity of media events vis-à-vis their real world counterpart is not the central question of this particular dissertation. In fact, whether or not the mediated version of an event has a real life counterpart is also not of direct concern to this dissertation either. Rather, this dissertation is more concerned with the *types* of representations and narratives that different mediations, and specifically social media(tions) allow for.

One of the most sustained critiques of Dayan and Katz’ notion of societal integration and solidarity has come from an edited volume by Couldry, Hepp and Krotz (2009) titled *Media Events in a Global Age*. A collection of papers in this volume focus on the notion of solidarity, noting that any grand narratives break down, particularly when considered on a global stage. As a poignant example of the need to rethink media events in a global age let us consider the following; in the Chinese context, the term ‘media event’ is often a way to describe online activism and practices of dissent against the government
(Yang, (G.), 2009; Yang, (F.) 2014; Xu, 2016). Contrary to working in accordance with established state media and organizations, Yang, Yang and Xu’s media events have become to be a pseudonym and a softer, censorship-evading term for protest and for working against the establishment. Therefore, on a global scale, we cannot even take the concept – let alone the contents – of a media event for granted, or for carrying a shared meaning. Subsequently, I agree with Couldry, Hepp and Krotz’ imperative that “we need to update our understanding of contemporary media events within an analysis of globalized media cultures,” (2009, p. 1). Nonetheless, with few exceptions\textsuperscript{14}, we still largely lack the empirical studies to do so.

One of the essays in Couldry, Hepp and Krotz’ edited volume, written by Dayan himself, states that “media events lend themselves to a rich grammar of appropriations,” (2009, p. 30). Therefore, the shared ritual meaning of a media event is slowly being substituted by a plurality of meanings of events. Furthermore, the construction of this plurality is now increasingly seen as an arena for contestation rather than consensus (Fiske, 1996; Kraidy, 2009). As several scholars have suggested, “social drama is the successor to ritual, not its continuation in another form,” (p. 54, Alexander, Giesen & Mast, 2006; Turner, 1979). Still, this increasingly publicly visible contestation of meaning in media events should not imply that these types of expressions are new to our current communications landscape nor, should they be taken for granted as the dominant form of media event expression. Some recent scholarship, including case study two of this dissertation, has demonstrated that some degree of suspension of disbelief and social

\textsuperscript{14} For example, Sreberny (2016) has analyzed how the series of 2015 attacks collectively described by the ‘JeSuisCharlie’ event-chain name, have come to be represented and responded to differently by global audiences and fractions of national populations.
solidarity akin to Durkheim’s (1912/1976) notion of ritual action, are still relevant experiences that certainly become the hallmark of some media events (Wardle & West, 2004).

To challenge and complicate the dichotomous notions of media events as sites for unity, versus media events as sites for contestation I apply two, somewhat opposing intellectual scaffoldings to case studies one and two; case study one borrows from the notion of ritual (Durkheim, 1912/1976) to explain how an appearance of social solidarity can be engendered and can impact audience participation. Case study two takes the notion of resistance (Hall, 1973; Morley 1980) to show how social media audiences can have oppositional readings and content creation practices to the key media event narratives – and sometimes to each other – while still, ironically, reinforcing the centrality of those precise narratives and narrative tellers. In addition, case study three depicts both, acts of audience solidarity and contention.

This apparent conundrum between media events as sites of unity versus media events as terrains for contestation also calls for a broadening of Dayan and Katz’ three original scripts of media events – and for a broadening of the roles of active audiences themselves. Such an act should allow media events theory to become more adept at handling and explaining the fuller spectrum of events that fall within its genre (Dayan, 2009; Hepp & Couldry, 2009; Katz & Liebes, 2009; Price & Dayan, 2008; Stepinska, 2009). Furthermore, it is precisely at this juncture of seemingly contradictory and irreconcilable approaches – again, media events as sites of unity versus sites for contestation – that media events scholarship may benefit most from a global, empirical and audience-centric perspective (Roche, 2006). Case study three, in particular, grapples with
media events and audiences comparatively and employs an analytical scaffolding of complex globalization (Roche, 2006) and hybridity (Kraidy, 2005) to address precisely these dynamics. Next, I outline three additional contributions and critiques to media events research, broadly speaking. I conclude with a separate section on active audiences, the critique that I argue becomes the missing piece or perpetual blind spot of the genre, and subsequently, the driving force of much of the ensuing inquiry of this dissertation.

First, it is worth questioning the centrality of television as the medium of media events. Being a product of its time, Dayan and Katz’ work has been criticized for privileging television above all other platforms in media events thus, excluding a rich body of historic and modern occurrences (Joost Van Loon, 2009; Wilke, 2009). The point of this critique is not purely a technological one: if television domesticates and integrates audiences around media events, then what types of relationships or audience roles can other forms of media engender through these same events and what types of dynamics are we potentially missing as a result of focusing primarily on television or on television-era based social relations? Even if television remains the dominant technical player in the media events genre – which it does – it is still worth contextualizing it within the much broader milieu of mediations that now include digital and social technologies. As Bolter, Grusin and Grusin remind us, “no medium today, and certainly no single media event, seems to do its cultural work in isolation from other media” (2000, p. 15). While it is true that most contemporary media events scholarship acknowledges the transmedia flow of content, few studies directly and empirically study it15.

15 Julia Sonnevend’s Global Iconic Events (2013) is one example of a contemporary work that does engage with the transmedia flow of an event however, the analysis of her book is rooted in a news media thematic and narrative level thus, not providing a focus on audiences and their co-creations. In addition, social media is not one of the mediums of specific inquiry.
If “television saturation of the globe is near complete,” (Rivenburgh, 2009, p. 187) the future of media event developments lies elsewhere. This future does not exclude television by any means but rather, most likely, implies a hybridization of television with other media platforms. In turn, this symbiotic development grounds and contextualizes the potential of other platforms, such as Twitter, as they come into contact with and negotiate their institutional dynamics with broadcast television. For this reason, it is more apt to conceive of media events as medium agnostic – to the extent that no particular medium works alone, and that television was not necessarily the first nor will be the last to transmit such events. By conceiving of institutionalization as the broader function of various media organizations, whether they be broadcast or not, and by thinking of specific technologies and their affordances, and the socio-cultural adoptions by audiences we may more veritably get at the hybridized relationship between media, media organizations and society. This forms the basis of architectures of participation, the analytical framework proposed by this dissertation, which will be addressed further on.

Second, Dayan and Katz’ media events framework tends to assume a relatively stable temporal frame for an event. Alternatively, we could say that their framework simply does not deal much with the temporal nature of an event other than to note that media events are broadcast live. Nonetheless, scholars such as Wagner-Pacifici (2010), Sewell (1996), Tamm (2015) and Sreberny (2016) remind us not only that events accrue their meaning over time but also that “deciding how to bound an event is necessarily a matter of judgement,” (Sewell, 1996, p. 878); not to mention often, a political act. Therefore, any consideration of a media event needs to deal seriously with the concept of time and, by extension, the very nature of the term ‘event’. Taking seriously the idea that events are
socio-cultural constructions and processes allows us to study how and with what interests they are collectively ‘invented’ (Sewell, 1996). Wagner-Pacifici (2010), refers to the processes of event invention as the ‘restlessness of events’, writing that events and their subsequent meanings are nomadic beings. In short, social actors creatively construct events in space and time and in turn, this allows us to note the logics of their construction, signification and contestation.

With this dissertation, I would like to challenge and extend current academic interpretations of media events, like the Olympics, as taking place over relatively short and bounded periods of time (Jago & Shaw, 1998; Müller, 2015; Roche, 2002; Sreberny, 2016), or as only having media event relevance by being broadcast live (Dayan & Katz, 1992). Whereas event management literature takes a slightly longer range of view and tells us that a media event’s lifecycle goes through three phases – planning, implementation and wrapping up – this understanding also fails to account for a number of important aspects (Tamm, 2015). Among these aspects we find the production of memories and the shaping of values around events (Sonnevend, 2016), as well as the social mobilization of audiences, all of which have been greatly enhanced through the proliferation of social media, such as Twitter. By problematizing the expiration date of the Olympics or, by studying the media event beyond the dates of the event itself, I look to build on these previous works and to engage with ideas from Tamm (2015), who argues for a focus on the afterlife of events; something commonly referred to as legacy and of increasing importance in management and policy literature (Cashman, 1984; Gold & Gold, 2008) – not to mention to the Olympic organization itself.
Dayan and Katz departed from the prevailing communication research paradigm of their time, which focused on the audience effects of ‘normal’ television consumption (Couldry, Hepp & Krotz, 2009) to study, instead, the ‘extraordinary’ of media production. In doing so, the authors broke into new epistemological and methodological territory for communications research. Yet, this focus on, and interpretation of the extraordinary (the notions of normative, conciliatory, unifying media events), became at once their intellectual strength and planted the seeds for their limitations. Thus, a shift in focus from the ‘extraordinary’, or the fall of media events, quite literally, into the hands and phones of the ordinary, is one development breathing new life into media events research today and one that could be understood better if we expand our focus of media events beyond the temporal and broadcast television boundaries of the events themselves. While some important work does exist on soft power surrounding the Olympic Games (Couldry, Hepp & Krotz, 2009; O’Loughlin & Gillespie, 2015) the idea of soft legacy resulting from the Games is underexplored in academic works. I think this is partially true because soft legacy, such as audiences’ narratives or communicative experiences, is more difficult to capture compared to ‘hard legacy’, such as built architecture or balance sheets. Nonetheless, this ‘communication legacy’ is immensely important to understand as perhaps, the main legacy of such events and possibly as the one that touches most people\textsuperscript{16}.

\textsuperscript{16} A brief example of soft legacy from my Rio 2016 case study preparation is that in preparation for the Games and for welcoming the world digitally and physically to Rio, the Favelas (Rio’s poorest slum neighborhoods) were marked on Google Maps for the first time. These areas were previously purposefully kept off most maps however, in connection to the Games, they were digitally recorded and made visible to the rest of the world. This is an act of soft, or communication-based legacy with arguably important impacts in relation to the politics of visibility.
Media events: active audiences, the missing piece

The third critique or blind spot of media events theory becomes the most fundamental to this dissertation; the roles of active audiences. With this work I would like to stress the fundamental assumption that media events, like the Olympic Games, are above all communicative occurrences. Take for example that research indicates up to 98% of people now create some form of social media content at events (Event Track, 2016); this means that all interlocutors or ‘communicative parties’ must be taken seriously as being constitutive members of an event. Subsequently, audiences, the thus far silenced partners of the party, have always been at the center of media events albeit in different ways. Surprisingly, however, they have not been center stage in media events or Olympic research. With this dissertation I invert the focus of media events to provide an audience-centric reading of these public, mediated societal gatherings by focusing on active audience theory; the missing piece of media events. Next, I outline a brief genealogy of the active audiences research tradition then explain how this dissertation contributes to it.

The active audience research tradition arose as an intellectual counterpart to, and development of a range of communication theories. These include: the cybernetics communication model (Shannon & Weaver, 1949), the two-step flow (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), uses and gratifications theory (Liebes & Katz, 1990), the Frankfurt School’s critical media studies (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972) and, most directly, cultural studies’ encoding and decoding work (Hall, 1980; Morley, 1980). For a comparison of the key features of these theories with the approach this dissertation takes to active audiences see Table 1.1 below (this study is described in the furthest column to the right).
### Table 1.1: A comparison of audience study traditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research approach/Theory</th>
<th>Behavioral paradigm</th>
<th>Incorporation/Resistance paradigm</th>
<th>Active audiences paradigm</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research approach/Theory</strong></td>
<td>Cybernetics model; Media effects; Uses and gratifications; Critical cultural studies</td>
<td>Encoding and decoding research; Interpretive research</td>
<td>Spectacle/performance; Fandom studies; User and platform studies</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Core beliefs about audiences</strong></td>
<td>Audiences are influenced by, and respond to, stimuli in relatively prescribed ways</td>
<td>Audiences actively interpret and co-construct meaning of texts based on their socio-cultural and economic context</td>
<td>Audiences co-produce content as well as meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methods</strong></td>
<td>Quantitative experiments; media text analysis</td>
<td>Primarily interviews, focus groups and textual analysis</td>
<td>Wider array of methodologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goals of research</strong></td>
<td>To objectively explain and predict audience behavior</td>
<td>To subjectively interpret and situate audiences’ responses within social context</td>
<td>To describe and understand audiences’ content production practices</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Power dynamics</strong></td>
<td>Researchers are objective and audiences are relatively passive consumers of messages</td>
<td>Researchers are relatively objective and audiences are active in constructing the meaning of texts</td>
<td>Various roles of researchers and audiences; from highly critical to utopian visions of participatory capabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>This dissertation synergistically draws from multiple approaches toward audience studies</strong></td>
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17 I borrow the grouping of these research works into ‘paradigms’ from Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998). While the authors suggest ‘spectacle/performance’ as the third, logical continuation of the previous two paradigms (behavioral and incorporation/resistance), I group ‘spectacle/performance’ under the broader umbrella of active audiences work, in order to be able to compare it to the approach I take. Of course, it is still worth noting that the delineations provided are generalizations for analytical purposes and exist in various combinations and overlaps in research today.
Without regurgitating various, thorough histories of audience research traditions (Butsch, 2008; Livingstone, 2003), I briefly outline the key tenets of several established paradigms with the goal of distinguishing the approach this dissertation takes toward audience studies. While the cybernetics and two-step flow models assumed rather simplistic, dyadic, processes of message transmission and functionalist oriented action, the Frankfurt School’s critical media studies shifted its attention primarily upon governing media institutions and the forces that shaped audiences. Uses and gratifications theory bought a greater focus upon audience motivations but still confined the range of possible actions that an audience member could take to a select gamut. I have grouped these approaches under the ‘behavioral paradigm’ because they all largely see audiences as influenced by, and responding to, stimuli which are inherent in a given message. These approaches also largely aim to explain and importantly, predict audience behavior.

The incorporation/resistance paradigm (which is sometimes referred to as early active audience studies) drew from semiotics and bought a focus upon audiences and their textual interpretations. Much of this work centered around resistance to dominant messages and thus, invited a greater level of agency18 (Hall, 1980; Morley, 1980; Radway, 1989). Nonetheless, the incorporation/resistance paradigm still confined the range of possible actions an audience member could take to broad socio-cultural and economic categories and largely limited audience encoding and decoding practices to interpretation rather than actual creation of media content. Further, the majority of these works relied on ethnographic and qualitative methodologies, which curtailed the scope of their abstractions based on the limited number of cases observed (Morley, 2006).

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18 Scholars have questioned the extent of this individualized audience activity for being rather limited, unless transformed into collective acts of resistance – which it rarely was (Morley, 1993; Seamann, 1992).
As the name suggests, initial formulations of active audience research (which itself runs a gamut as opposed to a unified front (Livingstone, 2013)) brought a focus to the diverse practices through which audiences engage with and produce media writ large. The spectacle/performance work by Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) focuses upon the saturated media environment which audiences narcissistically navigate. It encourages researchers to look across platforms, at broader mediascapes, which is increasingly necessary in today’s media environment in order to capture the flow of audiencing. Later works pick up this cross-platform trajectory and explore it even further by taking multi-method approaches to the study of audiences, the circulation of content, and media events (Sumiala et al., 2016). These are premises that I build upon in my approach toward examining audiences.

Works emerging from the context of fandom (Jenkins, 2012), and new media studies of produsers (Bruns, 2008), have come to accommodate a certain amount of agency to audience members in actively constructing the meaning and the media content they consume (Ang, 2006; Livingstone, 1998). Nonetheless, this level of audience activity has been criticized, too, due to its prescribed, inherently monetized, and often implicit formulations of user participation (Andrejevic, 2008; Fuchs, 2011; Langlois, 2013; Livingstone, 2013). Furthermore, many of these works still need to come to terms with media content and audience practices beyond the Western world. Thus, while active audience work has certainly migrated into the digital era, the unresolved question of how to best study and conceptualize audiences and their processes of audiencing seem to have migrated along, too.
Of course, the question of what truly constitutes active audience participation is a complex philosophical and practical issue, that is consistently up for debate and in need of empirical support. I attempt to address this question first, theoretically, in the following architectures of participation section and then, empirically, through the case studies and concluding chapter in this dissertation. While this is discussed in more depth in the chapter on methodology, the approach this dissertation takes toward studying audiences acknowledges and addresses what Fiske has referred to as “the incompleteness of any understanding” of audiences (1992, p. 355). That is, no single theoretical or methodological approach may single-handedly capture the essence of audiencing. In turn, this dissertation advances the active audiences paradigm by taking a multi-modal, multiple-method and comparative case study approach toward the study of an audience and context that has been largely under-examined thus far; the world’s biggest media event, the Olympic Games.

This dissertation also broadens the scope of active audiences to include global, comparative audience perspectives and both, ritual-like and resistant actions; thus, it questions universal understandings of participation and the roles of media event audiences. Next, I introduce the Olympic context as a site for active audience study by tracing the evolution of Olympic audiences, as discursively imagined, managed and instituted by the Olympic organization. Then, I detail architectures of participation, the sensitizing, analytical framework employed by this dissertation.

*The Evolution of Olympic Audiences*

Audiences have been a central concern for the Olympic movement, beginning with the ancient Olympic Games in 776 BC, which were often used as a political tool to appease
warring nations and tensions between lower classes and the ruling elites (Spivey & Spivey, 2005; Swaddling, 1999). Audiences remain a key focus in the modern Games, which were built upon Pierre de Coubertin’s vision of modern, docile citizens and have been used to rebuild a sense of nation post-war (Baker, 1994). Indeed, audiences have always been a central factor behind the realization of the Olympic Games, too. Before the advent of the mass television audience, the principle source of revenue for the Games was ticket sales coming from live spectators (Baker, 1994). Today, broadcast fees and, ultimately, audience viewership sustain the financial viability, and by large, the perceived success of the Games (IOC Olympic Marketing Fact file, 2014). Subsequently, it is widely known that the IOC is highly protective of the broadcast rights of the Games (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012; Price & Dayan, 2008; Rivenburgh, 2002).

Despite a lack of systematic and historically informed research about them, global audiences have always held an ideologically and practically constitutive role, located at the very heart of media events and, the Olympic Games specifically. For the purposes of this dissertation, the story of Olympic audiences in the context of the modern media event, begins around the 1956 Games in Melbourne, Australia. These Games marked an important turning point for Olympic organizers in how they imagined their relationship to the Olympic spectator because the IOC designated the Olympics as an entertainment – no longer news – category, which subsequently allowed them to sell the broadcast rights of the Games for the first time (Fink, Hadler & Schramm, 2006). This signaled the beginning

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19 47% of the Olympic revenue today comes from broadcasting fees and another 48% comes from sponsorship deals through advertising and licensing, which are largely mediated endeavors as well. Only 5% comes from ticketing. Thus, the mediation and broadcasting of the Games are so central to their viability that it is reasonable to assume there is no longer a clear distinction between the mediated and ‘the real’ Olympics today; a blurring that has been referred to as the ‘hyperreality’ of the Games’, (Ho, 2011).

20 Some years earlier, the 1948 London Olympics marked another step point toward this development. The organizers of London’s 1948 Games allocated around 30% of all tickets to national sport governing bodies,
of the mass media paradigm within the Olympic context. It was also the start of what would become a process of intense commercialization\(^{21}\) and an important step in the evolution of the Olympics into the global media spectacle we know today.

Another key moment for how the IOC related to its audiences soon followed when the IOC officially recognized ‘the public’ as a singular entity in the 1960’s and as a specific stakeholder, capable of influencing the Olympic image (Olympic Press Commission Fonds, 1966-1968, multiple). While the media have been an important constituent of the Olympic Games from the very first modern Olympic Games – there were 12 journalists covering the 1896 Games in Athens! (Nicholson, Kerr & Sherwood, 2015) – the subsequent establishment of the Press Commission in the 1960’s signaled the IOC’s written recognition, for the first time, of the need for an organizational department to strategically handle the mediated relationship between itself and the public. It was also a clear step toward the institutionalization of Olympic mass media audiences. Therefore, the designation of the televised Games as a public entertainment category and the establishment of a specific department to deal with audience relations laid the foundation for what would become the audience re-centered, mass media spectacle of the modern Olympic Games.

\(^{21}\) Another key development, often cited as a cornerstone in the commercialization of the Olympics, is attributed to the hosting of the 1984 Games by Los Angeles (Tomlinson, 2017). Sometimes referred to as the Americanization of the Games, this became somewhat of an inevitable turn in history. As the only candidate city wishing to host the 1984 Games at the end of the bidding season, the IOC was desperate and wrangled into agreeing to Los Angeles’ terms of hyper-commercialization that went against the Olympic ethos. What if Palestine, the other initial 1984 candidate city, had not pulled out of the running to host the Games and the Olympics had instead gone to the Middle East?
What follows during the next 50-year span is the discursive infiltration of the term *audience* into various Olympic documents, along with the mass popularization of television, and a recognition of a diversification of audience groups. Nonetheless, it is worth acknowledging here, particularly for the astute audience scholar, the slippage back and forth between terms. On the one hand, those watching the Olympics are described as publics by the IOC, yet on the other hand, in certain instances, they also become audiences. This is not a smooth evolution and both terms (not to mention others, like spectator) exist in more recent IOC documents, which I have discursively analyzed in a separate piece (see Girginova, 2016a). Nonetheless, in the context of this dissertation, I opt more consistently for the use of the plural term ‘audiences’. To begin with, there is no universally agreed upon term for how to best describe people who actively consume and produce media content – particularly on a global scale. Still, the term audiences became popularized in the mass broadcast era, which was dominated by television, much like media events continue to be today. In the plural, the term audiences also takes on hues of active audience research that acknowledges the diversity in practices of audiencing. Further, the term audiences nods toward the capacity of social media to serve as personal mass broadcasting tools thus, hinting at an evolution, not complete rupture, of media platforms and practices around public events. In short, after much deliberation, I have yet to find a term that more accurately describes the plural groups of Twitter users, broadcast viewers, and engaged people in the Olympic movement than ‘audiences’.

Nonetheless, the IOC’s discursive diversification of terms to describe various audience groups ranged from a single mass in the 1960’s to 19 diverse groups in 2016, who were strategically ‘called into being’ at various times of the media event (Girginova,
This refraction of the ‘audience’ into multiple ‘audiences’ and the increasingly granular understanding of these groups of people is consistent with broader audience research and industry practices (Butsch & Livingstone, 2013; Napoli, 2011). In fact, an argument could be made that like the very purpose of most media organizations, the goal of the Olympic Games and sport in general, is to move and shape people from being rowdy crowds into being docile citizens en masse. (Supporting this idea is a long line of research focused on the uses of sport and broadly speaking, physical activity, for disciplining the individual body and the crowd (Shilling, 1991; Theberge, 1991)). Thus, the subsequent, increasingly granular understanding of audiences can be read as an attempt of taming and control.

Like most of its media corporation contemporaries, the Olympic organization has undergone rapid changes since the 1950’s that have led it into the dawn of the digital (IOC, Olympic Congress, 2009). Important steps for the IOC in the transition from analogue to digital thinking and content included the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, which “brought an end to the myth whereby digital media had been considered to have a cannibalizing effect on television,” (IOC, Olympic Congress, 2009, p. 191). Relieved, in 2009, the IOC appointed Alex Hout as its first Director of Social Media. In 2009 the IOC also held its Olympic Congress in Copenhagen and had, for the first time, a whole discussion theme dedicated to the Digital Revolution. The conference invited practitioners, academics and a host of Olympic figures to address the question of ‘the digital’, through how to best

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22 As of 2018, Mr. Hout is still the IOC’s social media director and somewhat ironically, is the only official Olympic figure that has not responded to my efforts to get in touch, despite repeated attempts and introductions via colleagues in common.
incorporate digital media and audiences into the Olympic experience (Guilherme Guimaraes, Personal Communication, 2009 Olympic Congress Attendee, April 11, 2017).

London’s Games in 2012 next marked an important step for Olympic research through the first concerted efforts by an organizing committee to understand athletes’, visitors’, television viewers’ and sponsors’ experiences. In partnership with Nielsen, the market research company, the London Olympic and Paralympic Games Organizing Committee (LOGOC) conducted over 100 research projects prior to the Games to better understand the expectations and experiences of various stakeholders. Still, the culmination of this evolution toward the digital and toward engaging and understanding audiences came several years later, when the Rio Organizing Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games (ROCOG) made an unprecedented statement; “Through the press and social media, the planet’s eyes will be on Rio de Janeiro. Journalists and citizens who publish content on the web are the ones who will ultimately define the success of the Games,” (ROCOG, Rio 2016 Strategic Communications Plan, 2012, p. 16)

It is within this digital context that I situate current and future Olympic audience developments and the notion of the active audience. Still, as Dayan and Katz remind us, where the logic of media events tends to break down is when we include the somewhat unpredictable nature of collective audiences. In turn, I approach the concept of the active, digital audience (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013; Livingstone, 2004) as a key constituent in creating media events today. In fact, I invert the lens to argue that the Games are ultimately a product of the mediated circulation of meaning via global audiences. For despite an organization’s best attempts to foresee, shape and control its audiences’ responses, there is
still an element of the unknown and despite the limitations, it is here that the power of audiences lies.

If we accept that there are a plurality of active audience groups, that are now important to the Olympic movement not only for their content consumption but also content production in the digital era, then we should move on to another set of productive questions: how can we understand the various types of audience participation? What are the motivating factors for people to create Olympic related content, and what are the cultural differences that emerge when we look at how diverse audience groups do so? In order to answer these questions, I now turn to describing this dissertation’s analytical framework, architectures of participation. This sensitizing framework guides the ensuing analysis according to three main domains; the institutional, technical and socio-cultural and thus, allows us to answer the driving research questions above.

ARCHITECTURES OF PARTICIPATION

Introduction to the concept

Architectures of participation (O’Reilly, 2004), as used in this dissertation, describe the socio-technical and political configurations that frame audience participation. These three constructs also provide the analytical framework for the dissertation’s multiple case studies. The very concept of architectures of participation lies at the productive site of tension between structure and agency; it is also a paradox, because design is completed in use and use, or in our case participation, can never be fully designed. As a number of scholars have reminded us, audiencing is ultimately an activity completed in the process of
individuals’ meaning making and thus, cannot be entirely externally structured despite the media industry’s best attempts (Ang; 2006; Ong, 1975; Warner, 2002). Nonetheless, there are specific factors that do shape the ways in which we become content producing members of a media event and it is precisely the interplay of these factors that the concept of architectures of participation grapples with. In what follows, I (re)create a term, architecture of participation (singular), that was originally used by O’Reilly in 2004 to describe the fundamental, inbuilt heuristic of public contribution that is central to the creation of open source software23. The way I use and operationalize this term (in the plural) has some important theoretical, practical and contextual implications, which are outlined in more detail below. Importantly, these differences allow architectures of participation to evolve from being a heuristic principle that describes the nature of participating systems, to an analytical framework, that more systematically examines those very socio-political and technical systems.

In this dissertation I use the concept of architectures of participation as a sensitizing, analytical tool. It is sensitizing (Blumer, 1954; Lunt & Livingstone, 2016) in that it points us to where and how to look rather than precisely telling us what we are and should be looking at. It is analytical in that it categorically guides our unpacking of audiences’ participation and as such, it is a tool because it becomes the framework that this dissertation employs to critically examine audience participation in the three case studies. Importantly, architectures of participation emerges as a synergetic concept and a form of synthesis scholarship (O’Sullivan, 1999; Wenner & Billings, 2017) because it bridges between

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23 O’Reilly has expanded the application of ‘architecture of participation’ since his initial writings in the early 2000’s most notably, by applying the idea to social civics. In a paper and blog post (see O’Reilly 2011; 2015), O’Reilly proposes various ways government could integrate civic feedback into its operations through participatory technologies.
various scales of analyses and seemingly practical and theoretical divides on how to best comprehend media and their audiences today. The latter include some notable debates such as those between cultural studies versus political economy of communication (Garnham, 1995; Grossberg, 1995; Meehan & Wasko, 2013; Mosco, 1996; Murdock & Golding, 1973).

By borrowing ideas from a number of fractions within the field of communication, including cultural and political economy studies, the concept of architectures of participation implies a complementary approach rather than a competing and conflicting approach to studying media participation writ large. It also allows for the exploration of the distribution of power in participation both, at the level of organizations and, at the level of societal groups and individuals. The next section examines the key concepts of participation and architecture, and then moves on to a more in-depth discussion of the three domains that constitute architectures of participation; the institutional, technical and socio-cultural.

**What is participation?**

Participation has been variously defined as “the extent of citizens’ power in determining the end product,” (Arnstein, 1969, p. 217), and as “the desire for public, tangible sociality and serious creative activity within the community,” (Joas 1996, p. 255). Participation includes not only some form of public attention and engagement, but also some form of productive action or output; some shaping of the very context of participation itself²⁴. It is often here that scholars have debated over the extent to which audiences, social

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²⁴ Notably, sport and the Olympic movement specifically, are some of the rare contexts in which athletic ‘consumers’ or viewers are also often, already participants and to an extent, producers. The Olympic
media enabled or not, are really empowered to contribute substantively to various media texts (Fuchs, 2011; Langlois, 2013; Seamann, 1992).

Of course, substantive event participation in any context is difficult to quantify but in the case of this dissertation, I define participation as a mediated, public discursive act that contributes to the creation of a media event. Thus, in keeping with the social constructivist ontology of this dissertation, audience participation takes place via discursive acts that, to a larger or lesser extent, shape the overall discourses and narrative possibilities creating a given media event. The more successful or meaningful the participation, the more substantive the audience contribution toward the narrative construction of the media event (Arnstein, 1969). Subsequently, when participation occurs, it becomes an act of power – no matter how seemingly small – that helps to determine the outcomes of a communicative event.

It is precisely due to the widely visible, productive output of social media audiences that participation has become a media industry buzzword. Part of this dissertation’s timely interest in the topic can certainly be explained by the fact that audience participation is pertinent to the 21st century media ecology because it is profitable in an increasing number of ways and can thus, also be organizationally problematic (Bradley & McDonald, 2011). Of course, participation as a word has also increasingly infiltrated political, educational and design and technology literature, to name but a few.

movement redistributes over 90% of its proceedings to national and local sport organizations throughout the world, which is the equivalent of $3.4 million per day for the support of sport worldwide (Olympic.org). That is to say, the sport clubs which form the core constituents of the Olympic movement, sending athletes to the Olympic Games and allowing a vast number of amateur fans to participate in sport, are amongst those directly sponsored by and dependent upon Olympic revenue. This revenue, in turn, often comes from those very same sport fans who watch and attend the Games.
The term’s popular and academic appeal has risen in conjunction with a broader neo-liberal and post-modernist ideology, where grand narratives are under suspicion and it is through individuals’ public participation and practice that the best results are arrived at (Albrecht, 1988). In more recent years the rise of social or participatory media has bought about yet another wave of discourses about participation that range from utopian visions of digital democracies and reinvigorated public spheres (McGillivray, 2014), to dystopian analyses of participant exploitation (Andrejevic, 2002; 2008). While participation as a term predates any modern technology as a practice, it is now intimately tied to digital media industries and audiences (Banet-Weiser et al., 2008).

Although I think it is more productive to speak of audience participation in events on a spectrum as opposed to a binary opposition, an interesting question does arise: What happens when discourses of participation seep so deeply into our everyday practices and institutions that we are seemingly invited and even expected to participate everywhere, from entertainment to governance? Does this overabundance of participatory rhetoric diminish or simply alter the value of the term, and does it only serve to further mask the structural factors that shape our possibilities for participation in the first place? To grapple with some of these issues we now turn to the idea of architectures of participation; that is, the structural, institutional, technical and socio-cultural configurations that shape agentic participation.

**What are architectures of participation?**

Architecture refers to construction and aesthetics (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.). The construction of architecture is material, immaterial and ideological, and the aesthetics of
architecture relate to the *experience* created by a certain space, object or exchange (Dewey, 1934; 2005). Importantly, architecture also explicitly refers to people; the word comes from the ancient Greek ‘architect’ or craftsman, reminding us about the human decisions inherent in designs we may have come to see as autonomous. In this dissertation I use the term architectures, in the plural, to describe institutional, technical, and socio-cultural designs that shape people’s capacity for mediated participation. While the idea of participation is somewhat flexible and unpredictable ‘architecture’, on the other hand, suggests a level of structure, fixed-ness and predictability. Thus, one way to approach the terms ‘architecture’ and ‘participation’ together is as synonyms to structure(s) and agency, where these synonyms are not mutually exclusive but rather, exist in a dialectic relationship (Giddens, 1984).

The productive tensions between structure and agency serve as the foundation for many theories of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; du Gay, 1997), and knowledge creation (Nonaka & Toyama, 1993), which become particularly pertinent in the age of the *produser* (Bruns, 2008). In his review of the work of Joas (1996), Campbell describes the dialectical relationship between participation and architecture, or structure and agency, as follows:

“social forces form in conjunction with creative agency a kind of architecture that governs the recognition and movement of creative products in social space. This architecture defines the relationship between agentic creativity and social response at any given time,” (1998, p. 619).

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25 Aesthetics were certainly an important factor in Pierre de Coubertin’s vision and structure of the procession of the modern Olympic Games, which he designed to present a specific sensory experience to the spectators (Durry, 1986).
Creativity, or play, then emerges as a mediator between structure and agency; it is the potency that navigates and sometimes modifies structure and it is often, the productive force behind agency. Creativity and the value of play also emerge as a theme in a number of my case studies and help to explain audience participation’s connection to the broader role of events as collectively imagined models of the future.

I contend that public events, like the Olympic Games, have always had architectures of participation; for public events to exist, a functional relationship between organizers and audiences must exist. Thus, public events must be able to incorporate a level of agentic audience response or creativity alongside more fixed event structures. Nonetheless, throughout time, we have seen different configurations of the audience-organizer-media relationship, and of participation. Take for example the ancient Olympic Games, which were strategically held during post-harvest time in Ancient Olympia, at a location that was ‘globally’ accessible by water. This was a time that meant a majority of people were free to travel to and participate in the Games by cheering, voting and even producing early fan graffiti with the available tools (Swaddling, 1999). Yet, these Games were also segregated by gender and nationality, largely excluding women and non-Greek citizen spectators. Thus, these configurations become some early examples of institutional, technical and socio-cultural architectures that shaped who was able to access and participate in the Games and how. In short, architectures of participation both, serve to enable and to disable action.
Why the need for another new term?

On a practical level, the analytical concept of architectures of participation resonates with industry practices. A number of my interviewees who work as media professionals shared that when creating content, specifically for global audiences, they were forced to think in terms like cultural significance and resonance, technical operability, and international intellectual property rights; categories, that were not so directly prevalent to content and audiences in the pre-digital and mainly national media context (Bruno Hermann, Personal Communication, Head of Globalization/Localization, Nielsen, November 27, 2017). In turn, it makes sense that when analyzing global media events and practices of audiencing we, as researchers, take categories like socio-cultural and technical factors into consideration alongside the institutional role of official media producers themselves. In other words, there is a very real and practical reason for a term that analytically encapsulates institutional, technical, and socio-cultural factors that structure participation.

On a theoretical level, the concept of architectures of participation contributes to some important work, not least by reimagining and fleshing out O’Reilly’s (2004) idea of architecture of participation in order to become analytically applicable to audience studies. O’Reilly coined the term ‘architecture of participation’ in the context of open source software to describe “the nature of systems that are designed for user contribution” (O’Reilly, 2004, n.p.). O’Reilly’s articulation of, and work on the architecture of participation can further be traced as one conceptual strand behind the ‘Californian ideology’ (Barbrook & Cameron, 1996) that has become so pervasive in our experiences
of web 2.0 technologies. This ideology presents a techno-utopian vision of an open and collaborative internet, largely born in Silicon Valley in the 1960’s and 1970’s, which has since matured into a global, billion-dollar techno capitalist industry. I build on O’Reilly’s work by advancing the focus on technological factors (both, ideological and material), that shape the nature of media events participation. I also empirically elaborate his work by acknowledging additional and important institutional and socio-cultural factors (on the micro, meso, and macro levels) that shape the nature of people’s mediated participation. In addition, I operationalize architectures of participation, and explicitly refer to them in the plural as a nod to the global diversity at play in the various structures of people’s social media content creation.

Of course, scholars have already made significant strides in articulating the various factors that shape (mediated) participation – without explicitly referring to their work as architectures of participation. This list includes research in anthropology, sociology, linguistics, communication, political science, technology and critical cultural studies, but with few exceptions there seems to be a scarcity of synergetic and holistic approaches. Furthermore, few of these works attempt comparative national and cultural advances in

26 O’Reilly coined the term Web 2.0, as well.
27 One exception I am specifically referring to is cultural studies’ ‘circuit of culture’ approach to examining the construction and circulation of meaning (Hall, du Gay, Janes, Mackay & Negus, 1997). The Birmingham school authors posit five moments (representation, regulation, identity, consumption, and production) that holistically capture the production of meaning. I borrow the synergetic approach from this seminal study and adapt the three domains of architectures of participation to better reflect our digital communication ecology of audience media engagement. Further, the original circuit of culture model refers to the consumption of a product, the Sony Walkman, whereas the architectures of participation framework is suited to capture the co-production of content and social experience in media events by explicitly advocating multi-modal analyses – theoretically and empirically. Another exception is Barry’s notion of arrangements (2001). Barry uses this term to explain how it is that the creation, flow and governance of technologies becomes a political act. In his work, arrangements particularly refer to social, natural, cultural and technical elements that shape our uses of technologies. Nonetheless, his empirical focus and findings derive from an interest in politics, government and technology, as opposed to audiences and their form of social construction via communicative acts.
order to examine participation. For instance, Goffman’s seminal anthropological work on participation frameworks (1981) proposes a taxonomy for the various normative roles of hearers to speakers within a given speech context. It allows researchers to capture the lived, and primarily bottom-up dynamics of participation but cannot directly apply to the roles of automated, non-human actors such as technological platforms and large scale, complex, and global social events.

Livingstone and Lunt’s (1994) *Talk on Television* and Ito’s (2012) work on children’s software engagement examine various genres of participation or what are “particular but recognizable social and semiotic conventions for generating, interpreting, and engaging with embedded practices with and through media,” (Livingstone & Lunt, 2013, p. 5). These works draw on semiotic and linguistic traditions of text production, reception and en/decoding (Hall, 2001), as well as the implied reader (Eco, 1984; Hodge & Kress, 1988). They offer schematic, or socio-culturally conditioned determinations of interpretation and allow us to capture the mediated and often institutionalized genres that describe specific codes of audience content engagement. Architectures of participation builds on these works empirically by adding comparative, digital media audience data to explore participation and theoretically, by focusing on the synergy between institutional, technological and socio-cultural domains as they shape how people create and interact with media content.

28 A notable exception here comes from Katz himself in collaboration with Liebes in 1990. In this particular work, the authors examine comparatively the various culturally laden audience activities around the television series Dallas. Nonetheless, while a number of cultural groups were examined, audience activity is defined and studied only as far as the interpretation of the television texts through small, in person, discussion groups with familiar others.
Works that fall within the fields of design and technology studies also tackle the question of structuring participation from a number of angles. For example, urban studies advances the idea of design being completed in use and architecture being co-built with participants:

The quest for equality in the 1960s promoted participation as a means for achieving a just society… By recognizing the “authority of consumers,” planning hoped to find a new purpose and legitimacy after the debacle with the master plan and physical determinism,” (Albrecht, 1988, p. 24).

Communication technology studies examine the question of material structures and affordances as central, shaping factors of our media consumption and creation practices (Hutchby, 2001). In brief, technological affordances are functional and relational aspects which frame, while not determining, the possibilities for agentic action in relation to an object,” (Hutchby, 2001, p. 444). Scholars like Ong (1982) have studied how words become ‘technologized’ as we transition from using them in an oral context to a written one, and the subsequent implications for orality and literacy as shaped by communication technologies. Others, demonstrate how technologies, like seemingly mundane plugs and door stops, shape our possibilities for (communicative) action (Latour, 2005; Star, 1999).

More recent waves of scholarship have evolved to look at the digital turn in communication technologies and design29; for instance, Plantin, Lagoze, Edwards and Sandvig (2016) examine the intersection of platform and infrastructure studies to more

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29 Lievrouw and Livingstone (2009) propose a provoking framework for studying the infrastructure of new media. They advance an analytical triad of artefacts, practices and social arrangements, which is close to the three domains proposed in this dissertation for the examination of architectures of audience participation. One of the crucial dimensions which distinguishes the latter approach beyond its research focus, however, is the analytical synergy advocated between domains within a given study as opposed to between studies.
holistically grasp how technology and its infrastructures shape the flows of digital media. Gillespie (2010) and Parisi (2013) focus on algorithm design as an automated tool for shaping our lived realities. By drawing attention to the non-human or technological dimension of communication, these authors argue for the need to pay attention to the co-constitutive architectural role of various technologies in our communication practices. I build on these works by supplementing their technological focus with institutional and, specifically, comparative socio-cultural architectural domains.

In short, while predominant anthropological and linguistic approaches have been apt at explaining the cultural logics that frame participation, they tend to be less well equipped at grasping important technological or, sometimes, institutional processes taking place. Similarly, while technology and design studies, broadly defined, contribute important perspectives to help us examine the material, infrastructural and algorithmic roles of non-human actors, they tend to downplay the co-constitutive socio-cultural elements that shape participation. If the goal is to provide a more holistic understanding of the ways in which social media audiences participate in media events then perhaps, the sweet spot is a flexible and synergetic analytical framework, that draws from each of these important disciplines while acknowledging that neither is logically sufficient alone. In the context of this dissertation, the concept of architectures of participation allows us to do just that. Next, I briefly outline how architectures of participation becomes a useful, sensitizing and analytical tool in the case studies of this dissertation, then delve into its three domains.

In this dissertation I define architectures of participation as socio-technical and political configurations that frame audience participation and that are composed of the mutually constitutive institutional, technical, and socio-cultural domains. These three
domains act as sensitizing and operationalizing concepts that allow us to unpack given architectures of participation by guiding us toward specific features that shape audience involvement. For instance, they help to capture the varying scales through which the organizers of the 2012 Olympics opening ceremony institutionalized audience participation in the #savethesurprise campaign, as well as the socio-cultural and technical dynamics that shaped the ways in which people actually took to Twitter. Architectures of participation also allow us to examine the contradictory and complementary ways social media logics intersected with broadcast media and corporate logics to give rise to #NBCFail, a contentious Twitter born re-narration of the 2014 Sochi Olympics opening ceremony. Finally, by paying attention to the institutionalization and technical affordances of Twitter trends alongside the specific, cultural practices of different linguistic groups, architectures of participation allow us to critically understand how #Rio2016 became the top trending topic of 2016 and to what avail.

*The Institutional Domain*

In general, live sport is the media industry’s most expensive and sought after broadcast genre due to large, passionate and live audiences (James, 2016). In turn, the media industry’s institutionalization of sporting events has been colossal and it is easy to understand why the Olympic movement has been particularly careful about guarding the mediation of the Games, their main source of revenue since the late 1980’s (Puig, 2010). Numerous sets of stringent deals and requirements lie between the IOC, host cities, broadcasters, and social media platforms like Twitter, which determine to a large extent the look and participatory potential of the Games. For example, The Olympic Technical
Manual on Communications (2005), one document from a broader set of media and communications ‘rule books’ that all official broadcasters must adhere to, is 100 pages long itself. Thus, the institutional domain captures the role of these professionally established norms in shaping the context of people’s media event participation.

More specifically, the institutional domain comprises, and sensitizes us to look toward, legal frameworks and corporate culture, writ large. It refers to organizationally or professionally established norms and captures how various corporations institutionalize media participation via specific practices and ideologies. Intellectual property laws, like YouTube’s agreement with the IOC to take down any copyright infringing materials, the UK’s 2006 Parliamentary Olympic and Paralympic Games Act, and confidentiality agreements signed by all 2012 London Olympic volunteers are examples of legal frameworks undergirding the institutional domain. Corporate culture, such as Twitter’s more liberal and market driven approach toward permissible content, plus their institutionalization and capitalization upon high levels of topical activity into ‘trends’ are some other examples of institutional frameworks shaping participation. Taking a stance rooted in political economy toward examining various macro and meso-level institutional texts allows us to critically study this domain.

**The Technical Domain**

The technical domain refers to the tools we use for participation. In the context of this dissertation, the main tool under scrutiny is Twitter, which allows for public and mediated participation to occur. Specific features of Twitter, like the hashtag, shape how participation ensues and others, like wifi capability, serve to further enable or in many
cases, disable content creation. In addition, “questions of code and terms of service (are) absolutely critical for understanding the power dynamics of participatory culture,” (Baym, 2008, p. 1078 – in Banet-Weiser et al., 2008). For a fuller discussion on platforms and application program interface (APIs) see Gillespie (2010; 2017) and Lahey (2016), but the politics of platforms certainly come under scrutiny, particularly in case study three, which examines how Twitter’s global trends are constituted and what and who in turn becomes visible or remains invisible. Of course, Twitter as a technology does not work in isolation; as case study two demonstrates, a key dynamic behind the flourishing of the #NBCFail hashtag was the effective flow of content between different media, and the ability for people to engage in dual screen Olympic watching. In other words, those who most actively used the hashtag on various internet-enabled devices to rebel against NBC’s televising of the Games were typically those with broadcast subscriptions, allowing them to watch the Games in the first place.

While the tools we use do shape the types of participation we engage in, it is important not to disembodied technology from its producers or users. Therefore, under this domain we must be sensitized toward taking the ideology of technology under consideration, too (earlier versions of this argument are framed around the politics of artifacts; see for example Winner, 1980). If we assume internet technology to be a key (though not the only) tool for mediating participation, we may turn to O’Reilly’s (2004) work again, who urges us to think about the nature of systems built for participation; in other words, to look at the underlying logics and assumptions embedded in those technologies.
A number of authors have thoroughly examined web 2.0 technologies, such as Twitter, from the combined perspectives of a set technical configurations and a cultural set of practices and ideologies (Barbrook & Cameron, 1996; van Dijck, 2013; John, 2013; Marwick, 2013), which is an approach that I subscribe to, as well. For instance, Barbrook and Cameron (1996) convincingly describe the contradictory, yet successful combination of capitalist driven design with hippie philosophy in shaping the California ideology; one synergy that forms the underpinnings of the majority of our social media platforms and technologies. Subsequently, variations of this ideology structure what I refer to as the technical domain. We need look no further than Facebook’s EdgeRank or Twitter’s trends as examples of technical designs heavily imbued with the Californian ideology; in both of these cases, what is promoted as democratic participation, communal action, or personal expression (which also results in the profitable generation of user data) becomes rewarded with visibility and is algorithmically configured as the default. As Bucher (2012) argues, in these assemblages, “a useful individual is the one who participates, communicates and interacts,” (p. 1175). Thus, the technical domain emerges as material and ideological architecture.

The Socio-Cultural Domain

While processes of institutionalization and technology are certainly important factors, they alone cannot explain participation. Instead, to account for the vast human creativity and agency in digital content creation, we must turn to the socio-cultural domain, as well. This domain sensitizes us to look toward and encompass factors like the deeply held British cultural value of fair play that emerged as a key motivator for content creation
during London’s 2012 Games in case study one. Historically rooted, socio-cultural factors also emerged during Rio’s 2016 Olympics in case study three as Portuguese, English and Russian speaking audiences partook in Twitter’s Olympic trend in varying ways. In addition, it is worth acknowledging the role of the researcher in this domain. The processes of participation are not self-evident and the factors taken into consideration as part of each domain are a matter of choice, too. Therefore, a reflexive stance recognizes the researcher herself as another agent involved in the theoretical construction of architectures of participation.

If we assume the institutional domain to be an organizational and top-down logic, and the technical domain to be a somewhat automated (albeit strongly ideological) force, then we can say that the socio-cultural domain is primarily a form of bottom-up, culturally and historically conditioned social action. In turn, the socio-cultural domain points the researcher to look at socially, culturally conditioned practices that help to explain how and why particular individuals or groups of people create social media content. One way that this domain becomes visible to the researcher is via comparison; case studies two and three in particular are able to illuminate different linguistic groups’ audiencing practices in comparison to one another. Nonetheless, while the comparisons in this dissertation largely take place between nations and linguistic groups, there are certainly many other levels at which socio-cultural analyses may be conducted.

**Summary**

Another way to think about the three domains forming this dissertation’s sensitizing, analytical framework of architectures of participation is as top-down and
coordinated (institutional), algorithmic and somewhat autonomous (technical), and bottom-up, largely dispersed social action (socio-cultural). These domains enable and constrain participation; further, they allow us to bring into a synergetic analysis the institutional attempts at creating and engaging large audiences, the technical affordances of platforms like Twitter, and the public nature of events. While they are presented as separate domains here, intended to highlight their specific contributions toward framing and unpacking participation, it becomes apparent how interconnected they are in the discussions above and in the ensuing case studies. Indeed, it is worth highlighting that these domains are mutually co-constitutive and that their separation here is simply for analytical clarity.

Through these three domains, architectures of participation become operationalized into a sensitizing, analytical tool; one that allows and encourages us to be more holistic in our analyses by considering micro, meso and macro levels structuring participation and yet, to remain open and flexible to taking into account contextual nuances that emerge from specific research cases, too. By not being tied to any specific medium, architectures of participation further provides a conceptual scaffolding for analyses that hopefully reach beyond this dissertation. If, ultimately, “communication builds worlds through circulation,” (Baym, 2008, p. 1077 – in Banet-Weiser et al., 2008; Warner, 2002), then we can certainly gain some valuable insights about our media systems and the practices of audiences by deconstructing the forces that make up this communicative circulation. It is my goal to sketch out one such deconstructive approach with the concept of architectures of participation. Next, we turn to issues of methodology, which more thoroughly address and explain the specific steps taken toward the data capture and analysis in this dissertation.
CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

The following chapter outlines the key research questions followed by the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning this dissertation; namely, that reality is socially and discursively constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Krippendorff, 2005) and further, that we may be able to get at this reality through discursive analysis. It then moves on to describing the case study research design and the selection and analysis of data whereby data, in this dissertation, is treated as plural and multimodal (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001) and thus, a multiple-methods approach rooted in Discourse Theoretical Analysis is deemed best toward analyzing a given phenomenon. The chapter concludes with a discussion of research ethics and study limitations.

The key research question driving this dissertation is:

_**how do social media audiences participate in global events?**_

To more fully answer this question, it is divided into three sub-questions:

1) **What factors shape and motivate Twitter audience participation in media events?**

2) **What socio-cultural differences emerge in Twitter content creation across national audiences?**

3) **How can we use the vantage point of global audiences to better understand media events and conversely, what can studying media events teach us about global audiences?**
In turn, the objectives of this dissertation are threefold:

1) To critically discuss common themes, via textual analysis of data, that encourage audience engagement across the institutional, technical, and socio-cultural domains,

2) To comparatively analyze Twitter use and interviews within and across case studies for culture-specific patterns of Twitter participation,

3) To synthesize the findings across the three case studies and to compare the types of ‘media event’ and audience practices that emerge, to the types of media event and audience practices initially outlined by Dayan and Katz (1992).

**Ontological and epistemological assumptions**

The foundational ontological assumption behind this dissertation is that the audience member, his or her participation, and any given media event are latent concepts until socially animated through practice. This dissertation takes a moderate social constructivist stance\(^{30}\) (Järvensivu & Törnroos, 2010) and studies the social and discursive enactments of the concepts of audience, participation, and media event via discourse analysis (the specific type of discourse analysis taken is Discourse Theoretical Analysis, addressed further on). The foundational epistemological assumption behind this dissertation is that human knowledge is multiple, embedded, and thus, contextual. As Denzin and Lincoln remind us, “there is no one correct telling (of an)... event,” (1999, p.

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\(^{30}\) In contrast to an extreme constructivist stance that states all discursive interpretations and claims to truth are equally given to be valid, and in contrast to an extreme positivist stance, which believes there to be one, universal truth which can be empirically obtained, a moderate social constructivist stance notes that truth and knowledge are multifaceted concepts that exist in and through dialogue, critique and consensus as well as empirical observation of diverse social realities.
Therefore, we need to look contextually at the possible *tellings* of an event, which is where taking a multiple-method, multiple case-study approach, with a focus on the vantage point of audiences becomes core to the design of this dissertation.

**Research design**

Data are naturally multimodal, meaning that the way we communicate (through image, sound, movement, etc.) is composed of a variety means beyond the linguistic (Bezemer and Mavers, 2011; Dicks, Soyinka & Coffee, 2006; Hine, 2011; 2015). Furthermore, “a single philosophical framework does not work well with all designs,” (Creswell, Clark, Gutmann & Hanson, 2003, p. 187) and indeed, to be able to address not only *how* global audiences engage with the Olympic Games media event but also *why*, it becomes necessary to triangulate information by adopting a mix of analytical approaches; hence, the need for multiple-methods (Brewer & Hunter, 1989). At its simplest, a multiple-methods design sees the mixing of data types and analytical approaches. While the terms “multiple methods” and “mixed methods” are sometimes used interchangeably, some maintain that mixed methods require specifically the combination of qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell & Clark, 2007; Creswell et al., 2003), which takes place mainly in case study three, whereas case studies one and two stick primarily to a multiple-methods design. As such, I refer to the overall design of this dissertation as multiple-methods.

A multiple-methods design also entails a combination of ontological and epistemological approaches toward a set of data and research question(s). On a more practical level, it is necessary to address four specific issues regarding the implementation of this type of a study: the timing of the multiple data collection, the priority that each data
In this dissertation I apply a concurrent nested design to my case studies, which involves the simultaneous collection\(^{31}\) of quantitative and qualitative data, particularly in case study three. The integration then takes place iteratively at the analysis stage (Creswell et al., 2003). I use quantitative data, such as word and retweet counts, and social media metrics as a means of situating and co-constructing what is primarily a qualitatively-oriented dissertation (Morse, 2003; Steckler, McLeroy, Goodman, Bird & McCormick, 1992). In case study one, I use ratings (broadcast and social media) to situate and highlight the success of the #savethesurprise campaign. Though not the focus of the case study, I also turn to retweet and word counts to provide a quantitative backdrop to the parameters of the campaign; for instance, were people ‘talking’ to and retweeting each other or, were they just posting their own thoughts? What were the most popular words or themes? Answers to these questions spur on new directions for qualitative analyses and vice versa, resulting in an iterative process of inquiry.

In case study two, I turn to similar word counts to supplement what is primarily a multiple, qualitative methods study design. In case study three\(^{32}\), I shift between a broad and a fine lens to tease out and triangulate some comparative perspectives on participation in media events. Here, I work with a corpus of big data (over 15 million tweets) combined

\(^{31}\) Interviews were obtained concurrently or in a timely manner to the rest of the data collection however, this was not always possible, so in some situations across all three case studies interview data was obtained post-Games.

\(^{32}\) I gather, analyze and interpret the data myself in case studies one and two, and use the help of the Annenberg School’s technology department to capture and store the large amounts of data generated for case study three while again, analyzing and interpreting the findings myself.
with the comparatively smaller data of interviews, personal observations, and report and media analysis. Finally, the theoretical umbrellas of media events and active audiences both presuppose a level of multimodal data and understanding, and make the combination of analytical approaches across the case studies compatible.

To present and organize my data, I take a case study approach, which is a specific research strategy through “an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g., a “case”), set within its real-world context – especially when the boundaries between phenomenon, and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2009, p. 18). This empirical and contextual focus of the case study, as a means of exploring and enriching media events and audience research, is certainly a development a number of scholars have called for (Couldry, Hepp & Krotz, 2010). The multiple case study approach is also a particularly efficient way to comparatively and historically organize a number of analyses and evolving data points in my research (Feagin, Orum & Sjoberg, 1991).

Since the case study is a context-dependent approach to a social phenomenon it is premised upon the fundamental idea that “in the study of human affairs, there appears to exist only context-dependent knowledge,” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 211). In defense of the case study method, Flyvbjerg notes the Kuhninan insight as probably one of the best arguments for case-study research: “a scientific discipline without a large number of thoroughly executed case studies is a discipline without systematic production of exemplars, and a discipline without exemplars is an ineffective one,” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 219). Therefore, the selection and implementation of cases becomes key (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). As Flyvbjerg (2006) has noted, the “generalizability of case studies can be increased by the strategic selection of cases,” (p. 229) so next, I lay out my selection process.
There are a number of strategies behind the selection of my cases. For one, I choose a loosely comparative, information-oriented, maximum variation selection of cases (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 230), which is based around specific expectations I have about the content of my cases. More specifically, the three concrete cases I look at are the London 2012, Sochi 2014, and Rio 2016 Olympics. In an information-oriented maximum variation case design, the researcher typically selects several cases, which vary significantly on a major feature, such as location, but share other important, common features. In the context of this dissertation, the major differences between the three case studies are the location, timeframe, and locally meaningful interpretations of each Olympic Games. The features that remain constant are the underlying research questions driving the examination of audience engagement in the Olympics through Twitter data and a range of four other modalities, which I examine for each of the cases. By keeping the data sources constant across five years of investigation (Twitter data, interviews, personal observations, media coverage, and reports), I am also able to note some evolutions in the practices of audiencing and in the Olympic media event across case studies.

It is worth noting that applying a multiple-methods and case study approach to media events is relatively new. As Hine has argued “methodological solutions gain much of their authority through precedent,” (2000, p. 1) therefore, it is important to keep expanding methodological options via empirical studies. There are, nonetheless, several relevant publications that have influenced the design behind this dissertation and that are specifically worth mentioning here. For example, a number of works have been published in recent years that look at the output of Twitter audiences during popular media events (Lin, Keegan, Margolin & Lazer, 2014; McPherson, Huotari, Cheng, Humphrey, Cheshire
& Brooks, 2012; Pedersen, Baxter, Burnett, Goker, Corney & Martin, 2014; Trilling, 2015). The majority of these studies, however, are platform comparative, meaning that they examine how an event plays out on social media as compared to its televised broadcast and they focus on a singular context or event. This is in lieu of taking a more interactive or holistic point of analysis and asking instead, how various social and traditional media work together to create multiple events or, how socio-technical and political configurations combine. Other studies elegantly combine some interviews, ethnographic-style observations, and Twitter data (Kreiss, 2016; O’Loughlin & Gillespie, 2015) but they most frequently do this with organizational members of the media events thus, leaving the audience voices unheard. Still, some research exists that combines audience voices and organizational perspectives in intriguing and iterative ways (Deller, 2011; Gray, Suri, Ali & Kulkarni, 2016; Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2015;), yet it too, does not do this in the context of large media events or global, comparative groups of audiences.

Most directly applicable to my work is the approach taken by Sumiala et al., (2016), who study the *Je Suis Charlie* social movement that arose around the attacks and subsequent media event started in Paris in 2015. The authors devise a three-stage multi-method model for the study of this event. The three stages begin with a digital ethnography-like approach, to provide a qualitative sketch of the event, then move onto automated content analysis, or what they call the “helicopter stage” to construct their digital field of analysis, and finally return to a qualitative approach of in-depth, digital ethnography of specific content. In this last phase, the authors advocate for the addition of layers of meaning to the basic quantitative contours already outlined. Essentially, they move from
qualitative to quantitative and to qualitative back again, which presupposes a slightly different data gathering strategy to the concurrent nested design I take.

The authors note that the key for the success of this model is the interplay and adaptation between the different methodological approaches (p. 105). This, they suggest, creates a new type of dialogue between quantitative and qualitative data. Further:

“while dividing the empirical focus between the production, representation, and reception of media events has proven a useful strategy for understanding national media events, this approach lacks the tools to analyse those communicative processes that go beyond the national frame and take place between and betwixt production, representation and reception of media events,” (Sumiala et al., 2016, p. 101).

Their approach gets at this betwixt space of production by aiming to capture the flow.

In this dissertation, I take a similar, multi-methods approach, which toggles between micro and macro data or qualitative (ethnographic style data and discourse analysis) and quantitative (big data and content analyses). My approach, however, is composed of multiple case studies and a higher level of interplay and iteration between qualitative and quantitative data, especially in case study three. I collect qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously and go back and forth between them multiple times in my analyses, as opposed to following just the three-stage model outlined by Sumiala et al. Hence, my work focuses on producing the “methodological dialogue” advocated for by Sumiala et al., (2016, p. 101) as many times as necessary and possible in order to answer a given question.
In sum, no matter how powerful an analytical tool, discourse analysis alone cannot tell us directly about the intentions behind, nor the receptions of a particular text and its producer(s) (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Furthermore, analyzing texts, regardless of how varied, cannot by itself fill the gap between what people say and what people do; an important conceptual and practical blind spot for much audience studies research (Livingstone, 2004). Therefore, it is important to find ways to triangulate discourse analysis (with methods such as personal observation) in order to better situate texts within their social milieu (Krippendorff, 2012; Robson, 2002) – a tenet of the method – and as a result, to attain sound findings. If done well, a multiple-methods and case study design can certainly provide some solutions to these issues and strengthen a piece of research (Yin, 2012).

While this dissertation overall privileges the qualitative perspective (discourse analysis and ethnographic observation), I firmly believe that on the one hand, ethnographically rooted approaches sometimes lack the ability to see the broader picture and breadth of digital data available. On the other hand, computational social sciences lack the ability to dig deeply into specific nuances, cases, and questions of subjectivity (Sumiala et al., 2016). In an attempt to avoid these shortcomings, I mix the scale of data texts and supplement discourse analyses with more ethnographic and quantitative approaches (Hine, 2015; Livingstone, 2004). Further, this multiple-methods approach complements the ontological stance of the dissertation, which studies participation through the interplay between macro and micro scales. Thus, to underscore the original contribution of my dissertation from a methodological standpoint, it is worth noting that this is relatively new
territory in academic research so this dissertation also serves as a testing ground for some novel ideas and methods.

**Data collection**

This dissertation draws on a range of sources, which are treated as texts, to get at the questions of *how* and *why* global audiences participate in media events. This allows for a rich, empirically grounded understanding of the life of global media events, and their creation and evolution; it also serves as a form of triangulation of the various sources of data and thus, as a validity check (Krefting, 1991; Robson, 2002). The table below comparatively summarizes the five types of data used in each case study (see Table 2.1), which are then discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs.\(^{33}\)

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\(^{33}\) In addition to the data below, I have also personally been to the 2004 Athens Olympic Games, 2008 Beijing Olympic trials and sites, to meetings with Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games (BOCOG) officials, to 2020 Tokyo Olympic preparation sites (Japan), meetings with Tokyo Organizing Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games (TOCOG) officials, and to the archives and museum in the IOC headquarters in Lausanne, Switzerland. Thus, my immersion into the Olympic movement as an audience member, curious researcher, and fan spans over 16 years to date.
Table 2.1: Corpus of Data Used in the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Case Study One: London 2012</th>
<th>Case Study Two: Sochi 2014</th>
<th>Case Study Three: Rio 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Twitter collection</strong></td>
<td>Sample(^{34}) of 300 #savethesurprise archived tweets from Twitter’s search API</td>
<td>Sample of #NBCFail archived tweets from Twitter’s search API (English: 454 and Russian: 143)</td>
<td>Sample of over 15 million tweets captured via Twitter’s streaming API in English, Russian and Portuguese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviews</strong></td>
<td>4 interviews with Twitter users, and 16 with official figures(^{35})</td>
<td>6 interviews with Twitter users, and 8 with official figures</td>
<td>10 interviews with Twitter users, and 8 with official figures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal observations</strong></td>
<td>Personal observations during the first dress rehearsal on July 23(^{rd}), 2012, Visit to sporting events and venues during the London 2012 Games, Daily BBC Olympic coverage viewing and media monitoring</td>
<td>Daily NBC Olympic coverage viewing, Recording and reviewing of opening ceremony, Following print and digital publications in English and in Russian, Closely monitoring Twitter daily</td>
<td>Daily NBC Olympic coverage viewing, Recording and reviewing of opening ceremony, Following print and digital publications in English, Russian, Portuguese (translated), Closely monitoring Twitter daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reports</strong></td>
<td>Official London Organising Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) planning (pre Games) and evaluation (post Games) reports, and Official IOC reports (11 total), Broadcast ratings and Twitter metrics, Academic publication literature review</td>
<td>Official Sochi Organising Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games (SOCOG) documents and reports, and Official IOC documents and reports (5 total), Broadcast ratings and Twitter metrics, Academic publication literature review</td>
<td>Official Rio Organizing Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games (ROCOG) planning documents and evaluation reports, and Official IOC documents and reports (12 total), Broadcast ratings and Twitter metrics, Academic publication literature review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Media coverage</strong></td>
<td>Newspaper articles, blog, magazine and website coverage (25 total), Television coverage, Social media coverage</td>
<td>Newspaper articles, blog, magazine and website coverage (30 total), Television coverage, Social media coverage</td>
<td>Newspaper articles, blog, magazine and website coverage (25 total), Television coverage, Social media coverage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{34}\) Twitter does not claim that its streaming or search API produces random results however, it does claim that it produces statistically representative, or so-called pseudo random results, which is the industry standard for almost any algorithmically generated values (@andypiper, Twitter staff, May 2015). The reasoning behind this is that it is near impossible to ensure true, mathematical randomness from algorithmically programmed and generated values.

\(^{35}\) Some of the interviews with official figures overlap between case studies. See Table 2.2 for full list.
The five data sources

In this section I describe in more detail the selection of sources and capture of the data encountered in Table 2.1.

Twitter

I begin with Twitter because it provides the central data throughout my analyses and what largely makes it possible for my study of audience participation in the Olympic Games. Twitter is an important data source not least because it allows for the collection of what a number of researchers have called naturally occurring and unobtrusive data (Hine, 2011; Kozinets, 2015). However, especially since Twitter has become a widely accepted social media platform amongst digital users, and since it takes such a central role in this dissertation, it is important to critically and thoroughly introduce it.

First, Twitter belongs to a larger group of media called social, or new media. However, somewhat ironically, equating social media with new media is not analytically helpful. Marvin (1990) reminds us that all media technologies were, at some point, new and that all media certainly are social. Put differently, social media are not uniquely social nor entirely new and yet, social media do differ from other forms of media, such as legacy media, so we must be able to account for that change. Perhaps, the most regularly cited definition of social media is by Kaplan and Haenlein who, without pinning social media to any specific medium, state that they are “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation

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36 Of course, it is worth highlighting that this introduction to Twitter is current as of early 2018 and by the time this dissertation is published, parts of it will surely need updating given the speed of social media evolution. For a more thorough discussion about the history of Twitter see O’Reilly & Milstein (2011).
and exchange of user-generated content,” (2010, p. 61). I believe part of the reason for the popularity and longevity of this definition comes from its ability to capture the social significance of social media, without doing so at the expense of the technical or the political.

To be sure, social media are a different type of technology from television. However, as Williams reminds us, “a new technique has often been seen, realistically, as a new relationship,” (Williams, 1977, p. 163). Since social media, like all media, are “spaces of action,” (Couldry, 2012, p. 2), they are also forms of social practice – and digitally (re)productive ones at that. “Although media constitute differences in degree… mediation nevertheless constitutes a difference in kind,” (Kember & Żylinska, 2012, p. 3). As such, social media differ in degree from other technologies but the relationships that are built into and engendered through them form a difference in kind from other forms of media. It is precisely these differences in kind that extend their potency and ignite researchers’ imaginations into the political, geographical and socio-economic realms. Questions about what these differences mean when put into various social contexts have occupied the pages of many academic and popular works since the 2000s, and they have certainly become a central concern for this dissertation, too.

One way to introduce Twitter is as a microblogging service that allows users to exchange parcels of communication of up to 140 characters (Van Dijck, 2011; Van Dijck & Poell, 2013; Ellison & boyd, 2007). Yet, this description has been known to break down when considered on a global scale; for example, more than 140 characters may be evoked
in the Chinese context, and since 2017 this definition also needs updating in a Western context as people are now able to tweet messages longer than 140 characters.

A second way to introduce Twitter is by allowing the organization to introduce itself: Interim CEO Dick Costolo described Twitter as “the pulse of the planet,” (cited in Ingram, 2012, n.p.). Twitter presents us with a pool of what Surowiecki (2005) calls ‘collective knowledge’ thus, if “language represents the mass mind,” (Carroll, 1956, p. 165) then Twitter, one of the most accessible social data platforms to researchers today, certainly presents us with an analytical window onto that world of shared knowledge. Of course, Twitter is a fast evolving platform and throughout the time of this dissertation, the company has made inroads into repositioning itself, specifically as a news platform. One example is its ‘happening now’ feature, released in late 2017 and focused on showcasing breaking news events (Perez, 2016; Stewart, 2016).

A third way to introduce Twitter is by focusing on what it does. Twitter is a digital platform that collapses contexts (Marwick, 2011), cutting across social, spatial and temporal boundaries (Hogan, 2010). Twitter helps to engender grassroots, bottom up communication and action between various ad hoc publics (Barberá et al., 2015; Bruns & Burgess, 2011; Papacharissi, 2014). Even the US supreme court has called Twitter “the modern day public sphere,” (Fallow, 2018). Yet, at the same time, Twitter amplifies mainstream (and sometimes extremist and derogatory) messages as it becomes increasingly monetized and dependent upon loud, corporate voices or algorithms that favor sensationalist content (Baym; 2013, Gillespie, 2010; Stark & Crawford, 2015).

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37 Initially, Twitter enabled only select users to post Tweets beyond the 140 character limit. However, after Twitter eventually rolled out the 280 character capacity to all users in late 2017, research indicates that few people actually go beyond the initial capability of 140 characters (Perez, 2018). This is an important example of the power of technological defaults and habitual action in communication.
As such, Twitter is a hybrid medium, existing at the intersections of mass communication and personal and personalized expression (Dijck, 2011). It is also a hybrid, in the sense that like other social media, it rather seamlessly mixes a range of aesthetics; global and local, textual and visual, corporate and grassroots (Bar, Weber & Pisani, 2016; Goriunova, 2012). Finally, Twitter is a hybrid because it is what Silverstone (1994) would call a double articulation; it is simultaneously a text and a technology, particularly for research purposes.

Like other social media, Twitter’s hybridity invites what I call a *methodological context conflation* (adapted from Marwick’s (2011) notion of ‘context collapse’). Twitter creates a methodological context conflation in that it becomes, at once, the content, the site, and often the tool for conducting a study. This puts the researcher in a complex position of disentangling the role from the impact of Twitter, or as Haraway (1990) could say, from disentangling the myth from the tool, which so often mutually constitute each other (p. 206). In the context of this dissertation, the public image, constantly evolving affordances, and textual data (not) available from Twitter often form a convoluted dance. Of course, Twitter is not unproblematic in its multiple roles and I address some of these emergent issues of methodological context conflation in the ethics and limitations segment toward the end of this chapter.

This dissertation approaches Twitter as a medium for mass communication and focuses specifically on its capability to serve as a bottom-up, mass media alternative to the traditional, top-down broadcasting of media events via television. If, on television we hear the sanctioned, institutional narrative of events then on Twitter, we have the potential to hear a different set of voices (this is not to say that Twitter is not also heavily
institutionalized as a medium but rather, that this dissertation focuses its data collection and analysis on Twitter’s mass audience uses instead). To work toward achieving this goal, I have made efforts either to remove, or specifically to flag official Twitter accounts and voices in my data collection and write up.

I center the Twitter data collection around the hashtag, which was initially popularized by Twitter and is “now used by all major social media platforms (apart from Wikipedia),” (Wills, 2016. p. 11). According to Yang, Sun, Zhang and Mei, hashtags are organizational objects of information (2012), that serve two primary roles as bookmarkers for information, and as indicators of virtual communities. Some researchers have specifically praised the value of hashtags as “perhaps the most powerful techniques for semantic analysis,” we have today (Wills, 2016, p. 11), as indeed, they do allow for a relative ease of gathering (near) instantaneous and naturally occurring data. While I, too, view the hashtag as a valuable research ecosystem that allows for new types of inquiry, I maintain that it is important to supplement hashtag data with other modalities such as interviews. For one, some studies based exclusively on hashtag data have been criticized as being ‘low hanging fruit’ (Bruns, Moon, Paul & Münch, 2016), and a suggestion frequently given to make this fruit more appealing has been to combine hashtag data with more ethnographic or contextualized approaches38 (Bruns et al., 2016). Furthermore, the relative ease of access that researchers have to Twitter comes at a potential cost of skewed representation39; those using Twitter tend to be in the privileged minority worldwide.

38 This is a suggestion often found in the context of methodological discussions about how to generally address the shortcomings of big data, too (Bowker, 2014).
39 This takes us back to an interesting methodological dilemma posed by Gilbert West, who wrote the first (ancient) Olympic dissertation, Dissertation on the Olympick Games, in 1749. West questioned how it was possible to understand the ancient Games correctly if all of the sources we have remaining are based on fable and tradition (cited in Girginov & Collins, 2013). In a sense, some 250 years later, I am faced with a similar
Nevertheless, Twitter presents a sample of audience voices and like all samples, it comes with its particular parameters and limitations.

While Twitter data does take on different levels of centrality in each of the three case studies, I consistently use one of two types of Twitter data collection techniques. The first one is employed in case studies one and two, and is a search and collect based on archived tweets from the Twitter search Application Program Interface (API), or what is sometimes referred to as the ‘rest API’. The second one is a specific tweet capture based on pre-programmed parameters from Twitter’s live streaming API. This technique is used in case study three and was preceded by several rounds of data capture and algorithm testing and refinement. Both types of data collection techniques are based on specific hashtag, date, and language queries however, one of the biggest differences between the two approaches is in the temporal outlook. Whereas the former, the rest API, results in a historic approach, allowing random specified data to be collected in hindsight the latter, the streaming API, is near instantaneous, collecting data based on specific and dynamic parameters as it comes in. Both forms of Twitter data capture were screened and cleaned prior to further analysis.

Finally, the Twitter data took on another level of quantitative preparation before they could be considered as ‘text’ for subsequent data analysis via discourse analysis. Using algorithmic queries and Excel data processing counts like most popular words, days of the week, or number of mentions, we can identify patterns and trends within the data. However, this quantitative analysis cannot fully capture the depth and complexity of the human experiences and interactions present in the data. This is where the importance of qualitative methods, such as discourse analysis, comes into play. The combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the data.

40 Both approaches have advantages and disadvantages; for instance, while the latter data capture approach, the streaming API, is more difficult to administer, it does offer some more clarity about the percentage of tweets from the total population that it captures. Depending on the query and timing, the streaming API can give researchers between 1-40% of all available tweets (Bright Planet, 2013; Personal Conversation, Garber, September 16, 2015). Unfortunately, both data capture processes remain enshrouded in a cloud of Twitter’s algorithmic secrecy about their precise inner workings.
of tweeting, additional hashtags, and in-tweet mentions were obtained. These quantitative metrics gave a macro-reading of the millions of tweets that helped to tease out themes to guide the subsequent discourse analysis. Details about the specific discourse analysis used to analyze the texts follow under the ‘Data Analysis’ section.

*Interviews*

A second, important data source in this dissertation is interviews; in total, I conducted 52 interviews across five years. Interviews provided a sense of subjectivity, motivation, and personalization; they gave a voice to the audience and to the professionals involved in the mediation of the Games and as such, added much needed insights to what was otherwise a largely textual and removed body of policy reports, media coverage, and Twitter data (Livingstone, 2010). The interviews in this dissertation can be broken down into two categories; interviews with Twitter users, and interviews with media professionals, like IOC, organizing committee members, and Twitter employees, for example (see Tables 2.2 and 2.3 for full list of interviewees). Notes and wherever possible recordings were taken during all conversational interviews, which were later transcribed and used as text for analysis. Where interviews had already taken place via written form, the exchanges (emails or Twitter messages) were saved, archived, and again, used for textual analysis.
Table 2.2: List of media and Olympic professional interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Name of interviewee</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Type and date of initial interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Graeme Menzies</td>
<td>Director of Communications, Vancouver 2010 Olympic Games</td>
<td>Skype, email Feb. 18, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sir Craig Reedie</td>
<td>Vice President, International Olympic Committee (IOC) &amp; President of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA)</td>
<td>In person Jul. 3, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Tim Hollingsworth</td>
<td>Chief Executive of the British Paralympic Association</td>
<td>In person, email Jul. 3, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dick Yardborough</td>
<td>Atlanta 1996 Olympic Games: Managing Director of Communication and Government Relations</td>
<td>In person Feb. 19, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Alex Balfour</td>
<td>Head of New Media, London 2012</td>
<td>Skype, email Apr. 6, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Alexandra Rohr</td>
<td>Digital Communication Manager, Rio Organizing Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games (ROCOG) 2016</td>
<td>Skype, email Mar. 6, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Stewart Kellett</td>
<td>Director of recreation and partnerships for British Cycling</td>
<td>In person Jul. 3, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Emma Boggis</td>
<td>Chief Executive, Sport &amp; Recreation Alliance (the umbrella body of sports in the UK for 320 national governing bodies of sport)</td>
<td>In person Jul. 3, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Matt Millington</td>
<td>Head of Digital, Olympic Broadcasting Services (OBS Madrid)</td>
<td>Skype, email Apr. 2, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Steve Dittmore</td>
<td>Sport journalist and Associate Professor</td>
<td>In person, email Mar. 4, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>John Halpin</td>
<td>Manager of Online Projects, United States Olympic Committee (USOC)</td>
<td>Email, phone Mar. 8, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Chris Alexopolous</td>
<td>ESPN Sports Producer</td>
<td>In person, email, phone Apr. 8, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Emilio Fernández Peña</td>
<td>Olympic Studies Centre Director (CEO-UAB) Barcelona</td>
<td>Skype, email Sept. 8, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position and Notes</td>
<td>Contact Method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Guilherme Guimaraes</td>
<td>Former Head of Sports, Twitter Brazil</td>
<td>Skype, email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Brian Poliakoff</td>
<td>Senior Communications Manager, Twitter</td>
<td>Phone, email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Amir Zonozi</td>
<td>Chief Strategy Officer, Zoomph</td>
<td>In person, phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Pascal Wattiaux</td>
<td>Technology executive and IOC consultant</td>
<td>Skype, email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Fujisawa Hidetoshi</td>
<td>Executive Director of Communication and Engagement Tokyo 2020, Japanese Olympic Committee</td>
<td>In person, and email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Yosuke Fujiwara</td>
<td>Executive Board Member, Japanese Olympic Committee</td>
<td>In person, email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Keiko Homma</td>
<td>Policy, Information and Internal Relations, Japan Sport Council</td>
<td>In person, email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Matthew Haley</td>
<td>Director of Communication and Marketing, World City Links (oversees cultural exchange between Rio, London and Tokyo Games)</td>
<td>Phone, email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Tim Burke</td>
<td>Video Director, Deadspin.com</td>
<td>Phone, email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Rafael Sena</td>
<td>Social Media Coordinator, Rio Olympic and Paralympic Games Organizing Committee 2016 (ROCOG)</td>
<td>Skype, email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Bruno Hermann</td>
<td>Head of Globalization and Localization, Nielsen</td>
<td>Phone, email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Ulyana Lepehka</td>
<td>Journalist during Sochi Olympics and Head of Information and Organization Department for the Special Olympic Committee of St. Petersburg</td>
<td>Skype, email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Gregory Asmolov</td>
<td>Leverhulme Early Career Fellow, Kings College, London</td>
<td>In person, email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Juliano Spyer</td>
<td>Social Media Professional, University College London</td>
<td>Email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Igor J.</td>
<td>Journalist and researcher, Moscow</td>
<td>Skype, email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Polina Kolozaridi</td>
<td>Producer, Russia.ru and PhD applicant at Higher School of Economics, Moscow</td>
<td>Skype, email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Guilherme Ramalho</td>
<td>Journalist, InfoGlobo</td>
<td>Email</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.3: List of Twitter User Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Interviewee</th>
<th>Hashtag-specific interview</th>
<th>Type and Date of initial Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Amina</td>
<td>#savethesurprise</td>
<td>Twitter Sept. 10, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Stuart</td>
<td>#savethesurprise</td>
<td>Twitter Feb. 25, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Tim</td>
<td>#savethesurprise</td>
<td>Twitter May 3, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Andre</td>
<td>#NBCFail</td>
<td>Twitter, phone Mar. 2, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Chris</td>
<td>#NBCFail</td>
<td>Twitter, email Aug. 8, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Steven</td>
<td>#NBCFail</td>
<td>Twitter, email Mar. 3, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Irina</td>
<td>#NBCFail</td>
<td>Email, Skype Mar. 25, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Helena</td>
<td>#NBCFail</td>
<td>Email Mar. 6, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Heather</td>
<td>#NBCFail</td>
<td>Twitter Aug. 25, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Kathryn</td>
<td>#Rio2016</td>
<td>Twitter, email Feb. 23, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Evgenyi</td>
<td>#Rio2016</td>
<td>Survey Monkey, Twitter Mar. 8, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Dri</td>
<td>#Rio2016</td>
<td>Survey Monkey Oct. 9, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Jana</td>
<td>#Rio2016</td>
<td>Twitter Nov. 11, 2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first category of interviews was based on a convenience sample of media and Olympic professionals, which often evolved into a snowball referral sample\(^{41}\) (Robinson, 2014). I often found and made initial contact with these people through LinkedIn, a professional networking site, by reaching out with an introduction and questions. In general, the response rate was very high. In addition, I had the opportunity to interview a number of professionals at a post-London 2012 Olympic Games conference, at a 20\(^{th}\) Anniversary Consortium of the Atlanta 1996 Games\(^{42}\), and at personal visits to the Tokyo 2020 Olympic sites. I interviewed a total of 32 media and Olympic professionals across the three case studies (see Table 2.2) and found that people were eager to relive and share their experiences often, offering to put me in touch with others, too. These interviews were most frequently conducted via Skype or on the phone and lasted between 20 minutes to an hour, often with follow up email exchanges or conversations. All interviews were semi-structured (Wengraf, 2001), the most common method in social science research, meaning that certain questions were pre-designed and repeated to participants but the freedom to add extra topics or to change direction of discussion was given, too. My interview guide contained three interrelated sections pertinent to the conceptualization of the architectures of participation including institutional, technical, and socio-cultural domains (see Appendix B for sample of interview questions). In general, the questions were formulated around the particular person’s position and experience within the Olympic Games; their

\(^{41}\) Because the Organizing Committees for the Olympic Games (OCOGs) are transient structures – they exist for no more than 7 years with high turn-over rates – it is difficult to trace the exact personnel involved in the communication design of the Games. For this reason, I searched for key individuals who were then able to recommend and introduce me to others.

\(^{42}\) Leveraging the Olympic Games for building sport organisations, July 2, 2015, Brunel University, UK. Atlanta, 20 Years Later: Lessons in Sports Media from the Last American Summer Olympic Games, February 19, 2015, Atlanta GA, USA.
thoughts and observations of social media (broadly speaking), and Twitter (specifically) in the Games; and where possible, concrete ideas about the three hashtags of interest (#savethesurprise, #NBCFail, and #Rio2016).

The second category of interviews was based on a convenience sample of Twitter users from my data collections, which would guarantee the users had tweeted using one of the hashtags of interest. I most often made initial contact with the Twitter users via the platform itself, either through a direct message, a public tweet, or by sending a link to a short online survey via the Survey Monkey platform (see Appendix C for survey). The only exception to this was one particular interview which was conducted with a person whom I personally knew and who had participated in the Rio Games on Twitter. The formulation of questions was created using the key research questions and sub-questions; it was based around people’s experiences with Twitter during the Games and with specific hashtags (#savethesurprise, #NBCFail, and #Rio2016). Habitual Twitter practices and motivations for use were also questioned. Lastly, interviewees were always given the opportunity to share relevant, additional thoughts or ideas they desired. While the response rate was low (in total I interviewed 20 Twitter users across the three case studies), those people that did reply were highly engaged and often, our communication continued onto email and with longer, multiple, exchanges.

Personal observations

I attended the London Games in person (July 27, 2012 – August 12, 2012) and took notes and photographs of notable moments of social media participation, various types of audience engagement, and the design and look of the Olympic sites. This provided a
contextual perspective of the Games and it also gave a sense of grounded, tactile knowledge through in-person experience. While the majority of this data was tacitly included in my formulations of the Games as a media event, some parts of the data collection directly made their way into case study one via personal photographs taken at the opening ceremony dress rehearsal. In preparation for, during, and after the Games I also monitored a range of media platforms, including television (BBC, UK), print and digital media, as well as Twitter. I paid close attention to audience engagement in the forms of Twitter exchanges, and people’s behavior at competition and opening ceremony dress rehearsal sites. I saved and archived exchanges on Twitter that became particularly notable, many of which are visible throughout case study one.

I followed the Sochi Games (February 7, 2014 – February 23, 2014) on a range of media platforms, including television (NBC, US and Channel 4, UK), print (The Guardian, The Washington Post, The New York Times, etc.,) and digital media (NBC.com, BBC.com, RT.com, Facebook, etc.,), as well as Twitter. In addition, I was able to monitor news about the Olympics throughout the year, both in English and Russian. This included watching several hours of Olympic events daily during the Games on television and reading various articles to keep up to date with general Olympic developments. Pertinent articles were saved and archived. I was particularly interested in looking at various audience exchanges and interactions on Twitter to trace the evolution of the hashtag #NBCFail, and so did daily searches and where necessary, daily archives to familiarize myself with new developments.

Finally, I once again monitored the Rio Games (August 5 – August 21, 2016) closely on a range of media platforms, including television (NBC, US and Channel 4, UK),
print (The Guardian, The Washington Post, The New York Times, etc.), and digital media (NBC.com, BBC.com, RT.com, IZ.ru, g1.globos.com, Globo.com, Facebook, etc.), as well as Twitter. In addition, I was able to follow news about the Olympics throughout the year in English, Russian and Portuguese with the help of Google Translate. Articles of interest were saved and archived. My daily data gathering strategy was to watch several hours of television during Olympics time and to monitor Twitter closely, specifically #Rio2016, for audience interaction and developments. Points of interest such as audience interactions were noted. In addition, I would periodically check in with the big data collection team at the Annenberg School for Communication.

_Media coverage_

Media coverage provided a heavily edited, nonetheless valuable window onto the world of important occasions. I closely monitored the media (largely English language television, newspapers, online publications and social media described in the previous section) both, during the time of each Olympic Games, and throughout the year for general news about the Olympic movement, Twitter, and more. Data in the form of articles and press releases were then archived and used to provide the contextual background framing the Games at the start of each case study. Around the Sochi and Rio Olympic Games I also expanded the media coverage monitoring to include some articles in Russian and Portuguese (often with the help of Google Translate) in order to get a sense of the framing of the events in these countries. In total, I watched a couple of hours of Games coverage per day during the Olympic time, and collected tens of press releases and dozens of articles throughout the five years of data gathering.
With the media coverage, I was particularly interested in the official or professional versions of the three Olympics but also, in monitoring moments where audience tweets and data made their way into the mainstream media. I specifically recorded and archived such moments, which expectedly, formed the lesser part of the media coverage. Finally, this data was used contextually throughout the case studies but also more directly in cases one and two, where the flow of audience tweets to and from mainstream media and their interactions and responses to media coverage were particularly important to the case narratives.

**Official reports**

Lastly, official reports from the IOC, organizing committees, host countries, Twitter, official broadcasters, and academic literature provided the fifth source of data for the dissertation. The majority of this data was publicly available however, some was specifically made available to me, sometimes confidentially, by the media professionals I interviewed. This data provided what was once again, a largely ‘official’ narrative of media events and their constituent parts. Of course, it is worth noting that specifically the corporate literature encountered here was heavily sanitized and censored. In turn, report-based data, like the media coverage described above, was used largely as contextual background to help determine the institutional framing within which social media was used.
Data analysis

This section describes in more detail how discourse analysis was applied to analyze the data used in this dissertation. Discourse analysis is the study of language in use (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Labov, 1972). It concerns itself with the production, consumption, and dissemination of texts within their social context (Van Dijk, 1985; Fairclough, 1992; Labov, 1972; Parker, 1992; Phillips, Lawrence & Hardy, 2004; Robson, 2002) and can take on micro or macro approaches to doing so (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000). Discourse refers to a mode of constructive, constitutive human action; discourses “do not just describe things; they do things,” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 6). In turn, the types of texts that are associated with discourse are not just written transcriptions but broad, symbolic expressions, that require some kind of a medium for transmission (Taylor & Van Every, 1993, p. 109). Through this extended interpretation of a text a photograph, video, or emoji in a tweet also become discursive material for analysis.

Discourse “‘rules in’ certain ways of talking about a topic, defining an acceptable and intelligible way to talk, write or conduct oneself,” (Hall, 2001, p. 72). Subsequently, discourse also “‘rules out’, limits and restricts other ways of talking, of conducting ourselves in relation to the topic or constructing knowledge about it,” (Hall, 2001: 72). Thus, discourses both frame and work to enact the concepts of audience participation and media events. Without adopting an extreme objectivist or linguistically deterministic ontology (Machin & Mayr, 2012), we can conclude that discourses generate specific experiences that help to structure how we make sense of our social worlds. Subsequently,

43 A good example of a discourse ‘doing things’ is the act of pronouncing marriage vows; these words not only describe feelings and actions but they, within themselves, often ignite a whole set of actual social relationships, behaviors and events. This view is particularly compatible with Handelman’s (1998) depiction of public events as happenings that point to, and potentially ignite action beyond themselves.
discourse analysis can shed light on “the manufacture of conditions of possibility,” (Oswick, 2005, p. 9) and as such, can illuminate discourses as tools of power, which ought to be examined critically, and which can be used to unearth and challenge power, too.

An important factor to consider in discourse analysis is the notion of agency via textual interaction or ‘reader’ participation. Put simply, agency refers not to intentions but to the capacity an individual has to alter a given situation (Giddens, 1984, p. 9). Agency, in the textual sense, is therefore closely related to a reader’s ability to participate in, and to alter a text, whereby according to Arnstein (1969), participation is “the extent of citizens’ power in determining the end product,” (p. 217). This becomes particularly important in the social media communication era because part of the hype around web 2.0 platforms is their unprecedented affordance for the networked circulation and production of texts and discourses by masses of individuals. This affordance is also a central evolution in the practice of media events as addressed by this dissertation. Social media platforms encourage a certain perpetual openness of texts; a practical point that is well complemented by the theoretical view of a text as a discourse and a constantly (re)enacted social practice, which is never fully finished (Eco, 1984; Hall, 2001; Machin & Mayr, 2012). There is “always the possibility that actors can influence discourses through the production and dissemination of texts,” (Phillips, Lawrence & Hardy, 2004, p. 637), which again, becomes particularly evident in the social media enabled era.

In brief, since its inception in the 1970’s, discourse analysis has proliferated and diverged into a myriad of formations that can be regrouped under two main categories; the descriptive and the critical (Gee, 2014). The particular approach to discourse analysis adopted by this dissertation is Discourse Theoretical Analysis, and falls within the latter
category (Carpentier & De Cleen, 2007; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). As such, Discourse Theoretical Analysis pays particular attention to the social context and broader implications of particular discourses. In this dissertation Discourse Theoretical Analysis retains the normative drive central to the critical tradition of discourse analysis (Van Dijk, 1985), but focuses to a lesser extent on generating a call for social change.

While Discourse Theoretical Analysis remains part of the critical discourse analysis tradition, it also differs from other forms of it on at least two, important vectors: macro-contextual and macro-textual orientation. First, Discourse Theoretical Analysis’ macro-textual orientation uses broader definitions of text that include a wide range of media, and that center around ‘meaning’, whereby meaning is constituted by the totality of the linguistic and non-linguistic. This combination of language (the linguistic) and action (the non-linguistic) is what Laclau and Mouffe refer to as discourse (1990). Second, Discourse Theoretical Analysis’ macro-contextual orientation toward the broader social realm, as opposed to isolated social settings, allows for larger-scale conclusions and statements to be made (such as those pertaining to media events more broadly versus one particular setting or instance of a media event). This potentially results in a different scale of discourse analysis, allowing us to take data from the particular and to relate it to the general.

To situate the core tenets of Discourse Theoretical Analysis (Carpentier & De Cleen, 2007), it is necessary to briefly mention its origins in Discourse Theory. Discourse Theoretical Analysis is a practical and media studies oriented adaptation of Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) formulation of Discourse Theory, and retains its key attributes while alleviating some of its criticisms. Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) articulation of Discourse Theory helps to explain the socially and discursively mediated dynamics between structure
and agency in complex societies. The authors argue that the over-determination of concepts leads to floating signifiers (Torfing, 1999), which cannot be fully resolved nor permanently secured, and which instead become temporary fixations resulting from constant social negotiations. This, for Laclau and Mouffe explains how hegemony and the political function in complex societies; essentially through the work of particular, temporarily stabilizing thematic discourses.

While widely acknowledged as seminal, Laclau and Mouffe’s work has also been met with some criticisms. For example, Discourse Theory’s combinatory foundation of post-Marxist and post-structuralist sources has been questioned for resulting in overly relativist or nihilist conceptions of discourse and action (Carpentier & De Cleen, 2007). Furthermore, Discourse Theory has been described as an open-ended theoretical framework (Howarth, 1998), which I have found to lack some methodological clarity. (Perhaps, part of the reason is the limited applicability of Discourse Theory to empirical, media studies.)

Carpentier and De Cleen (2007) rename and reclaim Discourse Theory through their version of Discourse Theoretical Analysis and address some of its shortcomings by proposing clearer methodological premises. Furthermore, Carpentier and De Cleen (2007) practically illustrate how Discourse Theoretical Analysis can be useful in combining qualitative and quantitative data in a media studies case study, which is the approach that I also take. The practical steps they suggest for implementing Discourse Theoretical

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44 The political, for Laclau and Mouffe refers to the numerous levels of omnipresent antagonisms in various societies. Basic forms and identities are constructed via discourses around equivalence and difference thus, this becomes the basis for omnipresent tensions that are always in the background and therefore, always already politicized (Laclau, 2003; Mouffe, 2000).

45 Simultaneously, works exist that argue specifically for the productive combination of post-Marxism and post-structuralism thought, especially in the analysis of capitalist society (Goldstein, 2012).
Analysis include the search for, and accumulation of themes\textsuperscript{46} into nodal points, which are then used as macro sensitizing concepts to help explain larger level, social formations. According to Carpentier and De Cleen, nodal points are processes and moments of relative discursive stability, which can result in social agency and/or hegemony\textsuperscript{47}. As Discourse Theoretical Analysis is focused on teasing out moments of relative discursive fixation, it becomes particularly useful for this dissertation, which organizes its analysis around thematic centers or domains, forming the architectures of participation of media events. Through this process, Discourse Theoretical Analysis ultimately helps to explain the inner workings and negotiated formations of the higher-level concepts of participation, audiences, and media events.

**Ethics and limitations**

While I believe that the research design outlined above captures as best as possible the complexity of a multi-sited, multi-lingual, multimedia, and multi-temporal event, there are certainly some areas for improvement. Below, I begin by outlining potential ethical concerns arising from this study design, as well as what steps were taken to alleviate them, and then continue by acknowledging some practical limitations as a result of the particular methodology taken. It is worth beginning with the fact that this dissertation project has received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, meaning that a fundamental ethical check on the purpose of this work, as well as the merits over potential harm for the study

\textsuperscript{46} Of course, the search for themes is rarely a theoretically dis-informed process in the first place.

\textsuperscript{47} Hegemony, in the context of Discourse Theoretical Analysis, is based on Gramsci’s original formations (1999), which describe the (sometimes oppressive) formation of consent – rather than excessive force or domination – through the naturalizing of assumptions around temporary fixations of discursive nodal points (Carpentier & De Cleen, 2007; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985).
participants has passed (see Appendix A for IRB Approval). Nonetheless, while my research does deal with ‘human subjects’, thus prompting the American IRB review, this term and its subsequent ethical implications need to be considered more thoroughly in the context of my work. As the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) has often noted, the term ‘human subject’ does not translate neatly from clinical research onto social sciences research and can become particularly problematic when applied to online environments (Markham & Buchanan, 2012). Therefore, in addition to having passed the IRB review, I have identified two main areas of potential ethical concern in my dissertation and address each of them below.

The two ethical issues most relevant to my work deal with the question of representation. On the one hand, this questions arises when deciding how to ethically represent the people I have interviewed or portrayed via their tweets and interviews; on the other hand, it also emerges when wanting to substantially represent my research data, so as to contribute empirically sound work to the academic community and beyond. To address the first issue, the representation of interviewees and their data, I borrow the concept of contextual integrity (Nissenbaum, 2011), which refers to the proper treatment of people and their data within a given context. In essence, what may be ethical, direct attribution of tweets and interview quotations to specific individuals in the context of global media events may not be so in a health-related, more controversial, or predictive contexts of study. As the Olympics are a public event and the type of interview data I use is low-risk I informed all of my interviewees in advance of the purpose of my work and offered to share my findings with those interested in learning further about the study.
I also draw on two key questions from the AoIR ethics guidelines (Markham & Buchanan, 2012); first, what is a person’s (reasonable) expectation for privacy? Second, is a person’s data attributable, searchable and retrievable and if so, could any likely harm result? All of the people I interviewed were informed in advance that the information they provide will go toward my dissertation research – those speaking on behalf of corporations were specifically given the choice to remain anonymous although none requested this option – and in general, all of them shared a sense of enjoyment in reliving their Olympic experiences. My goal was ultimately to represent the people I interviewed, whether they were Twitter users who created content about the Olympics, or media professionals who moderated and analyzed this content, in a truthful manner and with integrity in the Olympic Games context. Therefore, while the Twitter data (and interviewee names) that I use are publicly attributable, searchable and retrievable, I largely limit the examples of tweets and information to the Olympic context only so as to prevent any unnecessary connotations between users and their other data within the scope of my dissertation. Furthermore, while it is not possible or practical to ask permission for Twitter content use from everyone in this context of study – although this data is already publicly available – I made a concerted effort to contact tweet creators (specifically in cases where I have isolated and depicted individual tweets), and where possible to notify them of my research and to interview them for additional context.

By addressing the first issue, how to ethically present people and their data (and deciding that anonymity is not a necessary precondition for this study), I set the groundwork for addressing the second issue, too. Here, once again, the concept of contextual integrity becomes a guiding heuristic in my dissertation. To preserve the
contextual integrity of the research and knowledge generated by this dissertation, as well as to provide some human element to what may otherwise feel like disembodied text or big data, I have decided to include interviewee’s names and positions alongside their quotations and Twitter usernames alongside tweet text. This decision is also intended to serve as an acknowledgement of what numerous internet researchers have long claimed; that seemingly autonomous, big data are ultimately the workings of very contextual and real human beings and decisions (Crawford, Miltner & Gray, 2014; Gillespie, 2011).

It is now worth turning to five methodological concerns that arise from the present study, too. First, while Twitter has become mainstream – as Durkheim (1895/1982) would say it has become a social fact – its use has not. Much of the world does not have social media or internet access, meaning that the types of discourses we hear more likely represent a privileged minority. Therefore, Twitter and the ensuing interviews with its users do show a skewed voice. While I am acutely aware of this feature of Twitter I approach it not as a limitation per se but as a specific parameter of this study, and of the sample of people examined.

Second, a related topic worthy of note is the ‘data not seen’ (Baym, 2013); the types of ‘lurking’ (Goriunova, 2017) and non-content-producing participation that are most common to social media users. To address the practical and theoretical limitations arising from examining participation only via productive, content producing means, I make a certain argument in this dissertation about the potentially pernicious equation of participation with publishing. I also strive to broaden my scope of what constitutes participation and data beyond the production of tweets only.
Third, invisibility and ephemerality of content, resulting from the methodological context conflation of using Twitter as the text, site, and platform of study, also results in practical issues of data access. Since the start of this research, certain accounts have been suspended and some content has been removed either professionally, or from the creators themselves. This, in itself, has been an interesting research finding but it has also made some subsequent verification of data difficult. To complicate matters, Twitter itself is a highly dynamic and rapidly evolving platform, which has made it difficult to sustain an entirely consistent approach toward data gathering throughout the five years of research. To combat this challenge, the beginning of each case study contextualizes Twitter as a communicative platform and as a business, by reviewing relevant reports and studies. I have also made an effort to highlight relevant tweets that are no longer available throughout the three case studies.

Fourth, there are a number of tangible limitations concerning researchers’ access to Twitter data. With very few exceptions, individuals’ tweets are public property. In aggregate, however, they become Twitter’s property and the company makes some of its income by trading on these big data sets. As Hine (2000) has noted, ethnographic style research online is a bootstrapping technique thus, being flexible and creative around Twitter’s research limitations, despite it being one of the most accessible research platforms, is still necessary. Simultaneously, openly acknowledging Twitter’s restrictive policies to data access in the name of corporate induced gains, is the first step toward critiquing what seems to be a less than ideal data access situation. I thus contribute to a broader body of researchers and organizations who make a call to big data companies to
update their data access policies for academic research purposes (Digital Europe, UCL, Society of College, National and University Libraries, etc.).

Fifth and final, a challenge to note about implementing a multiple-methods design is the need to transform the various available data in a way that allows for them to be integrated in the analysis stage. It is not practical to give the same level of prominence to each data modality thus, being “unequal in their priority, this design also results in unequal evidence within a study, and this may be a disadvantage when interpreting the final results,” (Creswell et al., 2003, p. 185). Subsequently, being as transparent and detailed as possible about the particular types of data collection and study design, and adopting a reflexive role in acknowledging the methodological assumptions brought to this dissertation will help to alleviate some of this concern. Nonetheless, despite the qualitative penchant, I believe that the benefit of incorporating multiple data points and perspectives (including quantitative analyses) ought to outweigh any potential shortcomings of unequal modality attention.
CHAPTER 3

CASE STUDY 1 London, UK: 2012

London’s Olympic #savethesurprise campaign

The first case study is concerned with the London 2012 Olympics, which were branded as the first social media Games. Through an analysis of the #savethesurprise campaign, this case study presents an instance of a wildly successful organizer-audience relationship in a media event – so much so, that it makes one curious as to how and why the partnership worked so well. In what follows, I introduce the campaign and situate it within the broader communications context of 2012. I then proceed by positioning this case study within the Durkheimian notion of ritual (1895/1982), which helps to answer research sub-question one; what factors shaped and motivated social media audience participation? Next, I unpack the specific architectures of participation that enabled #savethesurprise’ success, and conclude with some broader implications about the nature of audience co-creation in media events today.

Introduction

While the opening ceremony for the London 2012 Olympic Games was still three weeks away, details about the £27 million event ($42 million) including photographs and a music playlist had already leaked to the press. This presented the organizers with a pressing challenge: how could they keep the remaining details of the opening ceremony, one the most anticipated, expensive, and widely viewed media events in the world a secret? Furthermore, with two live audience dress rehearsals just around the corner, how could the
organizers channel the image of being *the* social media Olympics while simultaneously asking 100,000 people *not* to share their experiences?

To explore these questions, this case study applies a multiple-method approach of personal observations, interviews, discourse and quantitative (counting occurrences) analyses of archived tweets (for full list of data sources see Table 3.1 below and Table 2.1 in the methodology chapter). The findings critically reveal the complementary work of the three domains forming #savethesurprise’ architectures of participation and how this campaign became the first mass secret, created oddly enough via Twitter, a platform we associate with sharing not saving information. This chapter cuts to the heart of the tensions surrounding the adoption of social media in organizations and media events; the battle between narrative control versus flexibility, and structure versus agency. In turn, it contributes to the overall research question, *how do social media audiences participate in the construction of global events?* by showing, on the one hand, the strong socio-cultural appeal that created a sense of community around #savethesurprise that inspired so many people to tweet according to the organizers’ wishes and yet, on the other hand, the robust and relatively invisible legal and technical infrastructures that undergirded its success.
Table 3.1: Case study data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total unique #savethesurprise tweets scraped from Twitter’s archive</td>
<td>300&lt;sup&gt;48&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(150 from July 23&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;, 2012 and 150 from July 25&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;, 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with professionals and Twitter users (see methodology for list)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy documents and official reports</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal observations and digital ethnography prior to, during, and after the Olympic Games</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I frame this case study’s participatory dynamics under a modified version of Durkheim’s notion of ritual (1895/1982; 1912/1995). In brief, the idea of ritualistic action implies a common focus and emotion or, in Durkheim’s words, a “single moral community,” (1912/1995, p. 44). Ritual is also performative (Rappaport, 1999), periodic, and potentially transformative (van Gennep, 1908/1960), giving rise to a whole system of social relationships. I use a modified version of this notion of ritual, which includes a strong dose of suspicion about the shared social meaning of any given event (Couldry, Hepp & Krotz, 2009), and which studies the agentic actions of audience members. In other words, I do not argue that the #savethesurprise campaign’s audience participation was ritualistic in that it actually established a single minded moral community, in which all participants felt the same way. Instead, I critically unearth the performative elements which gave this campaign a ritualistic appearance and argue that it worked based on eliciting certain social relationships and creating a ritual-like social atmosphere. As Balfour, Head of New Media for London 2012 noted, the goal of the communications professionals working for the 2012 Games was centered around “orchestrating an atmosphere,” (Personal Communication,

<sup>48</sup> This equals just over 1% of all available tweets.
April 6, 2016). I unpack the #savethesurprise media event participation and this orchestrated atmosphere using the conceptual tools of active audiences and ritual.

**London, UK 2012: The communication landscape**

By January 2012 around 30% of the world’s population had internet access; that’s about 2.4 billion people. Of those, 22% had social media access, with the highest usages occurring in the US and in Western Europe (International Telecommunication Union, n.d.; Lunden, 2012). In the UK, around 16% of the population or about 10 million people were active Twitter users – the vast majority on mobile – making the UK the world’s fourth largest Twitter market in 2012 after the US, Brazil and Japan (Arthur, 2012). While by far not the most popular social network platform in 2012 (Facebook is globally number one), Twitter was rising in prominence and in numbers, all of which was rapidly fueled by fast mobile growth worldwide. In addition, global events such as the Arab uprisings beginning in late 2010, and the 2011 London riots built interest and knowledge around Twitter, firmly placing the platform into the media spotlight and onto people’s social imaginaries.

The London Olympic Games were yet another event that would help to cement Twitter into the connected viewing media landscape, as well as to launch it to its initial public offering (IPO) in 2013. Nonetheless, the presence of Twitter brought a unique, added challenge to the organizers of the Games. As the time to the anticipated London 2012 opening ceremony drew near, the organizers were scrambling to keep the details of the event a surprise, while still incorporating the social media platform and claiming the title of *the* social media Games.
Reportedly, on the day of the content leaks from the opening ceremony (1st July, 2012), Lord Coe, chairman of the London Organising Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG), was at a charity cricket match when people came to him and said, “I just hope we don’t know everything,” (Bannerman & O’Connor, 2012, n.p.). Consequently, there was an urgent brainstorming meeting about how to best contain the element of surprise for a few weeks longer and it was then that Jackie Brock Doyle, Director of Communication for LOCOG, came up with the idea of a social media campaign titled #savethesurprise. An interviewee later informed me that some of Jackie’s colleagues were initially skeptical about the success of this campaign and certainly about being able to contain upcoming live, dress rehearsal audiences from divulging further details about the ceremony on social media (Alex Balfour, LOCOG Member, Personal Communication, March 15, 2016).

Nevertheless, the #savethesurprise campaign was softly launched on July 1, 2012 through a tweet by Lord Coe (see Image 3.1) and quickly circulated on Twitter by a number of event staff, Games volunteers (who were called ‘Games Makers’), and a small community of their Twitter friends (see Image 3.2).

Image 3.1: First tweet with #savethesurprise hashtag
Lord Coe’s tweet is a demonstration of how from the beginning this campaign was framed around fairness and selflessness; emotions that became central to the activation of mass participation in the socio-cultural domain of #savethesurprise.

Image 3.2: Early spread of #savethesurprise hashtag

The problem of saving the opening ceremony details a surprise had been intensified by UK newspapers like the Daily Mail printing photographs of private rehearsals by employing helicopters to hover over the enclosed Olympic arena in order to obtain first pictures of the set (see Image 3.2 and 3.3). Thus, much of the early #savethesurprise exchanges on Twitter and on the subsequent (private) Facebook group were an angered response to the wider media industry not cooperating with the Olympic media event plan.
– or respecting the organizers’ and volunteers’ hard work. Indeed, anger and frustration emerged as key motivators behind much participation in the following case studies, too.

Image 3.3. Tweets against UK media’s handling of the Games

The buzz generated by #savethesurprise’s soft launch likely left the Games’ organizers relieved and calculatedly optimistic about the future of the campaign, which then had its hard launch during the first (Monday, July 23rd, 2012), and second (Wednesday, July 25th, 2012) public dress rehearsal for the opening ceremony. Director of the opening ceremony, Danny Boyle49, appeared himself on stage to describe the idea and to ask over 100,000 total spectators not to tweet – or post other social media content – about any of the details of the rehearsals:

It’s amazing that you’re here. You look wonderful as the guys say. Just to

49 Danny Boyle is the celebrated British director of hit films like Trainspotting, The Beach, Slumdog Millionaire and Steve Jobs.
say, you’re the first people in the world to see the show. And even we haven’t seen it… Because without you there isn’t a show. Without an audience there isn’t a show…

One of the things that I wanted to ask you as you sit there and as you go home is to do what we’ve put there on the screens, which is to save the surprise. Now I know it’s very difficult but we’ve asked all our volunteers, some amazing people, I’ll tell you about them in a second, to save the surprise for everyone else really. And we want to show you the show so that we can see how it goes with an audience and if you would not tweet and not post, especially pictures, we’d really, really, really appreciate it. It would make you part of our show. I know you’ve already contributed to it…

(Danny Boyle, Dress Rehearsal Speech, July 23, 2012)

The accompanying hashtag for this campaign was also prominently displayed on large screens surrounding the Olympic stadium during both rehearsals.

Image 3.4: #savethesurprise hashtag displayed across Olympic stadium screens during opening ceremony rehearsals
In turn, some 100,000 live spectators complied with Boyle’s wish to save the surprise and over 25,000 people used the hashtag in various creative, yet tight-lipped tweets about the event. #savethesurprise became a trending topic on Twitter, and London’s 2012 Olympic Games became the most widely viewed television event in American history and one of the most widely viewed internationally (Nielsen Sport Insights, 2013). Globally, the Games had an estimated audience of 3.6 billion television viewers – around half of the world’s population! (IOC marketing report, 2012) – and a new media following of about 4.7 million people across Twitter, Facebook and YouTube.

To the best of my knowledge, #savethesurprise became the first case of a mass social media secret and one, which was a huge success at that. Notably, since this campaign, numerous other events and organizations have adopted the hashtag for their own purposes but perhaps, more strikingly, every year since the opening ceremony of the 2012 Olympic Games users have continued to gather digitally on its anniversary and to relive their experiences by tweeting again under the hashtag #savethesurprise. How did this campaign work and what motivated people to create content and to respond so well? To answer these questions, the following sections analytically illustrate the three domains forming the architectures of participation for this media event.

The Institutional Domain

The institutional domain refers to the relatively fixed and decided ahead of time contractual elements governing the types of audience participation and communication allowed during the Games. This domain also captures the intricate policies governing the conduct of LOCOG, its staff, the accredited Olympic media, and the digitally-participating
world. Subsequently, it concerns any Olympic audience member publishing Games-related content on any publicly available medium, such as Twitter or YouTube.

Despite Beijing 2008 being the first Games to use YouTube and Vancouver 2010 being the first to use Twitter and Facebook, London 2012 was strongly committed to channeling the image of being the first ‘full’ social media Olympics. Indeed, what LOCOG and the IOC did do, was to make social media a much more integral part of the overall communications strategy for the London Games and for the Olympic brand (Sir Craig Reedie and Emma Boggis, Personal Communication, July 3, 2015). They also contracted British Telecom (BT) to build the world’s largest high-density wireless network covering the Olympic events’ locations to stimulate various communication during Games time. In doing so, however, they also codified many of the rules of engagement through direct, private media partnerships and via the creation and dissemination of strict policies for Olympic content use and creation (Graeme Menzies, Director of Communication, Vancouver Olympics Organizing Committee, Personal Communication, February 18, 2016). To add to this, LOCOG, like Twitter at the time, also had the freedom of being a private company and so did not fall under the Freedom of Information Act. In other words, beneath what was seemingly a very open and decentralized opportunity for people to participate in the 2012 Olympics via social media – and certainly a strong desire on behalf of the organizers to promote this image – lay a set of stringent legal and organizational policies.

50 Notably, London was the first Olympic host city to set a price for their broadcasting rights for the 1948 Olympic Games and thus, began the institutionalization of the media spectacle of the Games many years ago (Puig, 2010).
Still, these Games-related policies existed within an even broader legal infrastructure; a nation-wide communications ecosystem designed to give maximum protection to the Olympic Games’ intellectual property. “In 2006, the UK Parliament passed the London Olympics Games and Paralympic Games Act which, together with the Olympic Symbol Protection Act 1995, offers a level of protection to the Games and their sponsors over and above that already promised by existing copyright or contract law,” (Bodhani, 2012, p. 36). Therefore, in spite of the best attempts for transparent, inclusive and participatory action and rhetoric put forth by LOCOG, London’s 2012 games turned into “the strictest Games to date when it comes to protecting broadcasting rights and sponsorship deals from major backers alike,” (Bodhani, 2012, p. 36). Subsequently, social media uses and content also fell within these deeper and certainly less visible legal safety nets.

One example of how the institutional domain supported the success of the #savethesurprise campaign was through the swift takedown of the only known leakages of dress rehearsal content: two spectator videos that were uploaded onto YouTube. (LOCOG itself ‘leaked’ a third, 30-second clip on YouTube from the rehearsals). Both user videos were immediately removed due to ‘copyright infringements’ (Shergold, 2012) and were replaced with a message stating: "This video contains content from the International Olympic Committee, who has blocked it on copyright grounds," (Shergold, 2012, n.p.). Remarkably, in the short amount of time that they were online, these brief videos also managed to receive some negative comments from other YouTube users, criticizing their owner(s) for posting dress rehearsal content against the norms of the #savethesurprise
Finally, organizational secrecy was additionally reinforced through non-disclosure agreements that all LOCOG employees and those working at the dress rehearsals had to sign (Amina, London Games Time volunteer, Personal Communication, September 10, 2015). It is worth noting here that the above described stringent, legal-organizational policies illuminate wider issues of transparency surrounding the Olympic movement. Such issues have a longstanding history within the IOC and are certainly not exclusive to London’s social media case (Flyvbjerg & Stewart, 2012) – or to the Olympics as a media organization alone. Nevertheless, even with these rigid, legal protections in place ahead of time, the organizers for the dress rehearsals of the opening ceremony could not realistically stop their live audiences from using social media any more than they could police all uses of social platforms. Not only would such an act be in direct contradiction with their desire to be the social media Games, but they would also have no direct legal grounds upon which to limit users’ ability to tweet textual information about what they saw. Therefore, the #savethesurprise campaign emerged as an answer to this problem and in turn, its success is not to be attributed to institutional measures alone. The next section illustrates another important piece of the puzzle comprising #savethesurprise’s architectures of participation; the technical domain.

The Technical Domain

By mediating users’ practices and data and thus, allowing for the appearance of a cohesive digital audience, Twitter and its hashtag became the direct technological enablers for participation in this media event. On a practical level, the #savethesurprise campaign
would not have been possible without web 2.0 technologies like Twitter, which are as much technical configurations as they are cultural sets of practices and ideologies (Barbrook & Cameron, 1996; John, 2013). Here, I discuss both of these aspects of the technical domain, as well as how they contributed to the #savethesurprise campaign, arguing that in a Latourian sense (2005), Twitter became a non-human actor and thus, one of the key catalysts behind the campaign’s success. I also discuss the notion of transmedia content flow, and the relationship between Twitter and more established media like television and newspapers in media events.

The hashtag functionality is perhaps, the key technological capacity that facilitated participation in #savethesurprise. Through its aggregator algorithm the hashtag allowed for the appearance of group cohesion by reifying an incoherent mass into an articulate and semi-translucent whole; it thus enabled Twitter equipped individuals to feel like they were members of the media event. It also gave the public appearance of some kind of social order. While the hashtag functionality is central to all three case studies, it takes on particular significance here, due to the collaborative, group dynamic the Games’ organizers tried to foster around #savethesurprise. In the words of Balfour, Head of New Media for London 2012, the communicative challenge posed by these Games was “not about organizing an event, it’s about orchestrating an atmosphere,” (Personal Communication, April 6, 2016). The hashtag became particularly pronounced as a technical tool, used to orchestrate a specific, communal atmosphere.

Nonetheless, participation via this hashtag came preloaded with practical and ideological factors, specific to the context of 2012. For instance, a significant portion of those tweeting waited until they got home from the stadium to do so:
This could be due to a number of practical reasons, including hesitation over the Twitter mobile app, no active account, limited mobile data plans, lack of knowledge about the free public wifi at the stadium, or simply no smartphones available on hand, meaning live audience members had to wait until they got to a computer at home to tweet. On the one hand, this technical limitation could be seen as a hindrance to effective participation in the #savethesurprise campaign; for one, I did not set up a Twitter account until after the Olympics, meaning I could not have participated directly myself. On the other hand, this technical limitation also worked in favor of the organizers by perhaps, preventing some additional content leaks.

The participation in #savethesurprise was also largely in the form of first-person statements with a large portion of tweets focused around what a particular individual had just recently experienced.
This type of tweeting had been partially conditioned by the platform and its early prompt of ‘what are you doing?’ as an inspiration to get people creating content. First, ‘what are you doing?’ prompts an up-to-date style response of activities and second, it asks for a personal rendition of acts in the form of ‘I…’ thus, potentially, shaping the overall content one will produce. This type of content creation can also be read within the wider style of a highly individualized and generally personalized culture of expression around social media (Barbrook & Cameron, 1996; van Dijck, 2013). In short, this shows that both practical and ideological factors shaped the technical domain, which contributed toward the creation of specific architectures of participation.

Through its algorithmic affordances and limitations Twitter’s hashtag functionality further shaped the experience of what was seen and not seen (for a discussion on platforms and Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) see Gillespie, 2010; 2017; and Lahey, 2016, respectively). The platform also served as an informative source for the experiences and actions of several parties beyond the direct campaign participants. In a sense, #savethesurprise worked as a double agent since it at once became a user-driven advertisement for the Olympic Games’ opening ceremony, allowing an extended audience to hear about the Games via Twitter, and it also allowed LOCOG and various sponsors and media entities to monitor the spreading of ‘the secret’. Indeed, the IOC had confirmed in their social media guidelines release that they would “continue to monitor Olympic on-line
content to ensure that the integrity of rights-holding broadcasters and sponsor rights as well as the Olympic Charter is maintained,” (IOC Social Media Guidelines, 2011). This alerts us to what is perhaps, a darker, but equally important side of media events and social media participation; a highly surveilled and securitized space.

Of course, Twitter is not the only technology making up the technical domain. Furthermore, the interjection of Twitter into the Olympics communication milieu actually reinforced an environment of transmedia storytelling and content flow (Jenkins, 2006). #savethesurprise was conceived due to what was perceived as inappropriate content leaks from one medium, UK newspapers, and served to redirect the narrative attention to social platforms like Twitter and Facebook (refer back to Image 3.2). After a short while the campaign generated sufficient buzz that news about it eventually made its way back into mainstream media, all while building excitement about the broadcast of the actual Olympic ceremony (see image 3.5 below).

Image 3.5: Screenshot from The Telegraph newspaper headline

London 2012 Olympics: How Danny Boyle got 60,000 fans to keep mum over opening ceremony dress rehearsal

In the age of Twitter, Facebook and 24 hour news, getting 60,000 people to keep details of the London 2012 Olympic opening ceremony secret should surely be an impossible task.
In essence, audience participation in the #savethesurprise campaign could be understood as an action of the temporary redirection of media flow (this idea is addressed further in case study two, specifically). However, despite the narrative and platform diversions, the hashtag campaign ultimately worked to reinforce the traditional logic of media events by igniting people, either from buzz on Twitter or exposure to newspaper headlines, to watch the Olympic Games opening ceremony live on television:

Subsequently, the technological domain not only enabled a social media campaign to take place (no matter how constrained it was) but in doing so, also reinforced the centrality of television as the traditional and central platform for media events (Hutchins & Sanderson, 2017).
The Socio-Cultural Domain

The socio-cultural domain refers to the participants in the #savethesurprise campaign and to their culturally laden practices. Thanks to the creative audience engagement on social media, it is within this domain that a crucial transformation took place; #savethesurprise went from being a top-down organizational strategy only, or what de Certeau (1984) would refer to as simply a ‘strategy’, to a bottom-up, viral success composed of numerous audience tactics. Indeed, it was certainly possible that the live audiences would simply comply with the organizers’ requests not to divulge any of the dress rehearsal contents without passionately adopting the campaign’s hashtag. (There was only one case of an unfavorable sentiment expressed toward #savethesurprise in a tweet in my sample.) Still, a more worrying scenario for the organizers reasonably could have been that the audiences did not comply, in which case the content leakage issue would have been greatly exacerbated. Instead, the behaviors and desired outcome of both parties aligned and in a short period of time, Twitter users adopted the #savethesurprise hashtag, creatively generated buzz about the dress rehearsals, developed a group aesthetic of content creation, and even policed others, whom they thought were transgressing that community aesthetic and its implied norms. In other words, audiences voluntarily adopted ritual-like patterns of behavior. Below, I explore how and importantly, why the campaign worked as it did through the two emerging socio-cultural sub-themes of fair play and creative citizenship.

My analysis yielded fair play as one key theme, which was at the heart of the campaign and the audiences’ participation. This is a compound word, of which both

\footnote{The official staff involved in the production of the Games does not fall within this layer because although they were privy to the same information and in some cases more, they had to comply with a different set of rules that were specifically addressed under the legal-organizational layer.}
segments are important; ‘Fair’ refers to the perception of just and equitable actions and ‘play’ conjures up images of fun and competition but also underlying game rules. However, before we delve into how fair play became a central theme in this campaign, it is worth unpacking who the central players of the socio-cultural layer were.

The audience members, by and large, were select individuals who already had some form of commitment to the Olympic movement. They were typically students, like me, or citizens who worked in a wide range of organizations linked to the preparations of hosting London’s Olympic Games. Consequently, the majority of the people physically present at the event already had a base-level commitment to the wider success of the Olympics – and sometimes to working with one another, too. The very fact that one in six tweets from my sample, or around 17%, were directed at another person (another user’s handle was tagged in the text), and so were part of a conversation, shows a significant level of network density or interconnection, that is atypical for large scale media events. Indeed, as the other two case studies will show, there is generally a low level of ‘talk’ amongst Twitter users. Here is one example of a conversation taken from the second dress rehearsal, which illustrates an exchange between volunteers and a spectator:
This social connection allowed for a level of identification with others and with the #savethesurprise media event beyond what could be expected from a crowd of randomly selected spectators. Thus, the findings of this case study are consistent with other work on social networks ranging from the Arab Spring protests (Papacharissi, 2014), to projects of creative citizenship (Hargreaves & Hartley, 2016), where offline social connections are consistently a key factor for online social success. Weak-ties, as typically engendered through social media connections, are apt at coordinating and reinforcing some social action but it is the strong ties, like real offline connections and shared experiences and struggles, that lead to a sense of community and any significant social action, which can certainly be enhanced through social media (Bond et al., 2012). #savethesurprise became a blend of the two; both weak and strong ties comprised its success but the latter, were certainly at the core of the community experience.
It is worth highlighting that whereas access to the actual opening ceremony easily ranged over £2,250 ($3,000), the tickets given out for the dress rehearsals were free. In a sense, these tickets were a way of saying ‘thank you’ to those who worked in some capacity to prepare London for the Games. Yet, this access came accompanied by the social expectation to do one’s fair share in making the event a success. For example, Danny Boyle’s introductory speech to the live audiences (segment shown on pages 101-102) underscored what an important part of the show the dress rehearsal audiences were and, how their saving of the contents a surprise would be the fair thing to do for everyone who had worked hard for the event, and for all of the ‘less fortunate’ audience members who had to wait until the actual televised opening of the Games to see the ceremony. This very appeal to fairness is culturally significant in this context since the notion of fairness is a deeply rooted British value (Andrews & Mycock, 2008; Yuval-Davis, 2007). The British
Council itself advocates that treating others “with fairness” is a prerequisite for permanent residency or citizenship in the UK (British Council, n.d.). Thus, from the very start, #savethesurprise was socially contextualized and centered around a sense of selflessness in the name of a bigger good. (Some scholars have even likened the sport-context rhetoric of being selfless in the name of your country to a kind of patriotic appeal that is not so different to war-time calls of duty (Rowe & Stevenson, 2006).)

Of course, the special access to the dress rehearsals and the opportunity to partake in the Twitter secret was accompanied by the prestige and exclusivity of having received a first look at an event the world was awaiting to see. As Simmel (1906) and Marx and Muschert (2009) have written, being in possession of secret information is a source of prestige that symbolizes a person’s importance. Nonetheless, since technically speaking, anyone could partake in the digital rendition of this event by simply using the hashtag #savethesurprise – and as will be noted later, some people did just that – this meant that participants who were physically present had to be creative in their tweets to signal that they were actually at the rehearsals. Here, we enter into the territory of the second part of the phrase ‘fair play’.
Many of the social media users of #savethesurprise exhibited a dose of playfulness, a teasing behavior and enjoyment in their tweets. Indeed, a significant body of digital media research notes playful or ludic engagement as the norm; as behavior built into our media culture (Burgess, 2006; Highfield, 2017; Wilson, 2008).

Some spread humorous misinformation about the events while others posted obscured visuals (see image 3.8).

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52 Image from @aspender
In order to create playful tweets, however, participants also had to project who their audience members were. As noted earlier, the opening ceremony’s director Danny Boyle was instrumental in fostering an imagined, wider community by asking the live dress rehearsal audiences to consider those who had yet to see the opening ceremony and thus, to project the potential audiences of their Olympic tweets. As several scholars have noted (Baym, 2013; Napoli, 2011), every media audience is, in the initial instance, an imagined construct. Since the #savethesurprise campaign unfolded digitally, in a way that its participants could not see the totality of one another, and since the opening ceremony of the Games was a high-profile global event, Twitter users could expect that their tweets might generate a wider interest outside of their own social networks and so, had to engage in a level of audience projection. This process is important because it becomes a soft
structural factor that shapes people’s content creating behaviors and ultimately, the socio-cultural domain forming #savethesurprise’ architecture of participation.

Marwick (2011) uses the term ‘imagined audiences’ to describe this process and proposes three distinct tactics users adopt to tailor content to their imagined audiences: (1) stratifying content to appeal to different audiences, (2) concealing subjects that would not be suitable for a mass audience and, (3) simultaneously, trying to maintain an air of personal authenticity during communication. Variations of each of these tactics could be seen in the #savethesurprise users’ tweets and they all certainly required some level of imagination and digital creativity.

A further way that norms were established and the rules for stratifying content for projected audiences were created was through group-policing. In situations where Twitter users seemed to transgress the emergent community norms and practices of fair play, other Twitter members often reprimanded them by engaging in policing tactics. Note the responses the tweet in Image 3.9 below received:
There became a sense of community and an established aesthetic of play built around socio-cultural barriers and boundaries.

The second important sub-theme to emerge from the socio-cultural layer consists of a mixture of patriotism and creativity; it is the hybrid form of ‘creative citizenship’\textsuperscript{53}. As Hargreaves and Hartley (2016) suggest, the idea of creative citizenship “embraces the

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\textsuperscript{53} Hartley uses the concept of “silly citizenship” (2010) to express a similar idea, albeit with less of a focus on the roles of active audiences in constituting it.
tensions of citizenship as a source of obligations on the one hand, and as a source of playfulness on the other,” (p. 256). Being a part of the #savethesurprise campaign put audiences at the intersection of both.

The sense of citizenship or belonging was a central motivator for several of the #savethesurprise participants whom I interviewed. Most strikingly, perhaps, was the pride, belonging and national identity felt by those who had not even been to the dress rehearsals themselves but still felt strongly enough to either retweet #savethesurprise content from others or to create related tweets of their own. One of the men I spoke with, who was not at the rehearsals himself but worked close by to the stadium, said that it was a privilege and honor for him to be able to showcase the UK to the rest of world and he felt that being a digital part of #savethesurprise was an opportunity to do so (Steve, Personal Communication, March 5, 2016). Notably, this sentiment was largely echoed across the border from LOCOG staff and volunteers, as well as the general public (Alex Balfour, LOCOG Member, Personal Communication, April 6, 2016). In this case, it was the call
upon the global, a real or imagined evocation of the world’s eyes upon London, that ultimately reinforced a sense of the local.

While the relationship between sport, nationalism and patriotism has been well documented (Bainer, 2001; Tomlinson & Young, 2006), and an argument can be made that it is easy to fall into a type of ‘sporting nationalism’, I would argue that for the most part, the #savethesurprise tweets were good hearted and patriotic; they showed a support for one’s nation – but not at the expense or defamation of another. In turn, these findings (and the following case studies) support Imre (2009), who points out that somewhat paradoxically, “participatory digital possibilities have actually rekindled belonging to national communities,” (p. 16). The success of the #savethesurprise suggests that contrary to notions of post-state and post-national identity in a world of globalized, digital interactions, social media and social networks can actually reinforce notions of place and citizenship – albeit, as this case shows, via various playful means.

Furthermore, the case of #savethesurprise serves as reaffirmation of the idea that creativity, understood as the generation of novel ideas and practices (Amabile, 1988), is likely nourished more by internal motivations than by external ones (Amabile, 1988; Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013). The digital audience members partaking in the #savethesurprise campaign are one empirical case, which cannot be explained by monetary incentives alone since those who partook received no direct compensation for saving the surprise and frequently expressed national pride and fun as the most important motivators for their behavior.
Discussion and summary

In this chapter I unpacked the specific architectures of participation that allowed #savethesurprise to become a successful campaign and case of organizer-audience co-construction. I argue that although strict legal and technical beams undergirded the campaign, it was ultimately a localized appeal to the socio-cultural factors of fair play and creative citizenship that allowed #savethesurprise to work as well as it did. In turn, I conclude that elements of play and patriotism, as well as frustration felt at the leakage of information, were strong factors and motivators in shaping the ensuing ritualistic social media participation.

Of course, whether the initial leak of opening ceremony information was genuine or yet another clever part of the #savethesurprise campaign is debatable. Nonetheless, it does not make the architectures of participation enabling the campaign any less ingenious and it certainly does not diminish the creative participation of audiences or their feelings of belonging, playfulness and pride. Therefore, contrary to notions of modern day media events being primarily framed as contentious, disruptive and disastrous (Katz & Liebes, 2007; Kraidy & Mourad, 2010), the atmosphere created and orchestrated around #savethesurprise was quite reminiscent of Durkheimian notions of ritualistic, affirming and communal events. Nonetheless, there are two important caveats to be made.

First, London’s Olympic Games presented what was, for the most part, one of the last grand mass media event narratives of unity in the UK before the Scottish Independence Referendum of 2014, the Brexit vote in 2016, and a sleuth of other politicized events, such as the increasingly unsustainable budget of the National Health Service (NHS); an organization highly celebrated in the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games. Of course,
this projected unity of the 2012 Games was also a highly manipulated image. While a successful media event, the actual hosting of the 2012 Olympics was itself strife with problems, which revolved around unsustainable urban development, increased militarization of everyday life, gentrification of London’s poorest boroughs, questionable financing, and a quietly unfolding British cycling doping scandal. Therefore, the ritualistic experience described here was a mediated one – and certainly not one felt equally across the UK.

Needless to say, few of the issues with the 2012 Games made any significant and resounding headlines nationally or globally (or in the tweets captured for analysis) which, instead, were focused around the successes of London. This bias in global event representation, an intensely political act, becomes exacerbated when compared to the Western (particularly British and American) mass media coverage of the following Sochi or Rio Olympics which, before they had begun, were already framed as problematic, dangerous and corrupt; guilty, until the largely impossible verdict of being proven innocent. Thus, as we revisit the notion of ritualistic, celebratory media events we may wish to add a geopolitical clarification; the extent of the positive, ceremonial emotion attached to a given event is directly correlated to the interplay between the location of the event, and the voices representing it.

Second, the apparent alignment of the audience-organizer interests in the #savethesurprise’s event should not obscure varying motivations and power dynamics embedded within. For instance, rooted within the theme of fair play is not only a moral appeal; along with Danny Boyle’s culturally-laden, official line that social media users ought to be respectful by not divulging any spoilers to those who had yet to see the opening
ceremony and those who had worked hard to put it on, ran a parallel, unspoken economic imperative, too. It is easy to imagine why the organizers and the sponsors of the opening ceremony were anxious about sustaining the widest possible audience interest for the actual televised event. Further, the organizers’ and IOC’s work with platforms like YouTube to take down any materials that did infringe upon copyrights show a level of power over the user generated content and beyond individual users.

Yet again, focusing only on these sides of the story would miss an important part of the architectures of participation behind the #savethesurprise campaign; the valuable socio-cultural domain and the very real creative citizenship experiences of those, who were an active part of the audience. #savethesurprise served as a valve for the channeling of loosely structured audience activity and emotions, as well as an impetus for the public enactment of creative citizenship, successfully casting audiences in the new roles of playful guardians of a secret and important Olympic ambassadors, responsible for the events’ success. This overall atmosphere was not simply a top-down, orchestrated spectacle but rather, the synergy between clever institutional and technical campaign engineering, and the product of real acts of audiencing in the social media enabled era.

In the following case study, we turn to Sochi’s 2014 #NBCFail; an example that showcases a rather different, contentious relationship between social media audiences’ and organizers’ rendition of a media event. With this case study I critically examine the effectiveness of Twitter in shaping media events, and question how this efficacy ought to be conceptualized and measured in the first place.
CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDY 2 Sochi, Russia: 2014

The rise of #NBCFail

The second case study is concerned with the Sochi 2014 Olympics, which became an example of a contentious media event; one, where audiences used social media to re-narrate an official televised broadcast of the Games. In doing so however, social media audiences also, somewhat ironically, served to reaffirm the power of television as the main narrative producer. In what follows I introduce #NBCFail, a hashtag and practice that carries socio-political significance beyond this particular case, and make a few notes about method. I then proceed to position audiences’ roles in the #NBCFail media event through the critical lens of active resistance (Fiske, 1986; Hall, 1980; Morley, 1980; Warner, 2002). Next, I describe the communications context of 2014 and critically unpack the architectures of participation that resulted in a seemingly contentious media event. I conclude with some broader remarks that specifically address research sub-question three; how can we use the vantage point of global audiences to better understand media events, and vice versa, via a conceptualization of the effectiveness and success of social media in shaping media events.
Introduction

For two weeks during the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympic Games (7-23 February, 2014) viewers across the world participated in the #NBCFail hashtag. While protests against the Olympics and controversies about their broadcasts are nothing new (Blackburn-Dwyer & McMaster, 2018; Fuller, 2014; Sabo, Jansen, Tate, Duncan, & Leggett, 1996), what is new about #NBCFail is that it is arguably the first hashtag specifically created to serve as a consumer watchdog against a corporation. In this case, the corporation #NBCFail was trolling and patrolling was NBC, a subsidiary of Comcast, which is the largest broadcasting and cable telecommunications conglomerate in the world (Institute of Media and Communication Policy, 2017). In turn, #NBCFail became a complementary and contentious hashtag at the heart of the Sochi Games media event. Importantly, it allowed its users, often via playful means, to try out patterns of interaction since 2008 that have ended up penetrating many aspects of our modern day media consumption and civic participation (Jenkins, 2006).

By taking a multiple-method approach to critically trace the evolution of #NBCFail in English and Russian as a comparison point, I study how various contradictions in the broadcast of the Olympic media event gave rise to #NBCFail (see Table 4.1 for a list of data sources). In particular, I argue that the unveiling of the work behind NBC’s mediation
of the Olympic event gave rise to #NBCFail, which simultaneously came to present a
critique and a continuation of traditional media events logic. Furthermore, architectures of
participation behind #NBCFail were constituted by visible institutionalization, a number
of technical modalities, and socio-culturally based feelings of patriotism and playfulness.

Table 4.1: Case Study Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total unique #NBCFail tweets scraped from Twitter’s archive</td>
<td>1,381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1,083 in English and 298 in Russian). Tweets from: 7-23 February, 2014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with professionals and Twitter users (see methodology for full list)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy documents and official reports</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal observations and digital ethnography throughout Olympics time</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The critical cultural studies concept of resistance, as exercised in media text
encoding and decoding (Hall, 1980; Morley, 1980; Fiske, 1986; Warner, 2002), helps to
guide my analysis. In brief, this type of resistance is an ordinary yet politically infused act,
understood as the articulation, re-articulation, and reconstruction of meaning (Durham,
1999). In the context of this dissertation, resistance to media events takes on an active and
loosely collaborative content producing dimension, which results in the creation of new
media texts and narratives (see for example the concept of ‘active spectatorship’, as
expressed in Kreiss, Meadows & Remensperger, 2015). This framing of resistance also
alleviates some of the concerns about the power of the concept if practiced only at the
individual, meaning-making level (Fuchs, 2011; Langlois, 2013).
The findings from this case study raise a couple of important issues that I address towards the end: first, how effective were #NBCFail’s architectures of participation in resisting, shaping and (re)directing the Olympic media event narrative flow? Second, how should the effectiveness or work of architectures of participation be conceptualized in the first place? Third, how much of a break from traditional, broadcast media events do social media enabled events present? These questions help to respond to research sub-question three: how can we use the vantage point of global audiences to better understand media events and vice versa? Next, I situate this case study within the 2014 communicative landscape, contextualize the rise of #NBCFail, further explicate the data sources used, and explore the three domains of #NBCFail’s architectures of participation before returning to the questions outlined above.

**Sochi, Russia 2014: The communication landscape**

2014 saw the Olympic Games move East and to a country that remains embedded in Cold War era global relations. As Giffard and Rivenburgh (2000) have argued, this geographical situation of the 2014 Games is not insignificant for fostering an antagonistic predisposition for Western media in portraying the big event. For instance, despite many reports in Western media outlets about the strict censorship of reporters’ practices (i.e. Dewey & Fisher in The Washington Post, 2014), the IOC and the Sochi Organizing Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games (SOCOG)’s digital media guidelines actually became laxer for the Sochi Olympics than they were two years earlier for the Games in London. Nonetheless, simultaneous rising tensions in Ukraine and the Kremlin’s

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54 The last Olympics (summer) to be held in Moscow, Russia, were in 1980 and were boycotted by the US; an act, which was retaliated by a Russian boycott to the 1984 (summer) Los Angeles Olympics in the US.
release of its anti-gay propaganda statement contributed to an overall anticipation of Sochi’s Olympic doom in the West. In Russia, however, the Games were overwhelmingly portrayed as a success, which was accompanied by majority public approval and support for the project (VCIOM Russian Public Opinion Research Center, National interview poll, 2013) – although, the same report does show lower approval ratings via social media samples.

By 2014 Twitter itself had become more engrained in the world’s communications landscape (see Table 4.2 for a comparative overview); for example, the word hashtag had finally entered into the Merriam Webster dictionary, 7 years after its creation and adoption in the current format. Twitter was also better established in the Olympic communication milieu; for instance, NBC promoted the creation of its partnership with Twitter, which it described as “a different perspective of the Olympics,” that allowed users “to engage, speak about and cover the Olympics in original ways,” (NBC Sports Press Release, February 7, 2014, n.p.). In addition, the world had a more nuanced perspective of Twitter by 2014. Its initial public offering (IPO) had not been as successful as anticipated and it was still not making money as a platform (in fact, Twitter will not make money (net profit) until 2018 (Winkler, 2018)). Twitter had also slowed down its new user acquisition and the general, democratic hype around social media had somewhat subsided.

In Russia, in particular, the leader in social media is VKontakte, a Russian language platform very similar to Facebook. In fact, the top two social media sites in Russia are national, Russian language platforms, with Twitter coming in 5th place by popularity. Nonetheless, in 2012 Twitter announced a partnership with Yandex (the most popular search site in Russia) which has the capacity to show tweets, in almost real time, alongside
other relevant search results (Prodhan, 2012); thus, by 2014 Twitter is becoming more culturally embedded in the Russian media milieu.

Table 4.2: Comparative communication landscape 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>% Internet Penetration</th>
<th>%Social Media Penetration</th>
<th>Twitter users</th>
<th>% Twitter users from population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>140,000,000</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>9 million</td>
<td>~7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>376,000,000</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>48 million</td>
<td>~13%(^{55})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global</td>
<td>6.8 billion</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>250 million</td>
<td>~9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: WeAreSocial 2014; US Census Bureau; CNNIC; Internet World Stats; Statista

The broadcasting of the Sochi Olympics saw, for the first time, a majority of television viewers in the US using a second screen device to accompany their regular television watching of the Games (Clavio, 2016, p. 743). The result was a connected viewing experience with a publicly contested and renegotiated Games coverage – perhaps, not the ‘different perspective’ and original engagement NBC had hoped for. With this case study I pay particular attention to how largely US (English speaking) audiences entered into the #NBCFail discourse, often via playful means, to re-narrate what was seen on the official NBC broadcast of the opening ceremony and to piece together what was not. I also use some Russian tweets as a point of comparison, although case study three goes into more depth on intercultural differences in architectures of participation by looking comparatively at English, Brazilian, and Russian Twitter use. The findings contribute to

\(^{55}\) In 2014 Twitter is America’s second most popular social network after Facebook.
the dissertation’s overall research question by allowing us to use the vantage point of global audiences to empirically situate social media enabled events in relation to traditional media events (Dayan & Katz, 1992). By teasing out the potential and limitations of social media in creating media landscape change, we may also turn to ask: what is a successful media event in a social media era?

Table 4.3: Broad overview of data: English tweets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tweet Classification</th>
<th>Number of tweets</th>
<th>% of Total tweets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Original</td>
<td>759</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retweet</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversations @ someone</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct comments @NBC</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media/URLs (very few of which were photos ~1%)</td>
<td>712</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In total, I obtained 1,083 tweets in English (or all that were publicly available for the select dates) through the Twitter archive (see Table 4.3). Due to the disproportionate number of English to Russian tweets available, I decided to sample the English tweets by time period, so as to still yield the most content (see Table 4.4), yet be closer in proportion to the Russian data. The dates chosen included the opening and closing ceremony weekends, as well as the weekend in between.
Table 4.4: English tweets by date

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Number of tweets in sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7-9 Feb</td>
<td>544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-16 Feb</td>
<td>431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-23 Feb</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>1,083</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I obtained a total of 298 tweets in Russian using the hashtag #NBCFail. Because there were far fewer tweets available in Russian than in English, I did not sample them by time period but took all that were available between the dates of 7-23 February. In turn, I use these tweets as a loose comparison point between how #NBCFail developed in English versus Russian. In broad strokes, the vast majority (over 90%) of the Russian tweets surfaced between the 7-11th of February 2014 or, what was within four days of the opening ceremony. Unlike the English language tweets, and with the exception of a handful (less than 1%), all of these tweets were retweets of online media outlets such as RT or, Russian bloggers. Notably, the majority of the Twitter accounts appeared to belong to male or anonymous users and many have since been deleted, making follow up interviews a challenge. This challenge was present in case study three as well, raising questions about identity politics, reliability, and verification of online data (for a further discussion on digital politics of visibility and reliability see Kraidy, 2012).

56 RT, formerly known as Russian Today, is a Russian government funded television network headquartered in Moscow. It broadcasts and streams content in English worldwide, and is primarily directed at audiences outside of Russia, partly justifying the strategic, neutralizing name change in 2009.
#NBCFail

Nowadays, anti-corporate complaints and sarcastic corporate shaming are commonplace activities on social media platforms (Hogreve, Eller & Firmhofer, 2013; Makarem & Jae, 2016; McGraw, Warren & Kan, 2014). Yet, #NBCFail is precedent setting and important for a number of reasons. For one, it was likely the first hashtag to be specifically created and used as a media watchdog. In turn, #NBCFail became what is probably the first hashtag to emerge as a public pushback against corporate media writ large in the US, which is especially significant when we consider that the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) is the oldest major broadcast network in the country and commands the highest viewership and revenue in America. NBC is also a subsidiary of Comcast, the largest broadcasting and cable telecommunications conglomerate in the world (Institute of Media and Communication Policy, 2017), not to mention the largest Internet Service Provider in the US. As such, #NBCFail emerges as a modern, digital-day rendition of David and Goliath however, in this case, it is no longer just David but also Sam, Alexei and Venera... and they are using Twitter against Goliath.

While #NBCFail was originally created in 2008 as a means to complain about NBC’s Beijing Olympic coverage (see Image 4.1 below), for a number of reasons, including a lack of established and sufficiently diffused hashtag practices and a critical mass of participants on Twitter, it did not gain mainstream popularity until 2012. Nonetheless, this early start of #NBCFail is important because it was a precedent setting hashtag practice, which allowed its users to practice and establish patterns of interaction, which have since then become a staple in social media engagement for media events (for example, see #CNNFail; Cashmore, 2009), and consumer activism writ large.
Although the popularization of #NBCFail is attributed to Steven Marx during London’s 2012 Olympic Games (O’Hallarn & Shapiro, 2014; Steven Marx, Personal communication, March 3, 2017), the hashtag can actually be traced back to Chris Harrison on August 8th, 2008. Harrison used the hashtag before Twitter had launched their hyperlink hashtag functionality (Chris Harrison, Personal communication, February 22, 2017), which partly explains why #NBCFail did not gain much traction until the London Olympic Games, four years later.

Image 4.1: The first #NBCFail tweet

In our interview, Harrison noted that he had seen some of Twitter’s early adopters, primarily a community of web designers and developers, use hashtags before and he appreciated the added ease of searchability for words that were distinguished by the symbol. As for what prompted him to create #NBCFail, he said; “I know I was frustrated by the number of commercials that interrupted the Opening Ceremonies, and I likely used the hashtag tongue-in-cheek. Twitter didn't add actual hashtag support until nearly a year after this particular tweet was posted,” (Chris Harrison, Personal communication, February

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57 The #080808 hashtag refers to the start date of the Beijing opening Games; the 8th of August, 2008 (a very lucky combination of numbers according to the Chinese). Unlike #NBCFail, this hashtag still does not appear in blue and is not searchable in the same way because Twitter’s functionality is not set to work for hashtags beginning with numbers.
Thus, from the start, a playful element accompanied the hashtag’s underlying sense of contention.

The hashtag later gained mainstream popularity in 2012 when Steven Marx tweeted his frustration at not being able to watch Olympic coverage on the NBC app while traveling (Steven Marx, Personal communication, March 3, 2017).

Marx’ tweet with the hashtag #NBCFail (see Image 4.2 above) was retweeted by several people with larger followings. By July 29th, just two days after the opening ceremony, the hashtag had gained traction to over 20,000 other Twitter users (Laird, 2012) who were equally frustrated with the network’s broadcast or, who simply found it amusing (see image 4.3). The story was then quickly picked up by digital media news and entertainment company Mashable, which was also the first outlet to do an article that uncovered Marx as the man behind the hashtag (Laird, 2012). This article came out on July 30th, and was followed by a number of additional pieces, including an interview with Marx that in turn helped to propel #NBCFail further into the attention and mass use of many more people. Marx was also contacted to give interviews to a number of other outlets, including CBC and BBC (Steven Marx, Personal Communication, January 22, 2018).
While the 2008 Beijing Games saw the launch of #NBCFail, and the 2012 London Games initially propelled it into the spotlight, Sochi’s 2014 Olympics cemented the trend of using the hashtag as a media watchdog space and saw a number of contentious practices exacerbated due to the fact that the Games were held in an antagonized, non-Western country. The initial resistance driving the 2014 Twitter outputs during Sochi’s Games was again, based around NBC’s tape delayed coverage and some of their poor editorial decisions however, this time, (potentially due to Russia hosting the Games) the conversation went beyond consumer complaints and into questions of democracy and patriotism. The next sections explore the institutional, technical and socio-cultural domains framing the overall architectures of participation for the #NBCFail event.

The Institutional Domain

NBC’s mediation of the Sochi Games became problematic precisely because it became visible. In turn, this allowed for it to be deemed inappropriate by many people using the hashtag. NBC’s broadcast of the 2014 Sochi Games aired eight-and-a-half hours after the actual events in Russia for the US’ East Coast viewers – this was almost 5 hours
longer than NBC’s delay for the 2012 London Games\textsuperscript{58}. As Silverstone (2005) argues, media provide a framework for the ordering of time and space and by choosing to delay the opening ceremony of the Games NBC violated their own set of rules for ‘reality’. They also violated one of the key premises of media events; namely, that they are broadcast live.

![FAIL](https://example.com/fail.png)

According to the people using #NBCFail, the mediation of the Games was also problematic due to its editorial choices and NBC’s reporters were frequently and aggressively criticized. For instance, the interview with US Alpine Skier, Bode Miller, caused some outrage because after he won a gold medal, he was pressed to tears with questions about his deceased brother by an NBC reporter. Furthermore, despite the fact that the interview was not broadcast live, NBC still decided to air the full segment.

\textsuperscript{58} This is reminiscent of the delays experienced in the early days of Olympic broadcasting in the US; viewers had to wait several days until the tape recorded materials were sent over from Europe (Roche, 2017).
The editorial team’s revisions and scheduling decisions were also lamented and sometimes ridiculed visually and verbally:

Gaffes, like the mixing of the American and Russian flags in NBC’s graphics were quickly and sharply pointed out, and edits to the opening ceremony content were highlighted:
The latter point, Twitter reactions to the edits of the opening ceremony, is particularly important for a couple of reasons. First, it helps to explain the strong reemergence of #NBCFail during the Sochi Games and the activation of architectures of participation. The sentiment on Twitter regarding the opening ceremony edits came as “a response to the segmentation of the viewing audience, revealing not simply the fact that liveness was being mediated – which is itself uneventful – but also that access to that liveness was being limited by factors beyond simply a time delay,” (McNutt, 2013, p. 124). In other words, people realized that they were not being shown something (Andre, Personal Communication, March 6, 2017) and this is an issue I return to again under the ‘patriotism’ theme in the socio-cultural domain.

Second, the edits to the opening ceremony were also important because they stimulated specific types of resistant architectures of participation in response to NBC’s overt and inappropriate institutionalization of the Games. They were based around a loosely collective uncovering and piecing together of what had actually happened during
the Sochi Games versus what NBC had shown, which came in the form of a group identification, problematization and piecing together of the edited coverage. Put otherwise, viewers engaged in resistant decoding of NBC’s coverage via articulation, rearticulation and reconstruction:

In turn, it was revealed that NBC’s edits included the removal of the Soviet era act from the opening ceremony, the absence of the Olympic mascots, a missing performance by t.A.T.u (a supposedly gay Russian band), and the disappearance of the Russian police choir singing ‘Get Lucky’ (which later became a YouTube sensation but in a tragic airplane accident two years later, the majority of the choir members were killed). In addition, the IOC president, Thomas Bach’s speech was cut, although the almost five minutes long speech was shown in its entirety in most other countries. This was a particularly key omission because in this speech, Bach referred to the IOC being committed to equal human rights; “Yes, it is possible, even as competitors, to live together under one roof in harmony, with tolerance and without any form of discrimination for whatever reason,” (Bach, Sochi opening ceremony speech, 2014). In turn, audiences on Twitter responded:

*I see communism is alive and well in #Sochi2014. No not #Russia, But #NBC Ruling the broadcasting of winter games with an iron fist. #NbcFail*  
[@Us_Srb]

[This account and tweet have since been deleted]
The omission of President Bach’s tolerance speech specifically prompted some more serious and politically-imbued reactions on Twitter and raised an important question: if promoting human equality was a priority for the US and for Western democratic media broadly speaking, why did NBC edit out segments of the opening ceremony that specifically alluded to and supported this important cause? NBC’s response was that the editing decision was based around time and viewer interest.

In sum, if NBC’s television coverage of the Games was criticized for being overly and incorrectly institutionalized, the Twitter coverage was quite the opposite. The vast majority of #NBCFail tweets in both languages did appear to come from individuals with very few societal groups, such as human rights advocates, trying to coopt the #NBCFail hashtag. One notable exception was several tweets from the official account of RT (see footnote 56 on page 133), which took #NBCFail as an opportune platform for the promotion of its own network’s coverage. While not directly trying to convert any viewers, TwitchyTeam, an American-based Twitter curation site owned by media group Salem Communications was also active in promoting anti-NBC content. This group targets conservative Christian audiences in the US and spread news about NBC’s opening ceremony edits, as well as the ‘Leave Bode Alone’ messaging for garnering criticism against NBC’s liberal ideals. (The latter point is of specific importance and is discussed further down in greater detail under the socio-cultural domain.) Finally, Deadspin.com was
another active American website shaping the #NBCFail conversation via its uncovering of edited footage.

A surprising finding, or lack thereof, in the tweets was the scarcity of mentions of human and gay rights on Twitter compared to the prominence these issues received in the mainstream media. Thus, this highlighted another difference between institutional and audience created Twitter content. Twitter audiences seemed to be more concerned with the production values, the mediation of the event, and questions over national identity. Perhaps, this was due to #NBCFail’s composition of different issue publics (Dahlgren, 2006), a different thematic focus of the hashtag, or the fact that #NBCFail users did not perceive human rights to be fundamentally threatened based on the coverage they saw. Nonetheless, few comments were present about gay rights in particular and notably, the most effective ones were found in the Russian tweets. For instance, a humorous and creative play on symbols was established between NBC’s rainbow colored peacock emblem and the editing of Thomas Bach’s speech, which alluded to the IOC’s support for equal human rights (see Image 4.4 below). This tweet included the caption that the peacock’s wings were cut (referring to NBC’s rainbow colored peacock emblem, consisting of colors emblematic of the gay community, too).
In short, as certain elements became visible, it also became possible for them to be deemed problematic and so, frustration with NCB’s institutionalization became the impetus for the activation of #NBCFail’s architectures of participation.

The Technical Domain

The technical domain features the themes of multiple mediations and a transmedia flow of content between various platforms; it helps us explain how resistant rearticulations and reconstructions took place. A way to conceive of these types of mediations is to borrow from Martín-Barbero (1993), who describes ‘mediations’ as “the articulations between communication practices and social movements and the articulation of different tempos of development with the plurality of cultural practices,” (p. 187). The idea of plurality of mediations emerges in the first example below, and the discrepancy between different tempos of mediations becomes particularly evident in the following two.

First, mediation emerged as a theme in the findings through the simultaneous processes of transmedia content flow across platforms. There was a dialectical movement
between Twitter, blogs, online news sites, and more traditional media; as Steven Marx, the man credited with popularizing #NBCFail in 2012 noted, he only had 17 followers when he first used the hashtag (Personal communication, March 3, 2017). Subsequently, the reason why he and the #NBCFail hashtag gained attention in the first place was due to being picked up as a news story by larger media outlets. In turn, however, #NBCFail supplied those larger media outlets with stories – and has continued to do so for years – while borrowing its own content from other sources including NBC broadcasts. Thus, mediation in these cases worked in various ebbs and flows and the stream of content transitioned back and forth to converge between more and less established media creators. Despite some temporal flexibility, this took place within a relatively linear and synchronous fashion in the English tweets.

Second, in the Russian case, (re)mediations between platforms and content did not occur so smoothly thus, somewhat thwarting the transmedia content flow and successful spread of #NBCFail. Despite a similar transmedia environment of blogs, online news sites, and Twitter, content moved with less ease and speed in a more unidirectional and temporally dislocated manner. For instance, the Russian tweets rarely made their way back into the broader media milieu of blogs and broadcast news, partially due to language barriers and partially due to temporal delays. Further, there was only one case of transliteration (Yang, 2012) in my sample, where an English language tweet acknowledged the presence of Russian language #NBCFail tweets, and I did not personally encounter any English or Russian media picking up Russian language #NBCFail tweets:

You know NBC's coverage is bad when people are criticizing it in Russian! #NBCfail seems to have international appeal! @BaciDozi Feb 9
[Original tweet can no longer be retrieved]
Consequently, multiple mediations in the Russian language context became more of a hindrance than a help toward facilitating effective architectures of participation by not allowing for #NBCFail to successfully shape and redirect Olympic content narratives.

According to the sample obtained through Twitter’s API search, the majority of the complaints about the edits to the Games began to surface in Russian around February 9th, the day that a prominently re-tweeted blog was posted by Nikolai Kamnev. Notably, this is about two days after the opening ceremony and the surfacing of the same information in English. In other words, piecing together what happened during NBC’s rendition of the opening significantly lagged behind the events themselves and this was so, in part, due to the fact that the Russian sources were frequently translations of American news sites, which took some time to emerge. Again, we can borrow from Martín-Barbero’s (1993) description of mediations as the plurality of articulations between different social tempos and practices.

We can also, on a more practical note, conceive of #NBCFail in the Russian context simply as news that was not so directly relevant to Russians’ experience of the Sochi media event and thus, news that did not travel well. Hence, while social media enabled events allow for a somewhat temporally flexible consolidation of people and ideas, the key factors of space and time become narrative technologies that create visible gaps between those who participate, those who do not, and those who participate from various mediated, linguistic peripheries. In the Russian context the chronological flexibility and transfer across media only served to additionally splinter the #NBCFail narrative. In turn, we could say that due to technical issues of time and translation discrepancies, the Russian rendition
of #NBCFail did not build effective architectures of participation to successfully become a part of the Sochi Olympic media event in Russian or in English.

Third, NBC’s integrated tweets on screen conflicted with their broadcast footage of some competitions:

![Image of a tweet showing a video feed of a game being several minutes behind, but NBC's embedded twitter feed is real-time.](image)

This clash of platforms and their temporalities, as well as the resulting obvious broadcast delay, rendered NBC’s mediation visible to the point where it interfered with what viewers perceived as reality.

![Image of another tweet discussing up-to-date Olympic information](image)

Such poorly managed inconsistencies served to highlight technical discrepancies and became one of the key issues driving outrage.
The Socio-Cultural Domain

Similar to the previous case study, a key theme to emerge from the socio-cultural domain was patriotism however, it appeared not as a result of pride in NBC’s media event but rather, as a collective defense against it, albeit through the evocation of various beliefs. Patriotism became apparent to the Twitter participants, my interviewees, and me as an observer, largely via comparative means. Knowing what people watching other channels, and for the most part, being in other countries besides the US, were able to see versus what NBC had shown fueled much of Twitter’s commentary. Consequently, the sentiment of patriotism became another strong factor in activating architectures of participation and while for most, it was expressed in a playful way for others, it burgeoned into issues of democracy and contentious action against NBC.

A second theme to emerge from the socio-cultural domain was once again, playfulness. Similar to #savethesurprise in case study one, there was an element of fun underlying people’s participation however, in the case of #NBCFail, there was also the added collective element of problem solving, too. Furthermore, the playfulness was aimed at revealing and reconstructing the inner workings of the media event – not at concealing them. The following section describes each of these themes in more depth.

Patriotism
While in some instances “the development of international mega-events parallels the growth and spread of ‘modernity’ and nation-state consciousness,” (Roche, 2000, p. 6– emphasis my own) in others, like Sochi’s Olympic #NBCFail case, media events become an active site for the creation of this very consciousness. For instance, the knowledge of differences in national broadcast coverage of global events like the Olympics serve to highlight the notion of the nation (Eagleman, 2013). As the above tweet demonstrates, these differences often become visible via comparative means and patriotism59, which served as a socio-cultural engine for the activation of architectures of participation and for people’s social media content creation in turn.

In the paraphrased words of Tim Burke, video director at Deadspin.com (and fellow Communication PhD), as a media corporation, NBC is guilty in the eyes of many for its privatized Olympic coverage, premium fees and tape-delayed, over-commercialized airings. Thus, NBC naturally creates enemies with its Olympic coverage. Whereas the Olympic Games are a global event that is considered of significant importance to be shown live, free on air, and often without commercial interruption in a number of other countries like the UK and Canada, this is not the case in the US. In turn, the global discrepancy created by NBC is problematic because the knowledge of it creates angst.

Burke believes that he likely headed the first major outlet to break the story of what NBC had edited out of the 2012 Olympics by videotaping Olympic feeds from various countries and laboriously playing them side by side to uncover NBC’s missing pieces. (Part

59 I again, debated between whether patriotism or nationalism (differences previously described in case study one), would best describe the sentiment evoked by the majority of the tweets. I decided upon patriotism because the English and Russian language tweets, for the most part, expressed a belief and a solidarity with their own nation (US/Russia) – not at the expense or worth of another nation, even if comparisons were made to question fairness in national media stereotypes and representation.
of the reason why he did this in the first place, however, was due to a tip from a Deadspin reader, who noticed that NBC did not show a photograph of his deceased uncle, who was part of the London bombings tribute during the 2012 Olympic opening ceremony – Personal Communication, March 2, 2017). Two years later, being aware that serious content edits could take place, Burke once again spent hours pouring over various national video feeds of the Sochi Olympic Games opening ceremony. Surely, he uncovered serious discrepancies between what had happened in Sochi, and what NBC had shown – in fact, he concluded that NBC had cut almost 40% of the opening ceremony (Burke, 2014) – and became himself at the forefront of the comparative drive behind people’s participation. Below is an example a tweets with a link to one of Burke’s articles about NBC’s edits that received numerous retweets:

An additional and perhaps, much more personal expression of NBC’s mediation violation may be encapsulated by a conversation I had with one of #NBCFail’s active monitors and contributors; Andre is an amateur media watchdog enthusiast, who felt that

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60 There was a famous ‘malfunction’ of one of the five Olympic rings during Sochi’s opening ceremony, in which the ring did not open fully. Viewers in the US saw this malfunction however, in Russia, the broadcast producers cut to pre-taped footage of a rehearsal in which the ring had opened up. This became the only known case of a serious edit to the Russian viewers’ version of the opening ceremony however, since news about it quickly spread, Sochi’s Games organizers took the opportunity to poke fun at themselves and the television producers by playfully including a fifth ring that did not open fully during the closing ceremony. This time, this was shown on television across Russia, and appreciated for its sense of humor.
the issues with NBC’s coverage of the Olympics went beyond the annoying frequency of commercials and time delays (Andre, Personal communication, March 6, 2017). He experienced a sense of *arrogance* and *insult* from the fact that NBC chose what to show and what to conceal from their American audiences. This was something, he noted, that viewers in other countries did not have to contend with (to the same degree) – and certainly a feeling that sits at odds with the equally strong sense of American exceptionalism. A further worry and motivation for Andre’s involvement with #NBCFail stemmed from a subsequent suspicion: if NBC kept this from us (viewers), what else are they hiding?

While the socio-cultural drive of patriotism largely became apparent via comparative means and was bolstered through the very context of sporting competition, its renditions were rather different. For instance, in the American case, the confluence of NBC with American-ness and patriotism was intriguing on many levels not least because of the historical ties of NBC to the US as its first broadcast network (McNutt, 2013).

According to McNutt, these ties are “prominently reinforced through its (NBC’s) status as America’s Olympic broadcaster, as the Olympics and other international sporting events are one of the last spaces in which the ‘nation’ remains a prominent figure in an increasingly fragmented, narrowcasted environment,” (p. 125). Yet, regardless of historical ties, on a very practical level, to be able to watch any of the televised or online Olympic
coverage on NBC (the official and only broadcaster of the Games in the US), one had to be an NBC subscriber. Therefore, Americans were not given any particular choice, which created tension and raised broader questions about national values and the level of democracy in the American media system:

From a comparative perspective, the theme of nationalism was tightly interwoven throughout many of the tweets in both languages however, as noted above, the emphasis among them differed. In fact, the theme of patriotism differed even within the English language tweets, polarized largely along political party lines. Some people on Twitter expressed opinions that NBC’s reason for the contentious edits was that it was too liberal a channel, therefore, allowing for such inconsistencies to take place:

(Tweet in regard to insensitive interview of US Skier Bode Miller)

These types of tweets included links to conservative media outlets.
Others, put NBC’s edits down to relentless capitalism but not necessarily liberal values; they also included links to more liberal media outlets, too:

Interestingly, those people retweeting the @TwitchyTeam conservative accounts or, people who in general held more conservative, Republican political views in their tweets took advantage of NBC’s poor coverage to compare the US with Russia. Several years later, however, this has become a strategy that the Republicans seem to have swiftly moved away from in their media narratives and one, that the Democrats instead have seized. In essence, the Russians remain the common US adversary albeit now, in a different context and evoked by the opposite party.
The English tweets suggest that although a key driver for activating architectures of participation may have been the same (a sense of patriotism in this case), its expression, and certainly the underlying reasoning behind it significantly differed even within nations, let alone between them. In other words, there was contention even within contention. Notably however, these expressions of patriotism still carried strong elements of belief in the nation and its underlying good values. The contention did not arise from questioning the morals of the US but rather, from questioning their proper enactment via particular political parties or capitalist institutions.

The tweets in Russian, however, seemed to show a more unified front by being more serious in tone and directly critical of the American media and political systems, as opposed to NBC alone. In fact, in the Russian tweets a sense of nation and patriotism was evoked not in reference to specific Russian values but in comparison to anti-American behaviors. Perhaps, due to a lower volume of tweets, there was also more of a unified contention where the most popular Russian tweet and retweet was a variation of:

[Translates to: (here is) how the USA chopped up (edited out) the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in Sochi]

The various versions and retweets of this message would then have a link to an article, most often written by blogger Nikolai Kamnev, with further information about what had been edited out. Subsequently, the Russian retweets evoked a sense of hypocrisy, some
calling Western media ‘racist’, and showing a strong desire for recognition and just media coverage. The main complaint was that Russia was often the country presented by Western media as being anti-democratic and stifling to freedom of speech and yet, instances such as NBC’s political edits to the Games demonstrated a form of censorship in the US, too. Indeed, ‘censorship’ was a keyword that appeared in many of the Russian tweets, alluding to a broader critique of the reality of Western, and specifically American democracy.

[Translates to: Censorship from #NBCFail Olympics opening ceremony in #Sochi2014. So which county is a dictatorship?]

Бедных гражданам США промывает мозги пропаганда. Пытаясь показать Олимпиаду в Сочи с худшей стороны.

[Translates to: Poor US citizens, brainwashed by the propaganda machine trying to show Sochi in the worst light.]  
[This Tweet is no longer retrievable]

Again, ‘Russian patriotism’ and national identity in these cases seemed to be based on being anti-American (a finding that case study three supports and expands upon), whereas ‘American patriotism’ and national identity were largely reinforced through calls to a higher moral ground, although it was contended whether that was to be pursued via economic equality, or stronger conservative values.
**Playful mediation**

In the English sample of the tweets there appeared to be a drive, if not a competition, amongst participants to uncover the next big edit or ‘fail’. Once such a fail was uncovered and picked up traction amongst Twitter followers the general topic of tweets changed direction. Often, problematic topics on #NBCFail, such as the inappropriate Bode Miller interview, reached temporary closure by redefinition or, fizzled away into the depths of Twitter timelines to be replaced by the next big fail. In fact, as a couple of people noticed, this very process of gaffe discovery, a resistant articulation, was an enjoyable activity in and of itself (though the discovery of edits to the opening ceremony and its subsequent piecing together also took a more serious tone):

Hutchins and Rowe (2012) note that “the traditional conception of sport *and* media has given way to sport *as* media within a broader leisure framework,” (p. 4). Indeed, participants seemed to derive pleasure from the satirical act of being a part of the movement. As my interviewee, active #NBCFail contributor Heather Sokol said, she engaged with the hashtag:

“Primarily because it was funny and also true. But it was also a great way to attach my underlying frustration with the poor coverage and time delays, and it's a fun way to connect to a larger conversation. I found new people to follow through there and was able to get other perspectives on an event we were all watching at the
same time (even if we were hours behind the rest of the world),” (Personal Communication, August 25, 2017).

For Heather, #NBCFail was a social opportunity as much as an outlet for venting her frustration. Like a number of my interviewees in the London 2012 and Rio 2016 case studies, active sociality with a wider, often unfamiliar audience, was a motivator behind Twitter participation. For other people, #NBCFail was an important complementary, if not primary, part of the Olympic experience.

Gratification was obtained through belonging to the #NBCFail community, no matter how imagined, unfamiliar or dispersed it was. In fact, a number of the accounts I followed belonged to people who had participated in #NBCFail across Olympiads from 2012 through to 2018. The resulting atmosphere was a sense not unlike the euphoric communal feelings associated with rituals, festivals, and mega-events (Durkheim, 1912/1976; Jasper, 2008; MacAloon, 1984; O’Hallarn & Shapiro, 2014). Nonetheless, #NBCFail was not based on ceremonious, conciliatory and celebratory feelings but rather, loosely collaborative contention.
In total, almost 10% of all English language tweets were interactions with others, and 15% were direct comments to NBC; this level of communication is surpassed by the previous case study however, it is still relatively high for a major media event.

**Collaborative mediation**

Much of the momentum around #NBCFail was a function of a kind of dispersed participation, which sometimes resulted in loosely collaborative acts of problematization and problem solving. These acts were not necessarily orchestrated by any one individual but were more so formed as an amalgamation of many smaller ideas and actions.

@LucyWuto hell with #NBCOlympics if you are in the States, use fromsport.com, they have all events live as they happen #NBCFail

[@Tweet is no longer retrievable]
As noted earlier, a frequently voiced problem in the English tweets was the inability to watch events live on television or online without paying an NBC subscription fee. This problem was met with collaborative solutions by participants who suggested going to various websites to stream the Games live, changing their virtual private network (VPN) addresses to access other countries’ online coverage, or subscribing to different national broadcasting services.

There were some exceptions to this pattern with a couple of more direct calls to action from a number of individuals, too. For instance, a link circulated asking people to join a petition against NBC’s right to broadcast future Olympic Games. An open letter link also circulated by a journalist who voiced his frustration to NBC.

Petition the white house to take Olympics back from NBC: cl.ly/TvsL #NBCFail   Feb 15
@jamiefolsom
[Tweet is no longer retrievable]

Still, while these orchestrated actions did exist, they were few and far in between the majority of tweets, which seemed to consist of a much more loosely dispersed community
of collaboration. Instead, the vast majority of participants in this ‘loose’ community were more interested in sidestepping the system rather than completely overhauling it.

**Discussion and summary**

In this chapter I unpacked the architectures of participation that led to #NBCFail becoming a contentious performance of NBC’s Olympic coverage. Specifically, I argued that the rendering visible of NBC’s production of the Olympic event allowed for it to become seen and deemed problematic. In turn, through a US audiences’ comparison of the global (i.e. the experiences of those in other countries watching the event live) came a problematization and re-narration of the local (NBC’ version of the opening ceremony). This placed audiences in a resistant, advocacy-based role in relation to the media event.

The ability of #NBCFail to foster public attention around NBC’s editorial choices of the Olympics raises questions about the broader efficacy of social media in shaping media events. On the one hand, #NBCFail emerged as an important hashtag even beyond the Olympic context, and whether directly attributable to it or not, both NBC and the IOC did make some changes post Sochi Games that were raised by and reinforced through #NBCFail’s narratives. As framed at the beginning, this active audience involvement can be read as resistance in encoding and decoding processes (Hall, 1980; Steiner, 2009). On the other hand, #NBCFail ultimately reinforced the prominence of the televised version of the Olympics as the central text and primary enactment of events, if for no other reason than to provide material for the hashtag to critique. Thus, the oppositional readings the hashtag provided could be described as somewhat limited since they still operated within
the traditional media events framework established around broadcast television (Morley, 1993; Seamann, 1992).

Let us now return to the three questions set at the start of this chapter: first, how effective were the architectures of participation around #NBCFail in shaping and (re)directing Sochi’s Olympic content and narrative flow? Second, how ought the effectiveness of media events be conceptualized in the first place? Third, where do social media enabled events stand in relation to broadcast media events? By tackling these questions in turn, we contribute answers toward the broader, research sub-question three; how can we use the vantage point of global audiences to better understand media events, and vice versa. Tracing the contours of the #NBCFail hashtag suggests that the English version of #NBCFail established itself as a complementary, yet dependent production and viewing experience to NBC’s official broadcast; one which remediated, re-narrated but ultimately also reinforced NBC’s Sochi’s Winter Olympic coverage. The Russian version of #NBCFail however, played out differently; it remained at a linguistic periphery and was not as successful in activating architectures of participation that managed to shape or (re)direct the broader Olympic media event. Therefore, the latter served more as a divergent experience of the #NBCFail hashtag, which did not appear to be particularly influential in impacting wider transmedia narratives.

Still, despite the success of the English language tweets, let us make no mistake; in this media event television still rules. Sochi’s digital audience was 305 million, whereas its television audience was 2.1 billion (Sochi 2014 Global Broadcast & Audience Report, 2014). Therefore, the actual participants, audience, and initial impact of the hashtag were relatively small. In addition, as one of my interviewees said, by gaining in popularity
#NBCFail has itself become a part of the Olympic media event, “it’s become a ritual,” (Andre, Personal Communication, March 6, 2017), which renders it less visible and potentially less disruptive. So, herein lies the contradiction of #NBCFail, a social-media enabled extension of the Olympic event; it is the apparentness and inappropriateness of NBC’s mediation of the Games that awakened architectures of participation and provoked people into creating parallel and at times contrary social media narratives to that of the main narrative driver, NBC (and even to one other). Yet, part of the irony behind the #NBCFail hashtag lies in the very need for consumption.

Arguably, to be an effective and influential part of the #NBCFail critique, one needs to have cutting edge access to, and literacy of, the very content that is being discussed, which probably means being an NBC subscriber (and partially explains why some of the Russian tweets were slower to appear). This, somewhat worryingly, harks back to de Certeau’s argument that we are all now capitalist immigrants:

“consumers are transformed into immigrants. The system in which they move about is too vast to be able to fix them in one place, but too constraining for them ever to be able to escape from it and go into exile elsewhere. There is no longer an elsewhere,” (1998, p. 40).

Perhaps, all we are equipped with is just different levels of skill and tactical navigation with which to traverse our nomadic media landscape. (As noted earlier, all of my interviewees who were involved in creating #NBCFail content were highly digitally skilled nomads.)

Still, while #NBCFail is but one ray in the spectrum of Sochi’s global media event, its architectures of participation successfully aroused and led to some wider mediascape
change. Subsequently, this could be one means by which we can measure the effectiveness of social media enabled events and their place in relation to traditional media event formations; whether or not they are able to engender some change or transcendence through, within, and beyond themselves (Handelman, 1998). Much like Turner (1967) and van Gennep’s (1908/1960) notion of social liminality, these new forms of media event may be understood as liminal spaces themselves, within which one is immersed and if successful, reemerges as an evolved entity.

So, what changes did occur? Regardless of the popularity of the #NBCFail movement during the 2012 London Games, NBC’s ratings actually saw an increase and turned a profit. Jim Bell, NBC’s executive Olympic producer for the London and Sochi Games, responded to the #NBCFail movement by saying: “it got a little noisy and loud out there,” and while NBC “can understand and appreciate that people are passionate about things… I think the numbers speak for themselves,” (McNutt, 2013, p. 124-125). The case in Sochi was somewhat similar, and it could be argued that despite the fact that many of the #NBCFail tweets carried negative sentiments toward NBC they nonetheless drove viewership even if for no other reason than to provide viewers with new material to critique. However, by 2017, three years later, there was a change in atmosphere accompanied by some lower broadcast ratings. Subsequently, Jim Bell made another announcement:

Nothing brings America together for two weeks like the Olympics, and that communal experience will now be shared across the country at the same time, both on television and streaming online… That means social media won't be ahead of the action in any time zone, and as a result, none of our viewers will have to wait
for anything. This is exciting news for the audience, the advertisers, and our affiliates alike (NBC Press Release, 27 March 2017).

As of the next Olympic Games in 2018 PyeongChang, South Korea, NBC decided to air everything live in the US – despite an even more significant time difference to London and Sochi. One strong reason for this decision, Bell says is: “social media has become so ubiquitous that it’s hard to ignore even for people who are trying to avoid it… It just seemed like it was the right time to take this step,” (Battaglio, 2017, n.p.). Simultaneously, Bell stated that “making the Games live coast to coast is a way to address evolving viewer habits while “reasserting” television’s status as the preeminent medium for coverage,” (Battaglio, 2017, n.p.) thus, reassuring viewers (and investors) that this decision would also benefit NBC’s bottom line. Following the Sochi Olympics, the IOC also made some changes. It altered the wording of the Olympic Charter by adding a new bylaw on equal respect for human rights: “The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in the Olympic Charter shall be secured without discrimination of any kind, such as race, color, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.” (IOC, Olympic Charter, 2015).

Whether any of these changes in NBC’s broadcast strategy or the IOC’s Olympic Charter are directly related to the #NBCFail hashtag – or how exactly they are related for that matter – is difficult to establish. Nonetheless, there are several things based on this study that we can imply about today’s media events based on global audience participation. In the case of #NBCFail, audience participation was activated due to visible institutional and technical domains, and through playful feelings of solidarity, resulting in loosely collaborative action on the socio-cultural level. Furthermore, through the apparentness of
mediation, a sense of patriotism emerged, which was also a key driver for resistant participation and narrative flow.

Certainly, global competitions like the Olympic Games awaken a thread of patriotism amongst people that may lie more dormant in other genres of media events. However, the findings in this case study are consistent with case study one and three, as well as previous research (Imre, 2009), that finds social media as reinforcing of existing national networks and boundaries over global, boundary-less exchange. #NBCFail worked in the English language context since it successfully (re)directed some broader NBC broadcast narratives and, years later, saw some kind of called-for change; David, Sam, Alexei, and Venera’s struggle against the Goliath had come to some effect. #NBCFail in the Russian language context did not work because it struggled to activate transmedia flow and impact broader Olympic narratives, as well as to engender any notable change beyond itself.

In the following case study, we turn to Rio’s 2016 Games and to what became the year’s global trending topic on Twitter, #Rio2016. Whereas #savethesurprise specifically focused on factors shaping and motivating participation and content creation, and #NBCFail concentrated upon conceptualizing the role of social media in media events, #Rio2016 presents a comparative case of the plurality of practices between English, Brazilian and Russian audiences. More specifically, by examining the logics behind a global trending topic, the next case study grapples with the tensions of global content institutionalization versus local interpretations.
CHAPTER 5

CASE STUDY 3 Rio, Brazil: 2016

The anatomy of a trending hashtag, #Rio2016

The last case study is concerned with Rio’s Olympic Games which, through #Rio2016, became Twitter’s top trending topic globally for 2016. Whereas #savethesurprise presented a case of close cooperation between media event audiences and organizers and was framed using ritualistic terms, and #NBCFail demonstrated a case of contentious media event re-narration by Twitter audiences so was framed around notions of textual resistance, #Rio2016 becomes an example of a more semiotically-open (Eco, 1979) hashtag and culturally-diverse practice. In order to become more analytically meaningful, the hashtag is examined comparatively through the study of English, Brazilian and Russian audiences. In turn, this helps us address the dissertation’s second sub-research question, by focusing on emergent national differences in content creation, and by framing the dynamics of media event participation around notions of complex globalization (Roche, 2006), and hybridity (Kraidy, 2005).

Through the prism of the three domains of architectures of participation, I examine the factors that lend #Rio2016 its shape and substance. In doing so, I explore how the Rio Games became the pinnacle of Twitter’s largely self-driven institutionalization into the official Olympic communications milieu and critically question what becoming the top global trending topic of the year entails. In what follows I introduce #Rio2016, add some notes about method and the analytical notions of complex globalization and hybridity, and take a survey of the communicative landscape of 2016. I then unpack the specific
architectures of participation that contributed to #Rio2016 becoming the global trending topic of the year and pay particular attention to socio-cultural differences that emerge. With this case study I show that architectures of participation and their results, the content people produce, differ across nations not just based on what people talk about but also, on the ways in which they do it. I conclude the chapter with a summary and some observations about trends as specific architectures of participation, that are at once hyper-sensitizing and universal, as well as particular and concealing.

Introduction

Toward the end of 2016, Twitter announced that Rio’s Olympic Games had generated the year’s top trending hashtag globally, surpassing #Election2016, #BlackLivesMatter, #Brexit and even #PokemonGo. Furthermore, according to Twitter, tweets about the Rio Olympics were seen online and offline over 75 billion times (Filadelfo, 2016) during the period of study (July 29th – August 28th, 2016). These impressive numbers of engagement are unsurpassed by any other media event and they become even more remarkable when contextualized in an era with a global, digital media economy that’s vying for a short, yet lucrative audience attention span (Davenport & Beck, 2001). These figures also show that throughout the three case studies, the Olympics remain fertile ground for audience activity and research, highlighting the increasingly central role of Twitter as our society’s global digital public sphere – if ever there could be one – and as a medium that shapes the practices and experiences of public events.

This case study contributes the third and last set of empirical findings by focusing comparatively on English, Portuguese and Russian language architectures of participation.
To do this, I use a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods and data, starting with a dataset of over 15 million #Rio2016 tweets comprised of the three languages\textsuperscript{61}. These are all of the tweets available for capture through the Annenberg School’s live streaming algorithm, which represent between 1-40% of all tweets for this given hashtag at any moment. I then take random, representative, sub-samples of 10,000 and 250 tweets from each linguistic group to ease the automated content and manual discourse analyses (Goldbeck, Grimes & Rogers, 2010; Gomez, 2016). Lastly, I combine these Twitter data with convenience and snowball interviews, as well as personal observations, media coverage and reports (see Table 5.1 and 5.2 below, as well as methodology for a full list of data sources).

Table 5.1: Case study data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total unique #Rio2016 tweets captured in English, Portuguese and Russian through Twitter’s streaming API</td>
<td>15,137,994 (On average, this is around 10% of all #Rio2016 tweets generated during Olympics time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with professionals and Twitter users (see methodology for full list)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy documents and official reports</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal observations and digital ethnography prior to, during and after the Olympic Games</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{61} To the best extent possible, these tweets represent the audience voice of #Rio2016, meaning that official media Twitter accounts (i.e. @BBC, @NBC) have been pre and post data capture screened and removed from this sample. See methods chapter for additional information.
In order to examine how global social media audiences participate in the construction of events, and to help fill this media events’ empirical blind spot, this case study’s emergent findings are couched within the notions of complex globalization (Roche, 2006) and hybridity (Kraidy, 2005). In brief, complex globalization is a theory that Roche advances through his analyses of the modern Olympic Games. It states that against some of the techno-economic determinism associated with so-called basic globalization, complex globalization offers the opportunity for collective agency. Complex globalization also involves differentiation and particularization; it offers “the reconstruction of temporal and spatial distance and differences,” (2006, p. 31) against the basic globalization idea of a one-way time and space compression, and it presupposes a plethora of levels on which globalization can take place beyond the national. Roche argues, that “the Olympics are best seen, albeit against a background of basic globalization processes, in terms of more complex globalization processes of differentiation and agency,” (2006, p. 31). The theory of hybridity complements complex globalization in that it teases out the many nuances of the process and goes a step further to assert that all cultures (and, by extension, audiences and events) are ultimately a synthetic product, composed of varying levels of ideologically-infused hybridity (Kraidy, 2005). Taken together, the core premises of these two theories allow us to better understand how a global trending hashtag functions to shape participation, and vice versa, in complex and sometimes seemingly contradictory ways throughout the ensuing analyses.
Table 5.2: #Rio2016 Twitter data overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unique #Rio2016 users</td>
<td>3,534,072</td>
<td>666,535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tweets</td>
<td>11,620,597</td>
<td>3,334,387</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rio, Brazil 2016: The communication landscape

Brazil’s Olympics became the first to be hosted in South America – though the Games have yet to be held in an African or Middle Eastern country. The 2016 Olympic Games took place between August 5th and 21st (the Paralympic Games then followed suit from 7-18 September) and they unfolded amidst the perfect storm of political upheaval and economic crises in Brazil. To add to this, the Games happened during a global Zika epidemic outbreak and a domino-like athletics doping scandal for Russian athletes that placed the credibility of world-wide athletics organizations under question. As is often the case, the hosting population itself was divided about the economic sense of holding the Games, not to mention that Brazilians were still recovering from an embarrassing and emotional sporting defeat to Germany (they lost 7-2) during the Football World Cup finals held in the country two years earlier62.

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62 The official ROCOG Strategic Communication Plan (2012) acknowledged that the World Cup would be a determining factor as to the nations’ Olympic sentiment and to how the Games’ organizers should communicate with their audiences.
Although Brazilians are amongst the world’s most active social media users\textsuperscript{63},
Twitter is not the most popular platform in the country (as of 2016 Orkut was the most
popular, but it was recently surpassed by Facebook).

Table 5.3: Comparative communication landscape 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>% Internet penetration</th>
<th>% Social media users</th>
<th>Twitter users</th>
<th>% Twitter users from population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>209,000,000</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>29 million</td>
<td>~14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>322,000,000</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>68 million</td>
<td>~21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>143,000,000</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>16 million</td>
<td>~11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global</td>
<td>7.4 billion</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>320 million</td>
<td>~4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: WeAreSocial 2016; Statista; Pew Internet Report 2016

\textsuperscript{63} According to a number of reports, Brazil regularly ranks amongst the world’s top 1-2 nations by time spent on social media, comprising around 3.3 hours daily (Guimaraes, 2016; Kemp 2017 report).
Twitter was not financially and publicly well positioned in 2016 but it saw the Games as an opportunity to strengthen its image and market hold in Brazil and abroad. After extensive negotiations about the terms of a deal, Twitter entered into its first official partnership with an organizing committee for the Games (the Rio Organizing Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (ROCOG)). The company offered its services and expertise for free and in exchange for a place within the official Olympic communications milieu during the Games (Rafael Sena, Personal Communication, Social Media Coordinator, ROCOG, November 3, 2017). Thus, the social media proclivity of what was largely a young Brazilian population was met for these Olympics with an increased push from previous years from Twitter. It is worth highlighting that the 2016 Olympics marked the first official partnerships between the IOC, a Games organizing committee, and any social media platform (the specific platforms that forged partnerships were: Twitter and Twitter owned Periscope and Vine; Snapchat; Facebook and Facebook owned Instagram).

In partnership with the IOC and ROCOG, Twitter also launched its largest collection of emoji to date, which appeared automatically when people tweeted certain keywords like ‘Olympic’. Twitter launched its Olympic ‘moments’ feature too, which allowed users to filter their social media content by country (this was available for nine territories, including the UK, US and Brazil though not Russia), and Twitter’s video streaming services Periscope and Vine were operational for the first time, offering a backstage video look at the Games. The latter, specifically, presented a significant evolution from the IOC’s protectionist approach toward video footage of Olympic content during previous Games, although the platform has since been suspended.
Finally, for the first time, a Games organizing committee also yielded an unprecedented amount of narrative power to its digital audiences; “Through the press and social media, the planet’s eyes will be on Rio de Janeiro. Journalists and *citizens who publish content on the web* are the ones who will ultimately define the success of the Games,” (Rio 2016 Strategic Communications Plan, 2012, p. 16 – emphasis my own). While audiences, in various formations, have slowly been etching their way into Olympic stakeholder status since the 1960’s (Girginova, 2016a), Brazil became the first Games to openly declare audiences (and particularly those that publish content on the web) as the *central* stakeholders of the Games’ success.

Journalists and citizens who publish content on the web also became of increasing centrality to the broader media ecology in 2016, too; for the first time digital, and specifically mobile ad spending, overtook television spending in a number of regions around the world. In turn, this signaled an economic shift of consumer and industry trust and preference toward media platforms tailored for personalized content consumption and creation. Taken together, these changes in the Olympic and broader communication landscape presented a significant evolution from the context of case studies one and two. The following sections examine how specific institutional, technical and socio-cultural arrangements shaped #Rio2016’s architectures of participation.

**The Institutional Domain**

The communications team at ROCOG were certain that the Rio Games would trend on Twitter (Rafael Sena, Personal Communication, Social Media Coordinator, ROCOG, November 3, 2017), and one way to conceptualize why this ended up happening is to
unpack the *institutionalization* of user participation. In the case of #Rio2016 this took place a priori (through physical and digital efforts on behalf of the Games’ Organizers and various Olympic media organizations), and concurrently and a posteriori to the Games (by unifying disparate strands of people’s content and designating Twitter participation in specific terms, like ‘trend’). The following section looks at what some of the themes and processes of institutionalization entailed, and how they became structuring factors for #Rio2016’s architectures of participation. Specifically, I unpack the institutionalization of user participation according to three institutionalization processes: landscape, Olympic media content, and people’s participation itself.

*Institutionalizing the landscape*

The ‘dressing’ of an Olympic city to give the host nation a uniform, Olympic-branded look is a well-documented and institutionalized process (Edizel, Evans & Dong, 2013; Gold & Gold, 2008). Dressing a city appropriately has been one of the mandates of all Olympic hosts since the 2002 Olympic Games in Salt Lake City however, beginning in 2012, the list of those partaking in the design of the Games extended beyond the organizers and official sponsors of the Games, into the hands of social media platforms like Twitter. For instance, the physical insertion of Twitter into Olympic city spaces was first prominently seen during London’s 2012 Olympic Games when, without an official partnership at the time, the London Eye Ferris Wheel on the Thames river lit up in different colors at night to display the sentiment of people’s Olympic tweets. In preparation for the 2016 Olympic Games, Twitter also built a significant physical presence in Rio, this time through an official partnership with ROCOG, which further blurred the lines between the
local and global, and digital and physical thus, setting the ground for the institutionalization of #Rio2016 beyond the platform itself.

Image 5.1: An example of Twitter’s physical monuments in Rio

The statue above is a picturesque reminder of the connection between Rio de Janeiro, the Olympic Games, and Twitter. Conveniently built on the popular boardwalk of Copacabana beach, with a scenic backdrop of the Sugarloaf mountains, this statue provides the perfect spot for a photo opportunity – with an implicit reminder to then share the photo via Twitter during the Games. Tweets from all over the world were also curated and projected across Rio’s aqueduct, Arcos da Lapa, and a customized Twitter bus toured around Rio displaying tweets and Periscope broadcasts on various screens while providing free wifi signal to facilitate public Twitter engagement (Carlos Moreira Jr., 2016). Other than being an artistic and entertaining project, the material insertion of Twitter into highly

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64 Photograph taken at Copacabana Beach, Rio, Brazil 2016. Credit: Vassil Girginov.
visible city spaces can also be read as an institutionalization and a corporatization of social space (Jacobs, 2016; Sassen, 1999). It also serves as a persistent reminder of the centrality of Twitter in people’s public places, events, and spaces for participation.

**Institutionalizing the content flow**

The rights to broadcast and distribute Olympic content are strictly monitored and administered. Those media corporations that do pay the steep fees for the exclusive rights to mediate the Olympic Games, like the BBC in the UK and NBC\(^{65}\) in the US, also partner with Twitter to create, promote, and distribute their content. The result is a tsunami of institutional content. For example, for what was a total of 19 days or 456 hours of actual competition during the 2016 Games, NBC streamed over 4,500 hours of live digital Olympic content (NBC Press Release, July 12, 2016) and the BBC aired over 3,000 hours of footage with a round-the-clock live Olympic streaming service (BBC Sport, August 5, 2016). That means on average, on NBC alone, there were almost 10 hours of produced content per every actual hour of Olympics time! We can see the results of some of this institutionalization of content on Twitter too, if we look at the top mentioned or retweeted accounts in all three languages: @NBCOlympics, @BBCSport, @CBCOlympics, @RedeGlobo and @MatchTV, which all belong to major media corporations and Olympic broadcast right-holders (for an illustration, see Tables 5.10, 5.11 and 5.12 on pages 209, 211 and 214, respectively). The efforts to institutionalize Olympic content also took place via ROCOG’s hiring of social media influencers and Games Time volunteers, who were amongst the most active content producing ‘citizens’.

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\(^{65}\) NBC paid $7.75 billion for the exclusive rights to broadcast the Olympics in the US from 2014 to 2032.
The findings from this case study support previous research that shows mainstream media largely anchor the conversation across various screens (Hutchins & Sanderson, 2017) and play the most significant role in determining what topics trend on Twitter (Asur, Huberman, Szabo, & Wang, 2011). For example, in 2010, Asur et al., found that over 30% of the tweets sent in trending topics were retweets – and that over 70% of the top accounts getting retweeted belonged to professional news outlets. Six years later, these figures are even higher for #Rio2016, where over 70% of all tweets in the trending topic were retweets. This suggests that media events like the Games generate greater levels of retweet engagement than other trending topics and perhaps, just as likely, that the dominance of media corporations and the sheer volume of their social media output has grown since 2010.

While in all of these cases, the institutionalization of #Rio2016 ultimately worked softly and often, via people’s conscious choices of curation (after all Twitter users themselves chose to retweet the BBC, for example), the a priori attempts of media institutions to shape what would eventually become the #Rio2016 trend were also clear. In essence, the Olympic media machine both, helped to create the #Rio2016 trend by setting the preconditions for it, pumped out institutionalized content during the Games, and then reified people’s participation in #Rio2016 by quantifying and designating their content creating practices as the global Twitter trend of 2016. In turn, this shows a total institutionalization of user participation, which is certainly beyond what was seen in case studies one and two. Subsequently, in this kind of a setting, Twitter audiences take on more of a role of filters and amplifiers of certain mainstream content, whereby voice and narrative power become exercised via curation. Yet, at the same time, by retweeting
professionally created content, audiences often willingly reinforce the dominant media industry hierarchy, too.

**Institutionalizing participation**

As alluded to above, the final piece of the institutionalizing triad is Twitter’s labeling of people’s participation a ‘global trend’. Twitter released their trends feature in 2008 and so, designated themselves as experts, capable of detecting and labeling people’s content creation practices. In a rare statement explaining their inner workings, the company stated that user participation was algorithmically designated trending status when there was a rapid spike in popularity about a certain topic or a hashtag (Twitter, 2010). An algorithm ‘tailors’ trends “based on who you follow, your interests, and your location. This algorithm identifies topics that are popular now, rather than topics that have been popular for a while or on a daily basis, to help you discover the hottest emerging topics of discussion on Twitter,” (FAQs about Trends on Twitter, Twitter.com, 2017). Nonetheless, almost 10 years and numerous controversies later (Gillespie, 2011; Lotan, 2015), the actual workings of Twitter’s trend detecting and displaying algorithms remain enshrined in secrecy, insulated by thick layers of non-disclosure agreements. Thus, the precise algorithmic calculation of “topics that are popular now”, and the exact levels of individual content “tailoring” remain strategically ambiguous. Indeed, the inner workings behind Twitter’s trend detecting algorithms are still of significant mystery and importance that people build whole careers on trying to hack, explain and market their anatomy to the willing public.

We do know that trends undergo an editorial polish to the extent that Twitter’s employees check for and remove inappropriate topics, which has been met with questions
and criticisms about the extent of Twitter’s interference (Sydell, 2011). In response, Twitter insists that actual numbers and topics are not curated themselves – just checked for sensitive content – before being displayed (Twitter.com, 2017). In addition, Twitter’s algorithmic calculations are based on new, drastic spikes in content rather than steady and sustained interest (Dewey, 2015; Twitter, 2010). This brings us to an important practical and ideological function that underpins ‘trends’; from what may be gleaned from the outside, the structure of Twitter trends is such that they allow for the quick elevation and hypervisibility of a topic and they ensure for the equally rapid dismantling and supplanting of it.

In fact, the logic of Twitter trends creates what I call a triple erasure. First, Twitter trends are logically premised upon a limited shelf life by default; research shows that the average Twitter topic trends for about 20-40 minutes (Asur et al., 2011). Thus, deletion, or at the very least, displacement is guaranteed. Second, as participation is cloaked under the label of a ‘trend’ and as the trend itself becomes news (as Twitter’s release of what the world talked about each year often does), a further detraction and distraction from the impact and the nuances of the trending topic occurs. Third, by labeling large quantities of international hashtagged content under the common umbrella of a ‘global trend’, many of the cultural specificities of engagement become erased.

By conceptually framing and technologically displaying the Rio Olympics and its various audiences’ content creating practices as a trend, Twitter also depoliticizes participation. This ends up being a blanket process of homogenization or crude globalization, presupposing similarity over difference. As such, the idea of ‘trends’ culturally and temporally disembodies content from people and place. Yet, as the socio-
cultural section of this case study will show, there are important factors that structure architectures of participation beyond the institutionally driven logics of ‘trends’. Subsequently, rather than guaranteeing endurance or continuation, the design of a global Twitter trend promises detraction and replacement.

**The Technical Domain**

The technical domain of #Rio2016’s architectures of participation can be subdivided into three further themes that appear from the data: retweeting, timing, and emoji use, each of which emerge as mechanisms for structuring participation.

**Retweeting**

Over 70% of the #Rio2106 tweets collected in all three languages during the timeframe around the Olympics (29 July – 28 August, 2016) consisted of curated rather than created content. Thus, unlike case study one’s #savethesurprise, or case study two’s #NBCFail, where the majority of the data collected consisted of original tweets (except for the Russian sample in #NBCFail), the texture of #Rio2016 was rather different, making retweets the dominant form of participation. Interestingly, the ratio of retweets increased in all three languages as the event progressed. Nonetheless, retweeting itself was a nuanced practice (boyd, Golder & Lotan, 2010), and there are important cultural distinctions to be made about these figures, which is something that I address in the next section, the socio-cultural domain of architectures of participation.

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66 While Twitter’s trend detection and displaying algorithms would be another obvious theme to address under the technological dimension of participation, as noted earlier, it is difficult to obtain any reliable information about the proprietary workings of these algorithms therefore, I will refrain from making any further statements about them here.
The prominent presence of retweeting allows for some contribution to, and extension of, current research. For instance, major, acute events such as political protests or natural disasters attract higher levels of information sharing (i.e. retweets) than scheduled live events or, simply, regular days on Twitter (Bruns & Stiglitz, 2012). However, the same research also posits that television shows, sporting competitions, and what could be considered media events like the royal wedding, generate more talk-back to the television and amongst audience members and thus, result in more original content being created, too. Accordingly, the Olympic Games ought to fall within this sporting category of talk-back however, the results from the present study show that the Games attract high levels of original content yet, even higher levels of content sharing (retweets), making them an interesting mixture that is still more akin to acute events. To help explain this mixture and the notable presence of original tweets alongside the predominant retweets we could conceptualize the Games as a series of interconnected events, which can take on communicative characteristics of what has thus far been described as acute and talk back Twitter media events. In turn, this research supports the idea that specific patterns of audience Twitter behavior may signal the occurrence of specific events. Further, it suggests that from a communication stand point on Twitter, the Olympics look predominantly like a series of acute events, which are nonetheless interspersed with segments of talk-back occurrences.

The large number of Olympic retweets could potentially be explained by a number of factors. First, the Olympic Games are a media event unmatched in size, meaning that amongst other things, the majority of audience members worldwide access them via some form of media in lieu of being physically present themselves. Subsequently, it would make
sense that many of the tweets are retweets of Olympic content and experiences of others versus first hand commentary and observations. Second, the high percentage of retweets could be due to the fact that the Games present such a dense and emotionally charged context of information that people choose to retweet facts or ‘expert’ opinions as a cathartic practice of sense making.

Katy, an American interviewee of mine used Twitter in this way as an orienting and sense-making companion for what was an otherwise highly complex and dispersed event; “there were spoilers [in reference to competition results appearing faster on Twitter than on television] which was kind of a bummer but there was no way to watch everything that was on all at once anyway so I even liked those (especially when we won hahaha).” She further said that Twitter provided the backstory to what she often saw on television and felt that “I actually might like the Olympics on Twitter better than on TV,” (Personal Communication, September 19, 2016). A Brazilian interviewee, who attended the Games, shared a different angle of how she used Twitter to navigate the complex Olympic event:

O twitter foi uma boa fonte de informação durante a Rio 2016. As mídias sociais em geral tiveram bastante influência nas minhas escolhas sobre onde ir durante as olimpíadas, como também consegui informações sobre quadro de medalhas e outros.

[Translates to: Twitter was a good source of information during Rio 2016. Social media in general had a lot of influence on my choices of where to go during the Olympics, and I also got information about the medal table and others.]” (Mirelle, Personal Communication, October 18, 2016).
Timing

With this case study I collected and examined tweets divided into three temporal periods; before the Olympics (29 July – 4 August, 2016), during the Olympics (5 August – 21 August, 2016), and after the Olympics (22 August – 28 August, 2016). This was based on the expectation that timing would be a structuring technology of participation (much like it was in case study two) and indeed, in a number of ways, it was. First, similar to previous events research, this case study confirmed that Twitter served as a relatively veritable shadow of the peaks and troughs in the main action of the live and televised event (Shamma, Kennedy & Churchill, 2010); the days and times of big Olympic developments and broadcast viewership were also the days and times of the most active tweeting. Thus, this established Twitter as dependent upon or, at least guided by other (typically broadcast) media. In image 5.2 below, the biggest peaks on Twitter correspond to significant moments of competition, like sporting event finals. Nonetheless, the days with the most user generated tweets differed by language, adding some socio-cultural nuance to the experience of a global trending topic (see image 5.2 below)\textsuperscript{67}.

\textsuperscript{67} This graph shows when 18,870,583 #Rio2016 tweets were created in English, Portuguese and Russian within a couple of months before, during and after the Olympic Games. The figures in the image above have been adjusted to give a relative comparison between figures in each of the languages. While the different linguistic groups show somewhat similar peaks of content creation, there are still notable differences.
Accounting for time differences, we can see that the most highly tweeted days were somewhat different based on the language group (20th August, English; 21st August, Portuguese; 20th August closely followed by 14th August, Russian). On the one hand, this shows that the #Rio2016 trend and the overall Games on Twitter did look different based on language-nation affiliation. This finding supports previous research that has argued social media platforms like Twitter can serve to dislodge some Western bias from global media coverage (Sabo, Jansen, Tate, Duncan & Leggett, 1996; Wu, Groshek, & Elasmar’s, 2016) by focusing attention on nations and voices that tend to be left unheard or under-examined when lumped together into broad ‘global’ trends like #Rio2016. On the other hand, the fact that the busiest days on Twitter for each of the linguistic groups coincided with strong athletic performances from their respective nations is perhaps, unsurprising. Ultimately, we could say that the majority of people tweeted about sporting competition, which is actually a commonality between linguistic groups. This finding, too, supports previous research (Leetaru et al., 2013) that suggests geography only plays a minor role in
shaping *what* people tweet about; instead, I argue that geography and the socio-cultural differences associated with it play an important role in influencing *how* people tweet (addressed further under the socio-cultural domain).

Second, for the majority of my interviewees, Twitter was the go to place for the most rapid Olympic information; “Новости идущие в этом приложении [News were faster in this app],” (Venera, Personal Communication, Russia, March 7, 2017). As such, a significant part of the value derived from Twitter was its speed and timeliness of communication, which was true across all language groups; “*No twitter consegui me manter informada sobre as novidades da Rio 2016 com mais rapidez* [On twitter I was able to keep myself informed about the Rio 2016 news more quickly],” (Mirelle, Personal Communication, Brazil, October 18, 2016). In addition, the theme and value of timeliness appeared in the text of many of the English, Portuguese and, to a lesser extent, Russian language tweets once competition began. This manifested itself through words such as ‘now’, ‘time’ and ‘today’, suggesting that many users practice and value a timely and chronological Twitter use during events.

Third, this case study also supports the idea that the *nature* of Twitter content during the event depends on the temporal phase of the event itself (Kharroub & Bas, 2015). A content analysis of a hand coded, random sub-sample of 250 tweets from each language and timeframe showed the following:
Table 5.4: Coding Key

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>News (timely Olympic events and competition results)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Broader Olympic movement content (comments about specific athletes, sports; flashbacks to other Olympic Games; other non-time sensitive content)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Olympic related scandal or controversy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Cheering (emphatic response)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Personal comments off site (a particular individual's experience of the Games)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP</td>
<td>Personal comments on site (Olympic related content sent from those physically at the Games in Rio)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>Random; non-Olympic related content using #Rio2016 hashtag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>Sales or promotional tweet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.5: English coded tweets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>IP</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>SP</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Games Phase</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>899</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.6: Portuguese coded tweets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>IP</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>SP</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Games Phase</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>818</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.7: Russian coded tweets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Games Phase</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>During</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>After</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

News content dominated Twitter in all three languages prior to the Games but once competition began, the majority of the tweets turned to emphatic, cheering-based communication. The exception to this is the Russian sample, which remained dominated by factual news throughout all three time periods. Some research suggests that political instability in Russia and abroad is the key motivator behind Russians’ appetite for keeping up with news across all media platforms (Deloitte, 2016).

While not a top category in any of the languages (although being close in Russian), scandalous or controversial Olympic content made a regular appearance in the tweets too, and featured amongst the top retweeted content. For instance, below is an example of the most retweeted post from the Brazilian audience with the caption: “Beach Volleyball, Culture Shock”, and a tweet that was amongst the most retweeted in English, highlighting the gender inequality in media coverage in the US.
Once the Games came to a close, the temporal domain took on a more flexible and asynchronous character. For example, people continued to tweet Rio Olympic Games content under the #Rio2016 hashtag over a year later yet, the nature of the content that ‘lived on’ was no longer necessarily informative but rather, celebratory or commemorative.
This suggests that while an event and its broadcast may come to a physical end, audience Twitter participation has no such smooth delineation, meaning that the temporal domain of participation works in asynchronous ways to stretch and blur the edges of events. In turn, time itself becomes a technology of participation, where mediated and manipulated temporalities are its tools.

*Emoji use*

The majority of #Rio2016 tweets had some form of visual content embedded in them such as emoji, photographs, links to online content and videos (although video content was subject to a 10 second copyright limitation enforced by the IOC). In this section I focus specifically on the use of emoji – the most prevalent visuals found in the original tweets created by people – to discuss the impact of the visual on structuring participation. Several days before the start of the 2016 Games Twitter announced that in partnership with ROCOG and the IOC, it would release its largest collection of emoji to date. This included over 257 images of flags to represent each of the competing nations (thus, reinforcing a celebration of the nation and what Billig (1995) would call banal nationalism⁶⁸), and sporting graphics to represent specific disciplines and Olympic-related symbols. These emoji appeared automatically next to a range of hashtags, like #Rio2016 (see Image 5.3 below) and served to (re)mediate the verbal (Bolter, Grusin & Grusin, 2000; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996) along technological and ideological lines. The automatic appearance of the emoji also shaped how participation was practiced and perceived.

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⁶⁸ In brief, banal nationalism refers to everyday, sometimes unconscious forms of nationhood.
The release of new emoji certainly had a technological dimension to it, since it required that new code be written, adopted by the Unicode Consortium, and that people’s phones be adept to send and receive the images. The release of these new emoji also had a strong ideological dimension to it; this included first, the very decision that there was a need for these emoji and second, the choice behind what visuals were made and for whom.

It is important to situate Twitter’s push for emoji use within a larger capitalist ideology and its own business strategy; Twitter’s TV playbook itself suggests to its media clients that including visuals in tweets results in higher user engagement and a bigger chance of getting content retweeted (Midha, 2015). Emoji are also more universally understood than words and thus, travel more readily across international audiences (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). Furthermore, the release of the large, new emoji collection itself generated much publicity for Twitter. Therefore, aside from being an ‘enhanced’ experience for those wishing to tweet an emoji of fireworks alongside their closing ceremony hashtag, the release of the Olympic emoji collection was also a corporate strategy, designed to drive Twitter users and engagement writ large. As Stark and Crawford (2015) write, emoji are now intimately wrapped up in the broad blanket of capitalism; from phones to Halloween facemasks, emoji are everywhere and they are being monetized in
full force. In short, more Twitter interactions, if indeed facilitated by the presence of emoji, equal higher chances of user engagement and advertising revenue\textsuperscript{69}. Of course, emoji are also very much akin to text based communication as far as automated data recognition and mining go, so they provide a potential further layer of content surveillance and monetization that is still difficult to achieve from photographs and video.

It is also worth highlighting that the new Olympic emoji collection was missing a rifle and the Olympic rings – two explicit ideological choices – albeit for two rather different reasons. The rifle was removed from the proposed emoji list as a result of intense lobbying from Apple, Microsoft, Google and Facebook; the Olympic rings are one of the world’s most closely guarded trademarks logos, the use of which is strictly regulated by laborious contracts and large payments and thus, largely prohibited for free use. To add to the example of the ideological battles behind these visuals, the new emoji collection was also available only in seven select languages including English, Portuguese, and French\textsuperscript{70} but not in Russian. Interestingly, the Olympic emoji collection produced two, somewhat contradictory impulses; on the one hand, it served to standardize or hybridize global communication and linguistic differences via use of the same, more or less universally understood images. Yet, on the other hand, it served to further splinter the global Twitter experience of the Games since only seven out of 40 supported languages on the platform were enhanced with this special visual default. Hence, also producing differentiation.

This goes to show that while we are increasingly speaking in visuals (Miller et al., 2016), part of this new architecture of participation is driven by technological

\textsuperscript{69} This is not to deny user agency in adopting emoji but rather, to highlight the strategic, corporate logics behind them.

\textsuperscript{70} Although French is a less frequently used language on Twitter than Russian, it is an official Olympic movement language.
developments infused with a range of corporate interests and ideologies. Further, technology is indeed, not neutral and while a person is able to delete the emoji that automatically appears next to a given hashtag during Olympic time, embedded and default technological affordances like the Olympic emoji collection shape the ways in which we remediate the verbal and participate in digital culture. While seemingly innocuous, with default status and sufficient repetition, practices and affordances like emoji become society’s new standard for communication (Jenkins, 2006).

**The Socio-Cultural Domain**

The socio-cultural dimension of #Rio2016 allows us to examine in more depth some of the patterned practices that emerge when looking comparatively at how people used the hashtag in different languages. Although correlation does not necessarily equal causation between type of audience engagement and language or culture, strong evidence does exist to show that socio-cultural context has a bearing on content consumption and creation practices (Liebes & Katz, 1990; Miller et al., 2016; Sreberny, 2016; Toumazis, 2010). I begin this section with an overview that geographically situates various #Rio2016 linguistic groups on Twitter (see Table 5.8 below) and then look at some of the strongest common and nuanced socio-cultural dynamics that emerged from the data. I conclude by examining the most influential voices in each of the languages and contextualize emergent socio-cultural differences by taking into consideration media industry and audience consumption practices specific to each nation.
Table 5.8: Top 10 languages using #Rio2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>11,620,597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>3,334,387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>688,564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>460,943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>183,010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>159,243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>140,919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>107,226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>84,916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>84,335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>76,331</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While English is generally the most common language on Twitter followed by Portuguese (Leetaru, Wang, Cao, Padmanabhan, & Shook, 2013), research shows that in 2013 only “28% of the 50 most-mentioned countries on Twitter were core countries,” (Wu, Groshek & Elasmar, 2016, p. 1860). This means that the majority of the countries that people talked about on Twitter71, including Brazil and Russia, were not so-called ‘core’ countries (Wallerstein, 1974), and were not countries typically representative of Western democracies and standards of economic development. Analyses into these other countries and communicative realities is important not only for filling a hiatus in the academic literature, but also for the fact that “representation of countries in the media is pivotal to how the world is understood as well as to the external recognition and self-identity of a country within the world system (Masmoudi, 1979),” (Wu, Groshek & Elasmar, 2016, p. 1860). In other words, representation, whether from professional media outlets or from

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71 Whereas one could expect Chinese to feature amongst the top ten languages on Twitter, the platform is officially banned in China, explaining the lack of Chinese appearance here. This, in turn, becomes an interesting example of the institutionalization of content and participation at the state level.
user generated content is a crucial factor for how people understand and construct images of their social worlds.

Building on the work of Wu, Groshek and Elasmar (2016), who studied the representation of core, periphery and semi-periphery countries (Chase-Dunn, Kawano & Brewer, 2000; Wallerstein, 1974) on Twitter, I coded the 250 tweet language subsamples to determine which nations were being most frequently mentioned, either through hashtags or direct text, alongside #Rio2016 (see Image 5.4).

Image 5.4: Country mentions per language

The results in Image 5.4 show an important difference between linguistic groups and that overall, the most frequently mentioned countries via #Rio2016 were again, so-called non-core states. Although English language tweets tended to mention core countries like the US and the UK slightly more frequently than semi-periphery or periphery states, the English tweets also had the highest diversity of country mentions with 29 different nations. The Portuguese and Russian tweets mentioned a much higher percentage of non-core countries like Brazil, Russia, India and China, but they also mentioned a less diverse
set of countries, 26 and 24, respectively (see Appendix F for full list of country mentions per language). These results also support the pluralization of the nation-gaze and a contra-flow of people and content on Twitter (Thussu, 2006). Nonetheless, it is equally true that due to limitations such as linguistic barriers and lack of translation practices, the potential spread of ‘alternative’ narratives may be somewhat limited on Twitter\(^{72}\) thus, reinforcing nationalism via social media use (Imre, 2009) rather than a true globalized plurality of voices.

*Where we tweet*

Mapping the self-reported locations\(^{73}\) of the three linguistic groups allows us to better contextualize their communicative practices.

*Image 5.5: Geolocation of English language tweets using #Rio2016*

\(^{72}\) Despite Twitter’s partnership with Bing to offer (often questionable) translations of tweets in a variety of languages, I did not find any cross-linguistic tweeting or retweeting in my analyses.

\(^{73}\) Whereas only around 2% of tweets in a given day have their user controlled geolocation feature enabled (and thus are able to provide geolocation coordinates), around three quarters of users have set a specific location as part of their personal profile (Leetaru et al., 2013). I use the latter as metadata from the 250 randomly sampled tweets to create the geolocation maps that follow.
While the majority of the English language tweets stemmed from the US and the UK, this linguistic group does represent a geographically heterogeneous set of people. Notably, India emerged as the third most active geographical region for English language tweets and it accounted for 5 of the 10 most active #Rio2016 users.

Image 5.6: Geolocation of Portuguese language tweets using #Rio2016

Image 5.7: Geolocation of Russian language tweets using #Rio2016
The Russian and Brazilian geolocations portrayed a much closer relationship between language and user location, where the Brazilian group was the most geographically homogenous as the largest number of tweets emanated from Brazil. Furthermore, a closer look at precisely where in Brazil and Russia the #Rio2016 tweets came from confirms the socio-economic bias of Twitter users being concentrated in large, metropolitan areas within countries (see Appendix E for closer-range images). This impacted the architectures of participation for #Rio2016 through a class-based stratification of participants and expressions thus, tainting the relationship between the Rio Games and #Rio2016. Finally, all of these maps served as empirical reminders that the majority of the #Rio2016 tweets – even those in Portuguese – did not come from people who were physically in Rio and at the Olympic Games. Therefore, these people’s tweets became a globalized refraction of the lived event; a remediation of the Olympics.

*How we tweet*

This section comparatively examines the ways in which English, Brazilian and Russian audiences used Twitter. To understand what and who shaped the narratives in each language, I begin with a focus on word choice and commonalities amongst linguistic groups. Then I look at social and news focused uses of Twitter, contentious topics, and most influential users and accounts retweeted. Table 5.9 below gives a comparative snapshot of the most popular words used in each language.74

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74 Data based on sample of over 15 million tweets in all three languages.
Whereas the majority of the socio-cultural analysis for #Rio2016 is devoted to uncovering differences and nuances in participation across the three linguistic groups, a number of universal topics emerged, too. For instance, Usain Bolt’s outstanding athletic performance resulting in a triple gold medal for each of the three events he competed in was universally commented upon.
Nonetheless, the most striking commonality across the three linguistic groups and timeframes was the topic of women and, more specifically, support for women in sport\textsuperscript{75} (see Table 5.9 above). Comparatively, gender was rarely explicitly mentioned for men in the tweets.

\textit{RT @aelingalathyns: gente as mulheres estão arrasando em tudo!!! voleibol, vôlei de praia, futebol, handebol e ginástica artística!! #Rio2016 #Olympics #Brasil}

[Translates to: RT @aelingalathyns: people, these women are raving at everything!! Volleyball, beach volleyball, football, handball and rhythmic gymnastics… # #Rio2016 #Olympics #Brazil]

Part of the reason for the prominence of females in #Rio2016 could be due to Twitter’s user constituency or, to the Olympic Games’ ‘unusual’ demographics. Particularly in the US, one of the loudest #Rio2016 regions on Twitter, the Olympic Games attract a larger female than male audience. As the previous Sochi 2014 case study showed, there is a connection between the social media content production of people and media corporations’ broadcast strategies. Another reason for the prominence of the female theme could be attributed to a broader, social movement for women’s equality, including a rising

\textsuperscript{75} London’s 2012 Games became the first time in Olympic history that female athletes competed from every participating nation in the Olympics – if a significant amount of interest is also shown on social media toward female athletes \textit{globally}, it is certain that media corporations are listening and it is quite likely that they will also act by increasing women’s competition content.
number of (potential) female heads of states, that became particularly salient across global media in 2016-2017. In this case, the Olympic Games served both, as a mirror to society and as a model for future action (Handelman, 1998).

Beyond these similarities, some notable differences emerged in language use; for example, the Brazilian tweets were the most emotional (addressed further below) and the Russian tweets used what could be described as the most group-cohesive language.

[Translates to: Let’s say thanks to our Olympians, who despite everything glorified Russia, winning 56 (!) medals in #Rio2016 ! https://t.co/1AbqiZottB]

The effect of frequently opting for pronouns such as ‘we’ and ‘our’ in their tweets was a sense of group solidarity, based around the Russian Olympic athletes and the concept of the nation. This became particularly pronounced in cases where the Russian tweets

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76 The push for female equality in the media only intensified since the 2016 Olympic Games and on March 15, 2018, representatives from the IOC met with UNESCO, UN Women, P&G and NBC to discuss steps that could be taken toward achieving even greater gender equality. A set of recommendations specifically addressed how women in sport may be represented more equally and respectfully by the media. This meeting came in the wake of numerous public and private efforts in recent years to highlight social disparities between genders and shows the connection and role, even on a small scale, between media events, their organizers, participants, and audiences, in imagining the future of our society.
protested against the World Anti-Doping Association’s (WADA) decision to place a blanket ban on all Russian Paralympic athletes from competing in the Games. It is also worth highlighting that the Russian linguistic sample was the only one from the three that had another foreign country, ‘USA’, mentioned in its most frequently used 15 words (see Table 5.9 on page 198). As Russian scholar Ryazanova-Clarke (2011) suggests, the concept of ‘the West’ as the other is frequently evoked in Russian media as a tool for constructing Russian identity. This is a similar finding to the Russian evocation of the US in case study two.

Twitter for socializing and for news

Particularly amongst my Brazilian interviewees, a more homogenous set of users, emerged the theme of sociality as a key motivator for participation in the Olympics on Twitter. One interviewee said her favorite part of the Twitter-enabled media event was:

“A comunicação. As pessoas estão distante mas ao mesmo tempo tão perto uma das outras. Gosto demais da interação que acontece… parece um bate papo com que está perto de você.” [Communication. People are far away but at the same time so close to each other. I really like the interaction that happens....],” (Dri, Personal Communication, October 9, 2017).

Dri went on to say that she particularly enjoyed feeling a sense of unity with other spectators because, after all, this was the Olympic Games. Another interviewee highlighted

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77 Although all of my younger interviewees, Russian and English speakers included, cited sociality as an important feature of the Olympic experience on Twitter, this was something explicitly and exclusively mentioned by my older Brazilian interviewees, too.
the value of being able to post information about what she was experiencing, while others felt Twitter was a useful way to tap into the communal feeling of the Games:

“Acho que o Twitter tem, além da facilidade do tempo real, as opiniões e até o humor das pessoas, em uma cobertura, de certa forma, mais humana do que a da TV [I think in addition to the ease of real time, Twitter brings out the opinions and even the mood of the people in a way that is more human than the TV coverage],” (Bernardo, Personal Communication, October 2, 2017).

In addition, a number of the most frequently used Portuguese words could be described as socially oriented, too; people (gente), the world (mundo), (see Table 5.9) and the language used in the Portuguese sample of tweets, which frequently featured capitalized words, emerged as the most personal and emotional, comparatively speaking.

There were even tweets castigating Brazilian live audiences for their overly emotional behavior in the Olympic stadia. Brazilians were critiqued by the wider media too, about being ‘unaware’ of how to behave properly during the live Olympic events, when to be quiet to allow athletes to concentrate, and how to cheer ‘responsibly’; namely, by not audibly booing opponents from other nations (Redação Época, 2016):
The Russian language group stood out for having the highest ratio of retweets to original content – around 80% – and for being almost exclusively news oriented. One of the interviewees I spoke with said there could be a number of reasons for that (Igor, Russian User, Personal Communication, April 10, 2017); first, he suggested that people could feel more credible sharing an opinion on Twitter by citing an official source. Second, he noted that especially if the content was somewhat controversial or sensitive, as a lot of the Russian #Rio2016 tweets regarding the WADA doping scandal were, retweeting somebody else was a way of sidestepping direct responsibility for writing a particular opinion. Third, Igor implied a playfulness inherited in his personal and social circle’s tweeting practices; Igor said that he and his friends often retweeted things not because they agreed with them, but because they found them amusing and wanted to take on an alternate personality or to present an enigma to their followers, adding a further layer of socio-cultural complication to the notion of participation.

Another interviewee suggested a further practical explanation for Russians’ preference for retweets; according to her, most Russians do not think of Twitter as a serious medium for self-expression due to its character constraint (Polina, Moscow, Personal Communication, April 19, 2017). Research suggests a similar idea, that comparatively, Russians use Twitter more as a news source than a social network (Toumazis, 2010) and

[Translates to: Can we stop booing the opposing team? You look really ugly, you know. #BRA #Volleyball # Rio2016]
therefore, citing or retweeting others, especially when they include links to longer commentaries, sidesteps Twitter’s own limitations. Finally, since Russians’ media consumption is dominated by news across all platforms (Deloitte, 2016), retweeting news seems to be motivated by and, an extension of, broader media consumption habits.

#Rio2016 and contentious topics

Looking at the most popular hashtags used in combination with #Rio2016 gives us some insight into how the Olympic Games were used as a transitional object (Winnicott, 1953) to breach into other, more antagonistic themes. Although the dominant use of additional hashtags in English was closely and positively connected to Olympic competition, a notable cluster of other, more contentious topics did emerge. For instance, variations of #Zika were used to speculate about how the epidemic might affect the Olympic Games in Rio, #NBCFail reemerged, and #RioProblems presented a sharply satirical critique of Rio’s Games and Brazilian society writ large. Yet, most markedly, a feminist-centered commentary on race appeared in the English language Tweets through a number of prominent hashtags like #BlackWomenDidThat, #BlackGirlMagic, and #BlackLivesMatter, used in combination with #Rio2016. #BlackWomenDidThat was the most popular version, used in 0.1% of all of the tweets.
In these cases, #Rio2016 became the transitional semantic object in the tweet and connected the Olympic Games, a rather benign topic, with other, trickier subjects like race and gender. In the Brazilian tweets #Rio2016 was also used as a transitional object to connect the Games to the country’s ensuing political leadership crisis. The 2016 Games took place amongst a coup d’Etat, with actor Kevin Spacey famously commenting that the real *House of Cards* played out in Brazil hence, prompting *noveleiros* (a term discussed further on) to create the popular meme and hashtag #HouseOfCunha. Subsequently, #ForaTemer (#OutTemer) was seen in 1% of all tweets with #Rio2016; Dilma Rusev being the temporarily suspended President under investigation and Michel Temer, the interim President-in-Charge, respectively.

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78 *House of Cards* is a fictional, political television drama series set in Washington DC.
79 Cunha refers to Brazil’s political house speaker who was sentenced to jail in 2017 for corruption.
80 Due to public discontent and upheaval, Michel Temer considered not attending the 2016 Olympic Games until the last moment and he did not open the Paralympic Games, marking the first time in history that a head of state has refused to do so. The Paralympics opening ceremony had to be paused due to audible interruptions from protestors booing Temer.
Amongst the most prominent contentious topics attached to #Rio2016 in Russian was WADA’s decision to place a blanket ban, without permission for testing, on all Russian Paralympic athletes from competing in the Olympic Games. The #ПозорWADA (#ShameWADA) hashtag appeared alongside almost 2% of all #Rio2016 tweets in Russian and, importantly, was amongst the few examples of content that engaged in some acts of translation (see following tweet below).
The above was a frequently retweeted post by a Russian fan club of the national Paralympics team – it used hashtags in Russian and in English to reach wider audiences and actually translated the key hashtag\(^81\). Still, another example of a tweet (see image below\(^82\)) went a step beyond translation to hijack (Girginova, 2017) some other popular English language Olympic hashtags like #BlackWomensEqualPay and #TuesdayMotivation, in order to draw attention to the WADA scandal.

\(^81\) Historically, linguistic barriers favored Russians’ early adoption of Russian-language social media platforms (like VKontakte, which still remains the most popular to date), versus English language applications. Today, a certain style that is both ideological and quite practically, linguistic, comes to describe the Russian internet and Russians’ use of the internet under the term ‘Runet’ (Alexanyan & Koltsova, 2009; Kolozaridi & Asmolov, 2017). In turn, it is highly likely that the people creating the translations between the Russian and English language hashtags were aware of the silo effect of the Runet and thus, tried to expand beyond it via acts of transliteration in their tweets.

\(^82\) This tweet comes from the curiously named @KGBKAratelnny account and shows the Paralympic medal count during the 2014 Winter Olympic Games, when Russian Paralympic athletes were allowed to compete. @KGBKAratelnny, supposedly a real user, is somebody who’s political views are called “Красно-коричневые”, referring to red-brown political orientation (somebody who shares both nationalist and communist views).
Who was driving the Twitter conversation?

Around 4 million people (unique global users) were responsible for about 15 million #Rio2016 tweets, where the vast majority of people sent fewer than 10 tweets, and the most sent just 1 tweet. Looking at who the most prolific users were in each language also showed that with few exceptions, the number of people each user followed was higher than the number of followers per user, meaning that most accounts belonged to fans rather than opinion leaders. Next, we look comparatively at who was driving the conversation via being retweeted, the dominant user practice, or mentioned in the content of others’ tweets.

83 See Appendix G, H and I for tables of top users per language, by number of tweets sent.
Table 5.10: Top 15 most retweeted/mentioned accounts in English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Account name</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Description and code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. @NBCOlympics</td>
<td>471,242</td>
<td>US official Olympic broadcaster (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. @BBCSport</td>
<td>329,650</td>
<td>UK official Olympic broadcaster (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. @TeamGB</td>
<td>295,506</td>
<td>Official UK Olympic team account (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. @usainbolt</td>
<td>264,696</td>
<td>Athlete, Jamaican male track and field (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. @Olympics</td>
<td>239,389</td>
<td>Official Olympics account IOC (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. @BleacherReport</td>
<td>192,721</td>
<td>Online sports news site (US, Turner/Time Warner network) (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. @TeamUSA</td>
<td>147,077</td>
<td>Official US Olympic team account (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. @Pvsindhu1</td>
<td>145,688</td>
<td>Athlete, Indian female badminton player (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. @ZacEfron</td>
<td>131,427</td>
<td>US Actor (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. @MichaelPhelps</td>
<td>121,494</td>
<td>Athlete, American male swimmer (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. @Simone_Biles</td>
<td>112,029</td>
<td>Athlete, American female gymnast (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. @CBCOlympics</td>
<td>62,049</td>
<td>Canadian official Olympic broadcaster (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@Rio2016_en [now suspended]</td>
<td>39,406</td>
<td>Official Olympic ROCOG English account (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. @TeamCanada</td>
<td>76,136</td>
<td>Official Canadian Olympic team account (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. @usabasketball</td>
<td>65,698</td>
<td>Official American Olympic basketball team account (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. @GMA</td>
<td>64,382</td>
<td>American television show account (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Null (no mention)</td>
<td>2,285,063</td>
<td>Null (no mention)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique mentions</td>
<td>484,859</td>
<td>Unique mentions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total mentions</td>
<td>15,495,237</td>
<td>Top 15 accounts account for ~18% of all retweets/mentions and are present in 24% of total tweets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coding scheme in order of frequency

1. Official Olympic sport organization
2. Sport personality
3. Official national Olympic broadcaster
4. Official Olympic account - IOC and organizing committee (ROCOG)
5. American television show
6. Famous personality, other
The table above represents the most mentioned and retweeted accounts alongside #Rio2016 and thus, the loudest voices shaping Olympic Twitter narratives in English. These accounts made up 18% of the total mentions or retweets, and were present in almost a quarter of the total sample of English tweets (since multiple @ mentions could be present in a single tweet). There was a mix of broadcaster, athlete, and sports organization voices alongside the IOC and ROCOG; Usain Bolt, Simone Biles and Zac Efron also featured prominently in the most retweeted English tweets, emerging as the most influential individuals shaping the English Olympic experience on Twitter. However, if we expand beyond the top 15 to look to the top 20 most mentioned accounts nine of them, almost half, belonged to broadcasters and five accounts belonged specifically to American television shows and hosts. This implies that English Twitter was largely dominated by American users and employed as a second screen to comment upon television coverage. Audiencing in about a quarter of the English language tweets took place in the form of television talk-back.
Table 5.11: Top 15 most retweeted/mentioned accounts in Portuguese

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Account name</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. @RedeGlobo</td>
<td>99,629</td>
<td>Official Olympic broadcaster and among the most popular media organizations in Latin America, Rio based (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. @Aguinaldinho</td>
<td>68,996</td>
<td>Noveleiro (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. @cleytu</td>
<td>56,902</td>
<td>Noveleiro (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. @RealitySocial</td>
<td>54,509</td>
<td>Noveleiro (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@Brasil2016</td>
<td>47,484</td>
<td>Official federal government 2016 Olympic account in Portuguese (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. @CBF_Futebol</td>
<td>46,854</td>
<td>Official Brazilian Football federation (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. @JOAQUINTEIXEIRA</td>
<td>42,991</td>
<td>Noveleiro (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. @folha</td>
<td>40,162</td>
<td>Largest national circulating newspaper and media conglomerate in Brazil (Sao Paolo) (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@Rio2016</td>
<td>33,331</td>
<td>Official 2016 Olympic account in Portuguese (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. @g1</td>
<td>31,620</td>
<td>Globo network’s online site (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. @Estadao</td>
<td>29,065</td>
<td>Conservative newspaper - Sao Paolo based (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. @SeriesBrazil</td>
<td>24,383</td>
<td>Noveleiro (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. @Flamengo</td>
<td>23,261</td>
<td>Official account for Brazilian football club (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. @falarafha</td>
<td>23,184</td>
<td>Noveleiro (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. @JornalOGlobo</td>
<td>22,985</td>
<td>Account for Rede Globo newspaper (Rio) (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. @momentsbrasil</td>
<td>21,515</td>
<td>Official Twitter moments account (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. @ZAMENZA</td>
<td>19,055</td>
<td>Noveleiro (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Null (no mention)</td>
<td>1,030,570</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique mentions</td>
<td>79,123</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total mentions</td>
<td>2,553,218</td>
<td>Top 15 make up 25% of the total retweets/mentions, and are present in 15% of the total tweets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coding scheme in order of frequency

(1) Noveleiro
(2) Official newspaper account
(3) Official national Olympic broadcaster
(4) Sport organization
(5) Official Olympic account
(6) Official federal Olympics account
(7) Twitter moments account
The most specific characteristic of participation in the Brazilian group was the high prominence of social media opinion leaders called *noveleiros*; seven out of the top 15 most mentioned and retweeted accounts belonged to this very culturally specific group of content producers. The term *noveleiro* is a culturally designated label for a specific type of social media (often Twitter) user, who is a fan of Brazilian telenovelas, a type of broadcast soap opera (see Image 5.8 below).

Image 5.8: Example of a *noveleiro’s* Twitter account

This is a snapshot of Gui’s Twitter profile (above), an avid #Rio2016 tweeter. There are a number of features, like television clips and memes, that identify Gui as a *noveleiro*. A *noveleiro* strives to be an opinion leader by presenting a continuous, humoristic strand of commentary, often based on memes of telenovela characters and plots, as well as other popular television shows. The *noveleiro* is a businessman who aspires to Internet fame and product sponsorship, and who dedicates vast amounts of time and labor to cultivating a
loyal following by being relevant and commenting on everything of mass media importance.

To understand the practices and societal significance of a *noveleiro* as a digital public figure, it is important to situate this persona within the broader ethos of telenovelas in Brazilian cultural life. Since the 1970’s, telenovelas have dominated prime time television in Brazil and large parts of Latin America (Rêgo & Pastina, 2007), reaching across all socio-economic demographics. Subsequently, the role of the *noveleiro* emerged as mediated persona and practice, based on the historical discussion and re-appropriation of telenovelas in the neighborhood (Luiz, Personal Communication, October 9, 2017). Thus, the local, historical context becomes central for understanding the development of social media participation in Brazilian society today.

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84 We could argue that this socio-cultural dimension of participation has been conditioned by corporate media institutionalization.
Table 5.12: Top 15 most retweeted/mentioned accounts in Russian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Account name</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. @molniasport</td>
<td>20,121</td>
<td>States to be an amateur fan account (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. @MatchTV</td>
<td>10,808</td>
<td>Federal public sports channel – official Olympic broadcaster (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. @rianru</td>
<td>7,684</td>
<td>Moscow based state news agency (Ria News) (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. @rsportru</td>
<td>6,494</td>
<td>Sport section of Ria News (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. @sportexpress</td>
<td>4,963</td>
<td>Official online sport site of popular newspaper (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. @vesti_news</td>
<td>4,282</td>
<td>Largest government television channel (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. @riabreakingnews</td>
<td>4,003</td>
<td>News section of Ria News (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. @Olympic_Russia</td>
<td>3,549</td>
<td>Russian Olympic Committee official account (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. @evgeniy_nesin</td>
<td>2,965</td>
<td>Editor of kp.ru site for popular Russian newspaper (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. @sovsport</td>
<td>2,940</td>
<td>Official sport account of newspaper (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. @ornfront</td>
<td>2,562</td>
<td>All Russian Popular Front official site (Presidential Movement) (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. @rushandball</td>
<td>2,144</td>
<td>Russian handball federation official site (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. @marina_saniram</td>
<td>2,072</td>
<td>Aggregator/Bot account (anonymous) (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. @Olympic</td>
<td>1,833</td>
<td>IOC Official Russian language account (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. @izvestia_sport</td>
<td>1,799</td>
<td>Official news site (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Null (no mention)</td>
<td>37,559</td>
<td>Top 15 accounts make up 51% of total retweets/mentions and feature in 43% of all tweets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unique mentions 37,559

Total mentions 190,357

Coding scheme in order of frequency

| (1) Official Olympic broadcaster account |
| (2) Newspaper account                   |
| (3) Other news organization              |
| (4) Official Olympic Account             |
| (5) Personality                          |
| (6) Official sport account               |
| (7) Political Party account              |
| (8) Aggregator/Bot anonymous account     |

The table above represents the most mentioned and retweeted accounts in Russian alongside #Rio2016. These accounts made up over half of the total mentions or retweets.
(an even higher share than the top 15 English and Brazilian accounts combined) and, are present in 43% of the total sample of Russian tweets. Indeed, accounts of various news organizations dominated as the loudest voices in the Russian sample, the majority of which, including the political party account, were state sponsored or controlled. One of the 15 most popular accounts was anonymous, and likely a bot, serving the role of a nationalistic news aggregator under the name of an Armenian woman (other popular accounts that were anonymous also typically featured a female profile and name). It is worth noting that beyond the top 15, a number of the other popular Russian accounts were anonymous and heavily politicized, where it appeared that the Olympics fell into the general news category, since they were reported alongside other political issues. While some of the top Brazilian and English accounts were also anonymous, or from people who were relatively difficult to authentically verify, an important difference was generally found in the tone of the majority of the content, and possibly the purpose of its creator(s).

Discussion and summary

This chapter critically examined the architectures of participation behind Twitter’s top trending global topic of 2016. It showed that simply knowing the Rio Olympics, already the world’s biggest media event, had also become the year’s top trending topic on Twitter does not tell us much about the modes of its audiences’ participation. Instead, it simply served to uncritically reinforce the social universality of the Games and, importantly,

85 The top account, @molniasport (roughly translating to @lightningsport) is of somewhat mysterious origin but was potentially bolstered by bots to rise to quick prominence. According to the information available about @molniasport, it was started around the Sochi Olympics as an amateur fan site, but affiliations and retweets with federal accounts and the Moscow mayor’s office suggest that it might have been coopted by the government in time for the Rio Games.
Twitter’s role in measuring it. This chapter argued that in order to become more informative, we must critically and comparatively examine #Rio2016 to achieve a more nuanced understanding of the social media audience practices constituting the event. Beginning with the institutional domain, this chapter explored the range of Twitter’s institutionalized insertions into media event spaces, content, and user practices, that set the ground for an active social media spectacle. Then, through an examination of the technical domain, retweeting professional content emerged as the dominant practice through which people engaged with the Games on Twitter. Curating and amplifying became the key modes of event (re)mediation, which were nonetheless subject to temporal nuances and localized logics through the prevalent use of emoji. Despite being put under the sanitized and hyper-birds-eye globalizing forces of the label of Twitter’s top yearly trend, a closer and comparative look at the socio-cultural domain revealed even more differences. These differences not only better depicted the nature of a particular event, but also told us much about the socio-cultural practices of audiencing that produced it.

The differences in architectures of participation emerging at the socio-cultural level were not just based on the kind of content people produced (sport related news and emotional responses dominated tweets across all three languages) but rather, on the ways in which they produced it (for example, the accounts retweeted and the top words tended to vary by language group)86. The prominent example of the noveleiro personality in

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86 Of course, not all content practices are created equal. For instance, English language content is the lingua franca of Twitter and those tweeting in Russian, for example, generally enjoy less public visibility as a result, regardless of their particular practices. To combat this invisibility, one example of an interesting global aesthetic that was adopted by the majority of my sampled Twitter users was to write the location in their profile in English but the rest of the contents in their native language. Leetaru, Wang, Cao Padmanabhan & Shook (2013) describe this aesthetic as an attempt on behalf of global Twitter users to let the world know they exist (in English) while still being able to tweet to a more local demographic (in their native language).
Portuguese language retweets demonstrated how historical and socio-culturally engrained media consumption practices around telenovela neighborhood discussions have evolved into the social media era and into public events behavior. Furthermore, differences in use of Twitter across linguistic groups, like the English and Portuguese inclination to use Twitter more as a personal networking site, versus the Russians’ predominant use of it as a news platform (Toumazis, 2010), further exacerbated differences in style.

Undeniably, the Olympic Games draw international media attention unlike any other event, and the concept of a global trend, based on people’s common engagement, is certainly in line with Olympic ideology. Of course, there were some universal practices and topics that emerged through #Rio2016, like the theme of women in sport and the ‘global’ behavior of mass sharing of information via retweeting. The latter especially could be read as an example of global, hybrid, digital culture and, since it had relative universality, as a predictor of the occurrence of an acute media event on Twitter. Still, we must not underestimate people’s agency and global consciousness surrounding the Games. Using #Rio2016 to give additional visibility to tweets and to become a part of the larger conversation surrounding the Games was a conscious choice; as my interviewee Dri said, there was a certain feeling of unity around the Games – after all, it is the Olympics! (Personal Communication, October 9, 2017). This global consciousness could be exemplified by the practice of setting one’s profile self-described location in English – something a majority of people chose to do – while still tweeting in one’s native language. This practice is consistent with previous research, which suggests that this user practice may be understood as an algorithmic tailoring on behalf of a user to ensure world-wide
visibility in search results; a gaming of the national status quo if you will, and a further example of digital culture hybridity (Kraidy, 2005).

Nonetheless, we must also be careful about assuming too much universality of practice and meaning. Following Al Ghazzi’s cautions (2014), we must be hesitant when transporting a blanket understanding of citizen journalism practices – or, in our case, social media participatory practices – from a Western perspective onto others. As this case study has shown, historically and socio-culturally inured nuances like the Brazilians’ relationship to the telenovela format, or Russians’ identity construction around being non-Western, seep into architectures of participation and mark a culturally conditioned engagement with media events. Simultaneously, ‘global’, or largely American technical features like Twitter moments, emoji, and language defaults, also contribute to a rather localized experience – despite the universal appearance and rhetoric of the company.

Still, it is worth adding a note here to problematize these linguistic differences. Sporting events often serve to reify the notion of the nation as a unified locality and to an extent, through the select categories of English, Portuguese and Russian speaking groups, this case study subscribed to this logic, too. Of course, the idea of national or audience cohesion is problematic (Anderson, 2006; Fraser, 1990) thus, marking a limitation of comparative studies set along national categories. Nonetheless, as research has equally shown (Butsch & Livingstone, 2014; Hofstede, 1983), there is value to comparative work that cannot be gleaned otherwise and the nation is certainly one such widely accepted category for comparison. To the extent possible, this case study acknowledges the complexities involved in each of the linguistic categories, including additional commonalities or points of differences by age, gender and socio-economic status.
Instead of assuming a universalist or overly particular stance, the findings of this study point toward a more nuanced interpretation of global events, trending topics and architectures of participation. Returning to the concept of complex globalization and its four key premises allows us to better understand some of these dynamics; while this case study has demonstrated how institutional and technical affordances certainly shape the life of a trending topic, a closer analysis has also shown the opportunity for some collective agency via selective curation and the breaching of contentious topics like gender and race alongside #Rio2016. Against the universalizing tendency of the #Rio2016 trend, the findings reveal a high level of differentiation in participation amongst linguistic groups. While the media event of the Games certainly does compress attention into a two-week time span, the findings have shown that time takes on many roles in shaping content creation dynamics; and finally, although the focus of this case study was national-level differences in social media content creation – which certainly is just one amongst many possible levels of analysis – the maps of where the #Rio2016 ‘world’ tweets from certainly remind us that we are already talking about a very select audience in a given nation.

The data suggested that geography not only plays a role in shaping what people tweet about (Leetaru et al., 2013), making some topics and practices ‘global’, but that it also plays a role in shaping the ways in which tweet about it, making decoding content decidedly local. Like the Olympics, the Internet is a global construct, and its constituting practices exist on national, linguistic and cultural bases (Kolozaridi & Asmolov, 2017; Sassen, 2002). Nonetheless, interpretation is not an isolated practice and is subject to some globalizing dynamics. By inserting itself into public events and spaces, Twitter helps the establishment of new types of cultural (Kraidy, 2005) and organizational hybridity, where
cultural hybridity operates via the mixing of local and global behaviors and content, and organizational hybridity takes place both, in terms of platform and content flow. In turn, this serves to blur some taken for granted boundaries and binaries around major events.

Subsequently, labeling content production as a ‘trend’ is an ideological act that serves specific institutional interests but emerges as an incomplete logic of participation; it naturalizes inherent cultural specificities to offer, instead, a more coherent and simplified picture of global events. In so doing, the act of participation becomes further equated with content creation, and the measurement of participation becomes further entrenched in the hold of media companies, like Twitter, with the inside tools and access to big data. In turn, trends become one means by which social media platforms insert themselves into our broader media ecology by reifying what Couldry calls ‘the myth of the mediated center’ (2005); the idea that society has a shared reality and further, that the media (now including Twitter) are able to portray it.

Global trends are legally and organizationally sanctioned and measured via proprietary algorithms and corporate partnerships thus, wedging a private, commercial dimension within the public nature of many of the events and audiences they report upon. By measuring global trends, Twitter is no longer just assuming the role of the digital town square or public sphere; it is now purporting to be the gramophone of the globe or, in its own words, ‘the pulse of the planet’. In turn, it is worth critically considering what happens

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87 Social media platforms also elbow their way into, and to an extent reinforce, our existent media ecology and the hierarchy of dominant broadcasters by complementing and evaluating their performance relative to audience engagement. Take for example that Nielsen, the world’s largest media ratings company, has partnered with Twitter to give its corporate broadcast clients social media ratings.
when such a platform becomes so central to the experience of our events and importantly, what better alternatives we could have.

Ultimately, the grouping of #Rio2016 participation into a global trend serves to reify the universal importance of the Olympics and Twitter but also to downplay the specificities of people’s experiences. Of course, this is not to deny the international interest and significance of the Games but rather, it is to argue that like the universal ambitions of the Olympics, Twitter’s universal label of global trends provides a misleading understanding both, to the media industry and to its audiences about how participation occurs. In turn, #Rio2016 can teach us that global trends superimpose their own logic and architectures of participation upon events to become simultaneously hyper-visible and yet, neutralizing and concealing of the practices and experiences that constitute events in the social media era. In reality, the architectures of participation framing and guiding how global audiences (re)mediate events are much more nuanced than even this case study can portray.

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88 It could be argued that the inception of Twitter into the official Olympic communication milieu has actually bolstered what some have feared to be a current epidemic of ‘celebration capitalism’ (Boykoff, 2014). That is, events filled with “lopsided public-private partnerships; festive commercialism; the security industry windfall; feel-good sustainability rhetoric; and a media-fostered political-economic spectacle,” (Boykoff, 2014, p. 23).
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: TOWARD SOCIAL MEDIA EVENTS

The final chapter provides a summary and synthesis of the main findings from this study. It then returns to the key research questions and addresses each one in turn, followed by a discussion about the theoretical, methodological and practical contributions of this work. The chapter concludes with an outline of some of the dissertation’s limitations and avenues for future research.

Although the possibilities for audience participation in media events have evolved over the years, public engagement remains crucial for the success of public events. Nonetheless, in over three decades of progressive research on media events, audiences have largely remained at the sidelines of empirical study. More specifically, while we now have plenty of research from various angles of the Olympic Games, the world’s biggest media event, the ways in which audiences participate in them by creating various content remains a blind spot. This hiatus only becomes more noticeable when we consider the development of social media since the late 2000’s, which means that audiences are now able to create and disseminate media content that is potentially as far reaching as the professional broadcasts of the Games thus, making audiences stakeholders in the mediation of the Olympics. In the words of the Rio Organizing Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games (ROCOG); “Journalists and citizens who publish content on the web are the ones who will ultimately define the success of the Games,” (Rio 2016 Strategic Communications Plan, ROCOG, 2012, p. 16 – emphasis my own). Yet, there is a scarcity of systematic research on how audiences participate in the public content creation of such events – particularly from a global, comparative perspective.
Subsequently, the goal of this dissertation has been to understand media events through the vantage point of active, content producing audiences by asking the following research question: how do social media audiences participate in global events? The answers to this question were then broken down into three sub-questions, each addressed throughout the dissertation and, specifically, within a case study: Q1) what factors shape and motivate Twitter audience participation in media events? (specifically addressed in case study one); Q2) What socio-cultural differences emerge in Twitter content creation across national audiences? (specifically addressed in case study three); and Q3) How can we use the vantage point of global audiences to better understand media events and conversely, what can studying media events teach us about global audiences (specifically addressed in case study two).

The answers to these questions are important not only for filling very real practical and theoretical gaps in academics’ and practitioners’ understandings of the practice of media events today, but also for allowing us to better grasp the enactment of public events as an essential genre of social action. As Handelman (1998) explains, public events serve an important societal function because they point beyond themselves; they offer collective moments and spaces for the creation and contestation of shared meaning. Public events remain important because they provide society with a respite and a mirror in the present to examine itself, as well as an opportunity to model the future of how things could be. Thus, understanding the ways in which people participate in the mediation of public events carries a significance beyond any specific event.

This dissertation took media events and active audience literature as its theoretical interlocutors arguing that the former, the study of the mediation of extraordinary public
events, could benefit from theoretical bricolage with the latter, the study of active meaning making by groups of individuals (and vice versa). To examine the research question of global audience participation in a social media enabled era, this dissertation employed a social-constructivist stance (Berger & Luckmann, 1966/1991; Searle, 1995) based in discourse theoretical analysis (Carpentier & De Cleen, 2007; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). It adopted a multiple-method (Hine, 2011; 2015), multiple case study approach (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Yin, 2012), which allowed for the contextualized analysis of specific moments in depth, as well as for the tracing of historical evolutions and comparisons between Games (cases). The dissertation focused on audience participation in the Olympic Games via Twitter, the mass communication platform with what is probably the lowest barrier of entry and widest global reach. It defined participation as a mediated, public discursive act that contributes to the creation of a media event, and it took the hashtag as a microcosm for analysis; one which allowed for the study of various architectures of participation.

In brief, the sensitizing concept of architectures of participation (adapted and advanced from O’Reilly, 2004) was used to study the interplay of institutional, technical and socio-cultural factors that shaped audience participation in a given context. A focus on architectures of participation allowed for the analysis of multiple data sources from tweets, to interviews with professionals and Olympic audience members, to policy document analysis, and personal observations (all treated as texts for analytical purposes). The belief underpinning this research strategy was that data are naturally multimodal (Dicks, Soyinka & Coffee, 2006; Hine, 2011; 2015). Thus, gathering and analyzing multiple scales and sources, highlighted via the study of the three domains of architectures of participation, would not only lead to a richer understanding of a given research phenomenon, but also to
a more realistic one. Furthermore, using architectures of participation as a consistent framework for analysis allowed for the operationalization of participation and for a more thorough and sound investigation, as well as for comparison between cases.

This dissertation traced how Twitter audiences created content in three consecutive Olympic Games: London 2012, Sochi 2014, and Rio 2016. The choice of these Games was particularly significant because it coincided with the inception and evolution of social media within the Olympic communications milieu. In addition, the choice of cases was also significant because it gave a range of examples of different types of audience involvement. London became the first ‘full’ social media Olympics, unofficially integrating a number of platforms like Twitter and Facebook into its communication strategy, and began what could be considered as a process of strict codification of social media use. The particular case study within London’s Games, the #savethesurprise campaign, served as an example of a case of successful, ritual-like, audience-organizer co-mediation of the Olympics. Sochi was particularly important because it continued the expansion of social media practices and became an example of open media contestation by #NBCFail Twitter users. Finally, by officially partnering with a number of platforms for the Games including Twitter, Rio completed the process of institutionalization of major social media began in London. It also emerged as a platform for the comparative study of various types of global participation under the relatively neutral hashtag of #Rio2016. It is my hope that these case studies and the synergetic knowledge they generate, as summarized in this chapter, offer a critical view of media events for practitioners and researchers alike. Next is a summary of the three case studies and their main findings, followed by a discussion of the main research question through its three sub-questions.
Summary of case study one: London 2012

The first case study considered what were billed as the inaugural social media Olympics and also signaled the onset of a less well-advertised angle of the Olympic communication strategy; the start of a consuming process of social media platform and content institutionalization. Subsequently, this case study dealt with one rendition of the classic organizational tension between structure and agency; the anxiety between the Olympic movement’s desire to retain narrative control over an event (although, quite frankly, this tension could be found in most other organizations), while also engaging and including social media and thus, audience voices into their communicative repertoire. This tension manifested itself particularly well in a Twitter campaign called #savethesurprise, which was employed several weeks before the opening ceremony of London’s Olympic Games and was designed to generate buzz about the opening ceremony whilst simultaneously promoting a culture of secrecy during its live audience dress rehearsals. Case study one unpacked the architectures of participation that allowed #savethesurprise, a rather unusual and unprecedented campaign, to proceed with such astounding success, and contributed to this dissertation’s overarching research question by focusing on what motivated people to use Twitter to participate in #savethesurprise in a ‘correct’, ritual-like way.

#savethesurprise’ architectures of participation showed a strong institutional backing; prior to the start of the Games, the UK’s government put into law a protection act that would shield Olympic intellectual property over and above all existing regulations, which were already quite stringent. In addition, the IOC and LOCOG worked closely with
platforms like YouTube to swiftly take down any leaked content from the dress rehearsals, signaling high levels of inter-institutional control. Technical affordances like the hashtag contributed to a collective campaign atmosphere while limitations, such as restricted knowledge, availability, and use of Twitter by audiences in the stadium, contributed toward an air of secrecy. Nevertheless, this case study argued that despite the strong institutional and technical preconditions undergirding #savethesurprise, the campaign truly became a success at the socio-cultural level and it is thus at this level that the factors that motivated participation particularly ought to be examined.

From the beginning, #savethesurprise was framed by the opening ceremony organizers around the themes of fairness and patriotism and the participants, the rehearsal audiences, were all select individuals who had a base level interest in the success of the Games. In turn, a palpable atmosphere of fair play and national pride was established and reinforced by the audiences via their creative yet subtle tweeting and patrolling of those whose Twitter content was deemed inappropriate. This cast audiences in the roles of secret guardians and co-creators of what was ultimately a ritualistic enactment of a media event. In turn, this also contributed to the overarching research question by showing that the factors shaping and motivating participation (play, frustration, patriotism) were ultimately based on the skillful evocation of intrinsic and to an extent, collective national values, more than extrinsic rewards.

Summary of case study two: Sochi 2014

The second case study examined Sochi’s Games, which became the first in history to have a majority of viewers in the US watching on a dual screen (television, accompanied
by phone). In addition, the Games took place in Russia, a country often antagonized by Western media, which set the preconditions for some contentious broadcast coverage by NBC – and for some potentially prickly social media audience responses. This case study examined #NBCFail, a hashtag that re-narrated NBC’s coverage of Sochi’s opening ceremony and pieced together the nearly 40% of footage that NBC controversially decided to edit out of its time-delayed broadcast. By focusing on US-based Twitter users alongside Russian-based users as a comparison point, this case unearthed the architectures of participation that made #NBCFail a popular and transformative media event. It also contributed to the overarching research question by asking how we can use the vantage point of global audiences to understand media events (and vice versa) and thus, how we ought to conceptualize the success of social-media enabled events writ large.

The institutional and technical domains of #NBCFail’s architectures of participation for the Sochi Games became problematic because they became visible. In turn, this presented audiences with the drive at the socio-cultural level to respond to what they deemed as inappropriate mediation on behalf of NBC. The responses came via playful, angry, and collaborative tweets using #NBCFail to piece together what NBC had cut from their time-delayed ceremony. The ability for global comparison – what NBC had aired versus what viewers in other countries had seen live – also became an important feature of the Olympic experience. It cast audiences into critical, advocacy roles and highlighted the evocation of the nation and the fissures behind a contentious media event as drivers of participation.

Beyond the case of the Sochi Games, #NBCFail became the first hashtag to be used for consumer watchdog purposes against a major media corporation. It is also probable that
some of the pressures social media audiences exerted on NBC’s Olympic producers led to a decision, several years later, for NBC to air all future Olympic coverage live. Thus, the continuation of #NBCFail throughout the Sochi Games became an essential tool and precursor for media advocacy in the digital age. By using the vantage point of global audiences to dissect #NBCFail, we emerge with a measure of event success: change. Not only were audiences able to influence the broader mediated coverage of the event, seeping their way into mainstream media narratives (thus, igniting mediated change via a redirection of content flow) but also, arguably, they were able to impact the very rendition of NBC’s future Olympic event mediation, making #NBCFail a transformative experience (thus, igniting institutional change beyond this particular media event).

**Summary of case study three: Rio 2016**

The third case study interrogated Rio’s 2016 Olympics, which led to what became the top global trending hashtag of the year, #Rio2016. By examining the architectures of participation behind this global trending topic, with a comparative focus on English, Portuguese and Russian speaking Twitter audiences, this case study argued that global trends themselves superimposed a logic of participation that was at once hyper-sensitizing to events and yet, concealing of the socio-cultural nuances that gave them their shape. By comparatively studying the specificities of participation, this case study contributed to the overarching research question by unveiling cultural differences in participation; it showed that the ways global, social media audiences participate in public events differs not only based on what people create content about but importantly, on how they create it.
The architectures of participation undergirding this case study presented the pinnacle of Twitter’s positioning into the institutional domain and, by extension, into the Olympic communications milieu as it entered into an official partnership with the Rio Organizing Committee for these Games. The groundwork for the institutionalization of #Rio2016 was also laid via physical and technical infrastructures and yet, some strong distinctions in the socio-cultural ways that English, Portuguese and Russian speaking audiences engaged with #Rio2016 emerged. For instance, although retweeting sport related information became the dominant form of engagement across the linguistic groups (thus, showing some hybridity and globalization of practices, as well as casting audiences in the roles of curators and amplifiers), the English language group was comprised of the most geographically diverse users, where talk-back to the televised event appeared as the most popular form of participation. The Portuguese language group was the most geographically homogenous, emotional, and based around retweeting noveleiros (specific cultural figures that stem from the telenovela tradition); and the Russian language group had the highest percent of retweets and engaged with the Games primarily as a form of news.

Notably, in all three cases, a strong theme of support for women in sport appeared, whereas men were rarely mentioned for their gender. Ultimately, this case argued that distinct socio-cultural histories and Twitter’s own technical features contributed to a sense of complex localism despite the global ambitions and status of #Rio2016. Next, this chapter returns to the key research question driving the dissertation and tackles its sub-components one by one.
RQ1) What factors shape and motivate audience participation in media event content creation?

To critically grapple with how social media enabled audiences remEDIATE global, public events and our understanding of them, it is important to turn to the question of what shapes and motivates participation in the first place. Institutional and technological factors certainly exerted an influence in igniting, encouraging and sustaining participation across Twitter. Nonetheless, when asked about why they participated in specific Olympic hashtags, my interviewees’ responses always pointed to some intrinsic motivators, located at the socio-cultural group or individual level. Subsequently, the three key factors that emerged from the socio-cultural domain as driving participation across the case studies were sociality and playfulness, frustration, and patriotism.

First, research has long established sociality as a key factor for both, encouraging and sustaining offline and online collective action, as well as predicting its successes (Jasper, 2008). Case studies one and two had the most frequent actual connections between audience members (conversations took place in 17% and 10% of all tweets, respectively) and many Twitter participants in case study one had some relationship to the Olympic movement. Case study three, however, only had an average of 4% mentions and conversations relative to the total number of tweets. As I argue later, sociality and community are important indicators of successful media events and case studies one and two certainly exhibited strong features of both.

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89 The desire and importance of sociality was particularly true for my younger interviewees, as most directly demonstrated by case study three. This suggests that motivations may well differ across demographics and implies the need for further research.
Second, playfulness, emotion and an element of fun were also key in all three case studies. As stated earlier in the dissertation, the Olympic Games can be thought of as miniaturized, rule-based, and dramatized enactments of society or, quite literally as games. The constitutive nature of a game places it somewhere at the intersection of reality and make-believe (Winnicott, 1953), so through active engagement with different media, digital play like that encountered in #NBCFail, and the creation of texts, we test out various communicative realities and (re)create our own subjectivities (Goriunova, 2012). Imre (2009) has argued that we may benefit from understanding various types of media formations and audience participation and consumption practices as games that are perpetually open to playful negotiation\(^{90}\). In fact, Wilson has gone a step further to say that all engagement with media is essentially ludic or playful (2008). Each of the three case studies supports these claims to exemplify some form of play; whether that be with Olympic narratives, or with rules that side step country-specific intellectual property (IP) laws for viewing Olympic content.

Play may also be connected to creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; 1997) – the latter being defined as the product of combinatory practices (Amabile, 1998; Goriunova, 2012; Joas, 1996) – and can be seen throughout the case studies:

- As a form of individuation and subjectivity (Goriunova, 2012; Joas, 1996): Case studies one, two and three,
- As a form of loosely collective problem solving (de Certeau, 1984; Runco, 1994): Case study two,

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\(^{90}\) Here, Imre uses the concept of ‘play’ in several ways; as an expression of ambiguity and change, and also as a way to capture the gamified and ludic dimension of global media developments today.
• As a specific, capitalist subsumed, type of labor encouraged by corporations
  (Andrejevic, 2008; Kraidy, 2016): Case studies one, two and three,

• As a strategic, state-level policy (Burchell, O’Loughlin, Gillespie, & McAvoy, 2015; Price & Dayan, 2009): Case study one.

In turn, playfulness, which often manifests itself in creativity, becomes an important feature, value proposition, and freedom of expression inherent in social media participation. The very ability for play becomes an ability for participation and for the social practice of media events. Subsequently, the inability to play, as partly demonstrated by case studies two and three, limits the success of media events. Play also allows for a testing of Handelman’s (1998) reflection and refraction of public realities. Of course, this is not to deny that creativity can also take on more corporate and exploitative undertones (Kraidy, 2016), as suggested in case study three. Nevertheless, this dissertation ultimately supports research that indicates internal motivators as greater drivers of creativity (resulting in content creation) than external ones (Amabile, 1998; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Indeed, play and creativity were some of the main reasons for participation across the three cases cited by my interviewees themselves.

Third, affect (most frequently expressed through the emotion of frustration), was another key driver of Twitter participation in all three case studies. As previous works have shown, the display of affect is often a political act in and of itself (Kraidy, 2016; Papacharissi, 2014). Further, various frustrations have fueled many recent online movements (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012; Perugorría & Tejerina, 2013). Thus, we can read the frustration displayed in the case studies as a common motivating thread between London’s 2012 volunteers who were angry at the British media for spoiling the
opening ceremony surprise, NBC’s broadcast viewers in 2014 who had to contend with long delays and heavily edited footage, and the Brazilians during Rio’s 2016 Games who used the Olympics as an opportunity to vent about the political situation in their country.

Lastly, the patriotic\textsuperscript{91} notion of the nation was evoked from the participant interviews and from the thematic content analyses in each of the case studies. Further, a sense of the nation was reinforced via the institutional and technical domains\textsuperscript{92}; for instance, Twitter’s automatic emoji flags propped up when certain country names were mentioned during the Rio Olympic Games. Further, as illustrated by case studies one and two, it was often the socio-cultural moments that made a call to the global, that most concertedly created and reinforced a strong sense of the local. This dissertation thus, suggests that social media use around global media events reinforced the notion of the nation just as much, if not more, than it created a sense of global community (Imre, 2009).

However, this statement too, requires some qualification. In order to complicate the seemingly straight forward and binary labels of global and local, it is worth returning to the notions of complex globalization (Roche, 2006) and hybridity (Kraidy, 2005), introduced in case study three. All three case studies showed discrepancies and convergences in event temporalities (Martín-Barbero, 1993) and communicative experiences. In addition, despite the national-level of analysis adopted by this dissertation, patriotism, or a sense of the nation, also emerged as fraught and plural concepts. For instance, case study two most directly demonstrated how the correct practice of the

\textsuperscript{91} As discussed in case study one, there is a palpable difference between the sentiment of patriotism and nationalism; while both celebrate the nation, patriotism does so without diminishing the value of other nations and it is the more appropriate description for the sentiment expressed throughout the three case studies.

\textsuperscript{92} While Twitter’s platform design can be read as a relatively benign push for nationalism more extreme examples certainly exist. For one such example of nationalism and localism enforced by technical design and government policy (i.e. the technical and institutional domains) see the case of WeChat in China (Liao, 2018).
American nation was not a unified concept but one divided clearly along political party lines, that crossed a number of localities.

**RQ2) What cultural differences emerge in content creation?**

Despite the universalist ambitions of the Olympic movement and of Twitter, the ways in which various people around the world participated in creating Olympic content was significantly culturally-informed. In summary, English language tweets tended to be the most diverse, but a pattern emerged from those emanating from the US and the UK with a focus on the media coverage of the Games. Twitter was frequently used as a talk-back channel for commentary on the mediation of an event. The Portuguese language tweets emanated from the most geographically homogenous group and were the most linguistically emotional. They were largely driven by noveleiro style content, where Twitter was primarily used as an entertainment and social network. The Russian language tweets consisted primarily of retweets of a relatively consistent group of accounts, where Twitter was used as a news source more so than a social network. Nonetheless, while conversations in the form of mentions of others were almost non-existent in the Russian samples, plenty of hashtags appeared, implying a desire for networked news.

The differences noted above reinforce the notion of localized experiences of global events (although these may themselves be hybridized forms). In the words of Bruno Hermann, Nielsen’s globalization and localization head; “global business is something abstract; it exists only because there are local customers,” (Personal Communication, November 27, 2017). In turn, there is no global audience experience, there are only local audience *experiences*, and global media events exist only in their local renditions and
conditions. This supports MacAloon’s (1992) idea that there is no single Olympics but rather, multiple Olympic Games. For example, the Rio 2016 case study was particularly instructive in showing that there are noticeable, culturally-conditioned differences in how various groups of people participated in media events; these manifested themselves not just through the topics discussed, but through the ways of discussion themselves.

Still, while a number of notable differences emerged, some cross-cultural similarities were certainly present, too. In terms of content, the theme of women in sport appeared as a commonality most strongly in case study three, and across all linguistic groups. In terms of ways of creating content, a taxonomy of participation emerged, where certain hashtags like #Rio2016 were constituted mainly of retweets, whereas #savethesurprise and #NBCFail were dominated by original tweets, often in conversation with others. This implied that curation and amplification were more apt at signaling what previous literature has termed acute events, that aim at spreading information quickly (Bruns & Burgess, 2011; Bruns, Highfield & Lind, 2012). However, original content, composed of contention, emotion, sociality, remediation and play tended to signal what previous literature has called talk-back or ‘audiencing’ (Bruns, Highfield & Lind, 2012; Fiske, 1992). The latter is typically experienced during scheduled programming, as talk back to the television or as non-urgent fandom. Although retweeting dominated, the fact that both taxonomies of participation and ‘event’ were present in #Rio2016 serves as further evidence that there are, indeed, a plethora of Games or events taking place during the Olympics.

In theory, global social media enabled-events are able to serve another important societal function to those already indicated by Handelman (1998) and Roche (2006). They
are potentially able to illuminate different understandings of the world, as depicted by fellow citizens, to allow us to move beyond our own national media and personal, linguistic filter bubbles of understanding. In practice, however, these events often fail in their potential to do so. The extent of transliteration or cross-national communication evidenced by the three case studies tended to be limited to sparse hashtag translation and even sparser hashtag hijacking. There was almost no palpable co-referencing between different national audience groups. Furthermore, through additional personalization ‘features’, like the country specific moments or language-specific emoji collections, platforms like Twitter technically and institutionally reinforced a localized experience of global events – contrary to their ambition to serve as a more universal podium.

RQ3) How can we use the vantage point of global audiences to better understand media events, and vice versa?

To best summarize public events in a social media enabled era, I first present a table (see Table 6.1), that compares media events, as defined by Dayan & Katz’ (1992) five fundamental criteria, with what I call social media events, composed of architectures of participation for audience involvement. In short, media events theory provides the analytical features for social media events which, through a focus on global audiences and the sensitizing framework of architectures of participation, offers a much needed update and expansion to the former. I then delve into some of the defining characteristics of social media events in more depth, paying particular attention to evolving audience dynamics, and conclude with a discussion about what makes for successful social media events. In brief, the concept of social media events aims to practically capture the active, mass, content producing and disseminating role of audiences, while theoretically building upon
over half a century of extant media events research (Boorstin, 1964; Couldry, Hepp & Krotz, 2009; Dayan & Katz, 1992; Fiske, 1996; Kellner, 2015; Kraidy; 2006; Sonnevend, 2016). The latter has tended to either privilege broadcast television as the primary medium for media events (while in essence ignoring the productive roles of audiences) or, to subsume the constitutive role of social media audiences under the broader umbrella of media (thus again, under-investigating their agency in event construction). As such, the term social media events evokes both, the focus on audience voices through social media, and the years of media events theory it builds upon.

Nevertheless, finding a name for this process of audience involvement and mediation within public events proved to be a challenge. ‘New media events’ was too vague and ‘Twitter events’ was too narrow for what I wanted to evoke. The characteristics of the events studied on Twitter largely translated onto social media platforms in general plus, there were instances of cross-platform references (Facebook, television, etc.,) within the case studies making Twitter events again, too constrained a name. The label social media events seemed to be the closest to the idea emerging form the findings of this dissertation yet, it too, raised some questions. For instance, social media have evolved at such pace in the last decade that it is not difficult to imagine a world in which Twitter is no longer amongst the top platforms. It is also quite possible that in the near future a new set of platforms for audience engagement will emerge.

The issue then becomes; what is the heuristic value and shelf life of a concept such as social media events? Potentially at the expense of eternal longevity, social media events capture a specific social moment (Highfield, 2016). Like media events, which were a product of the heyday of broadcast television, social media events are a product of society’s
preoccupation with social media platforms like Twitter today. Yet, more importantly, social media events highlight the social construction and audience involvement behind the mediation of public events. This involvement predates almost any particular medium or temporal context, but it is certainly shaped by the ideology and technical affordances contextual to the media with which it is associated. Hence, the name social media events.
Table 6.1: Features of Media Events as compared to Social Media Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features of Media Events (Dayan &amp; Katz, 1992)</th>
<th>Features of Social Media Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional Domain</strong></td>
<td><strong>Technological Domain</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Largely reinforces real time broadcast and digital media content, but also supports reaching of wider audiences via asynchronous content on partner platforms</td>
<td>‘Broadcasts’ events on variety of platforms, and encourages asynchronous engagement. Can cause issues when differences in mediation become visible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be live (on television)</td>
<td>Social media platforms often work hand in hand with event organizers to plan, advertise and execute events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be preplanned, advertised, and originate outside of the media</td>
<td>At least some degree of event organization occurs with media institutions. Event planning and advertising take on various gravity, but audience participation cannot be fully planned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall into three overall scripts of action</td>
<td>Social media events can fall into a range of scripts, where social media platforms are primarily interested in shaping quantity of engagement as opposed to quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have large audiences, integrate society, and be mostly conciliatory</td>
<td>Social media events increasingly depend upon large audiences and largely serve to reinforce the central role of media institutions in society. However, specific audience actions need not be conciliatory, as long as they drive engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interrupt routine and demand normative viewing</td>
<td>Regular schedules of media organizations are still somewhat interrupted. A saturation of media content pushes toward normative viewing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In brief, social media events emerge as thematic, public accumulations of communication (Couldry, Hepp & Krotz, 2009), that include mass, mediated audience participation, and take place according to the interplay of institutional, technical and socio-cultural domains. These domains form what I call the overall architectures of participation. The table above depicts a hybridization of features and practices between media and social media events, which is largely driven by the technical abilities and institutional and social support for platforms like Twitter to facilitate a transformation of time, space, personal and professional boundaries. (Refer to discussion in methodology chapter on pages 70-76 about specifics of social media affordances). The results of this blurring are discussed in more detail in the outlines of the five features below.

The five fundamentals revisited: Be live – on television

Liveness remains a key feature of media events and social media events. For instance, the outrage driving many people’s participation in #NBCFail was a response to NBC’s tape delayed rendition of an event that the rest of the world outside of the US was able to see live. Liveness and instantaneity were also key for driving participation in case studies two and three, where many people expressed that they got news faster on Twitter than they did even on live television (since live television is still slightly delayed and subject to editorial decisions). Therefore, the value of live both, as a technical capacity and a social practice (van Es, 2017), certainly remains central to the experience of social media events. However, the concept of liveness gets complicated by social media; media events time itself expands in a social media event as it stretches beyond the single time frame of the now and beyond the sanctioned timeframe of any given event.
First, the addition of mediating platforms beyond television also means the addition of a range of different temporal affordances and audience temporalities, which become most visible when they are out of sync with television and with each other. For instance, news on Twitter was often ahead of the televised event in cases two and three and this sometimes foreshadowed surprises that had yet to be broadcast. Case studies one and two demonstrated instances of the opposite, too; for a number of reasons, #savethesurprise and Russian speaking #NBCFail social media audiences were slow to create Twitter content after a given live event had occurred. This, in turn, prompts some deeper ontological questions: does a social media event begin when audience attention and participation begins? If so, does the social media event largely have a life of its own, which is driven by reverberations of social activity? What then is the relationship between different platforms mediating events, audiences, and the events themselves?

Second, as people are able to access, create, share, and re-narrate Olympic content via social media on a mass scale, and at any time of the year, this carries implications for the lifecycle of the Games. No longer are the Games only an insulated feat that can just be witnessed every two to four years as it takes place live, and as broadcasters choose to air it. (Although liveness certainly remains an institutional strategy for driving large audience figures, and the fact that the actual Olympic competition occurs during specific periods of time does not change.) What does change, however, is that mediated fragments and audience practices from the Games live on beyond specific Olympics. This makes Olympic communicative legacy a practical issue worth attention alongside the physical and

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93 The IOC itself has pushed beyond a bounded Olympics experience by launching the Olympic Channel at the end of the Rio Games in 2016. The channel streams Olympic content year round in an attempt to engage younger audiences and bridge time between Games. Thus, institutions like the IOC themselves have become active agents in challenging the bounded time frames of media events.
infrastructural legacy attended to so far by many scholars and the IOC (Girginov, 2012b). 

#savethesurprise was a prime example of how communicative legacy, understood as meaningful social interaction and experience, can live on years after an event; people returned to Twitter on the anniversary of London’s Olympic dress rehearsals to relive what was an unusual and likely hard to replicate social experience.

*Be preplanned, advertised, and originate outside of the media*

Case study one showed a social media event organized by the Olympic media machine; case study two showed an audience-led social media initiative bolstered by the professional aid of editors and outlets like Deadspin; and case study three could be described as a hybrid of original, audience-produced content, the sharing of professionally produced content, and the shaping of participation by Twitter into a ‘trend’. Therefore, as research has already implied (Boorstin, 1964; Hoover, 2010), and as this dissertation confirms, the instigators of social media events are many, and often work with, as well as have direct vested interests in the media.

It is undeniable that certain aspects of the Games and their proceedings remain highly scripted. However, as case study one demonstrated, even within the opening ceremony, which is probably the most pre-planned and advertised part of the Games, there can still be elements of surprise. Thus, we are reminded of Ang’s (2006) remark that no matter an organization’s best attempt to plan and structure audience responses, there remains an air of unpredictability and social agency. Of course, if we assume social media events like the Olympics to be creative enterprises, and we acknowledge that audience participation is driven at least somewhat by the motivation of play and creativity, then it
also logically follows that the scripted and preplanned feature of media events be correspondingly modified.

**Fall within three overall scripts of action**

While Dayan and Katz maintain that there are three primary scripts that a given media event can take – contest, conquest or coronation – the case studies in this dissertation indicate a richer variety. This includes not only a mixture of types of events, including parody, protest and secrecy, but as case study three has shown, due to the heterogeneous nature of its multiple actors and technical affordances, a given social media event may also take on multiple scripts simultaneously. In fact, this is a documented communicative strategy, known as Olympic polysemy; the explicit conjuring of multiple narratives by Olympic broadcasters in order to appeal to wide audiences (Chalip, 1992; 2000). However, what becomes particularly interesting is the creation of multiple scripts by audiences, too, and the subsequent visibility each of these scripts enjoys (or doesn’t) during an event.

Additionally, it is no longer just the event that is cast into a particular genre or script. Now, audiences are (sometimes self) cast into particular roles, too. For instance, audiences took on the roles of guardians of a secret and collaborators in the success of the opening ceremony in case study one. In case study two, they became critics and advocates for change and in case study three, they were largely curators and amplifiers of content. Because social media events allow audiences to access and create narratives beyond the official ones, they are well suited to Handelman’s (1998) typology of public events as models, presentations and representations of society. In this sense, social media events became powerful and instructive social mechanisms that very publicly showcase ways of
audiencing to people around the world. In doing so, social media events also become useful sites for researchers to better understand the establishment of various modes of active audiencing.

_Have large audiences, serve to integrate society, and be mostly conciliatory_

The central point of having large audiences is necessary in order to legitimize media and social media events. It is also crucial for their financial viability, as is increasingly demonstrated by the Olympic Games being heavily reliant upon audience figures. However, the types of activities imagined of these large audiences certainly differ between media and social media events. For one, the former envisaged audiences as a static, aggregate entity, whereas they gain some individual and collective agency in the latter. Further, the latter _can_ be integrative of society and conciliatory in character (Rothenbuhler, 1988) to the extent that they manage to coalesce diverse groups of people to pay attention to an overarching common theme; Olympic sporting competition. They can also certainly be integrative of people around a specific cause (Wardle & West, 2004), like in #savethesurprise in case study one, where diverse individuals engaged in common action. Nonetheless, social media events can also be destabilizing of society. For instance, case study two most clearly demonstrated how audiences are (self) cast into contentious roles, making fissures become hyper-visible between various groups (Kraidy & Mourad, 2010).

Traditional media events framing _does_ acknowledge the importance of audience activity. However, as a product of its time, it limits the capacity of that activity to relatively passive agreement, which is seemingly the necessary ingredient for events in the broadcast era to work. Yet, from an institutional perspective, social media platforms are often more
interested in quantity of engagement rather than quality of engagement, so whether people’s Olympic event participation is conciliatory or not is not something necessarily of concern to Twitter. In fact, a more cynical reading would hold that contention is actually preferred since it drives more audience interest (Palomino, Ribac & Masala; 2018). Thus, social media events are certainly able to take on less conciliatory roles in society and arguably, function even better when they do. In addition, various technical features, such as Twitter’s platform accessibility differences based on language, (or simply the presence of numerous languages) subtly helped to make events somewhat segregated. In sum, several decades of research, including this dissertation, have pointed toward a nuanced reality, where audiences negotiate, re-narrate and outright contest events’ meaning and framing at times.

*Interrupt routine and demand normative viewing*

The idea of an interruption of routine harks back to the extraordinariness of the Olympic media event. However, the way this special-ness is accessed and practiced takes on both, extraordinary and mundane characteristics in the context of a social media event. For example, social media events not only present an interruption to people’s routines of media consumption but also to their routines of media *interaction* via Twitter; a number of my interviewees indicated they were more likely to follow and communicate with new others during the Olympics. Simultaneously, social media events present a continuation of some audience habits such as personalized content consumption and schedules of content viewing. In turn, this contextualization of the Olympic Games via personal practices into the everyday lived realities of people facilitated an identification, internalization and
normalization of events. At least at face value, it promoted the idea of audience agency and, in a sense, became a step beyond the extraordinary, into the land of the multiple ordinaries.

In all three case studies social media event viewing and participation still emerged as normative; if not, it would lose its importance. However, this normative dimension took on an altered character, too. Now, key to the idea of achieving normative viewing in an increasingly fragmented media environment is not only the interruption of media organizations’ routines with specific event content, but also the flooding of audiences with this content across an increasingly greater array of platforms. Thus, normative viewing was promoted (and achieved) not only in quality but in quantity.

Successful Social Media Events?

Having used the synergies between the data in the three case studies to advance the fundamental features of media events, let us return to an important question raised specifically by case study two: what do successful social media events look like (and who decides)? Is success defined simply by the number of people who create content on a given social media platform to gain an official status like Twitter’s #Rio2016 label of global trending topic of the year? Surely, this quantitative measure of audience engagement says something for itself – but it does need interpretation. Based on previous literature and the findings of this dissertation, I propose at least three measures of social media event success: volume (enabled by the technical and institutional domains but ultimately amassed at the socio-cultural level), community and collaboration (taking place at the socio-cultural level)
and potentially impacting other domains), and change (often instigated at the socio-cultural level and implicating one or more of the other domains).

First, volume remains a central measure of success – and one that is closely linked to the other two. If #NBCFail or #savethesurprise had not achieved sufficient volume made possible by synergies across all three domains, then their impacts of community action or change would certainly be limited. Furthermore, from a practical standpoint, volume is a very important measure for the Olympic movement, which has in part instituted social media into its communicative milieu as an attempt to entice a new, younger demographic and thus, deal with the problem of the dwindling and graying of the Olympic audience. Of course, volume also ticks a major feature that is definitive of the cultural and political importance of both media and social media events: large audiences.

Second, community and collaboration could also be seen as measures of success. For one, sociality was hailed as a desired experience of social media events in all three case studies. My interviewees often mentioned that feelings of community, not unlike Durkheim’s (1912/1995) described sense of ritual sociality, were central to their experience of the event on Twitter. Furthermore, although more difficult to capture and measure than volume, feelings of community help create the communicative legacy of the Games which, I argue is an important heritage alongside Olympic infrastructure and finances.

Third, change through social media events is certainly another important measure of success and there are a number of ways that change can take place. For instance, it may do so narratively, when transmedia flow occurs or, when social media discourses go beyond their specific medium to impact the narratives of other more established media organizations. It may also do so transformatively; that is, it may achieve what Dayan and
Katz (1992) call the transformative function of engendering real impact beyond a given occurrence that few media events achieve. Case study two was an example of both types of change that impacted our communicative constructions of reality; the movement around #NBCFail effected the overall media flow and Games’ narratives. It also helped to shape the very constitution of future Olympic Games’ broadcasts.

Of course, much like community, capturing and measuring change and transformation is more difficult than doing it for volume alone. Audience driven transformations may occur at the institutional, technical and socio-cultural level; they may be rapid or slow, and they may make a significant, meaningful impact on future renditions of a media event or, on the reality of those involved in it. For these reasons, taking a more longitudinal and multi-modal approach toward media events and audience participation becomes key.

A discussion about the successes of social media events would be incomplete without an acknowledgement of some of their limitations, too\(^{94}\). If the concept of social media events states that they ensue whenever audiences are able to actively participate in the (re)mediation of public events, then it is worth asking how regularly and extensively does that occur? Writing in 1992, Dayan and Katz privileged the role of television in shaping media events and today, there is still much truth in that. For instance, London’s

\(^{94}\) An interesting quandary to ponder over is: what happens if and when social media events become too successful? Although some scholars have argued that the mediated version of events provides, at best, an impoverished, second class experience (MacAlloon, 1984) and at worst, a disillusioned, inauthentic one (Boorstin, 1964), the tides may be turning. Indeed, accessing the mediated version of events like the Olympics is far less expensive for audiences, more comfortable, safer (a concern that has unfortunately become more prevalent in the last couple of decades), and the view is almost guaranteed to be better from the comfort of the home or phone screen (Pascal Wattiaux, IOC Consultant, Personal Communication, March 4, 2016). Even sociality, one of the last advantages of the live event can, to an extent, be replicated virtually. Indeed, media event organizers are battling with how to keep the live experience engaging and appealing. So, could the social media event outdo the live one (particularly with the expansion of virtual reality content)?
2012 Olympic Games had a social media following of 4.7 million – and a global television audience of 3.6 billion (Miah & Garcia, 2012). Further, while case study one and two were socially successful events, they still served to reinforce the centrality of television. Although a large part of this dissertation has been dedicated to clarifying and often arguing against the sole centrality of television in directing public events today, (particularly in cases where there is a strong public sentiment of nationalism or frustration), it is certainly worth holding onto parts of this claim, especially if we read ‘television’ to refer to the broader concept of the media industry and corporate power.

Also worth asking is if audiences have always been central to public events, then why are we looking so intently at them now? Did Dayan and Katz miss the nature of audience involvement in their media events theory or, has audience involvement simply changed? Utopian visions around Web 2.0 technologies drove much of the early research interest in the democratic potential of citizen ‘participation’. However, since then, academic and business discourses have become much more nuanced and I believe the answer to this question is similar to the answer provided by Crawford, Miltner and Gray (2014), who questioned the current interest in big data. A significant part of the renewed popularity of audience research at the start of the 21st century can be attributed to the broader social, political and economic value at the fore of content creation, mining and monetization. Audiences did not take on this type of added commercial significance in the broadcast era. Thus, Dayan and Katz had even less of an incentive to pay attention to their doings in the heyday of the broadcast age; they also could not have envisaged the combination of personal and collective participation afforded by social media technologies.
Of course, one problem with taking lessons from social media audience studies and applying them to audiences writ large could be precisely this error of the times, which presently comes with a hyper-focus on productive audiencing; a reverse in the extreme of earlier communication studies, which acknowledged audience participation only to the extent of encoding and decoding processes – if at all. The present focus on productive, visible, content producing audiences is an addition to Dayan and Katz’ work however, taken as a blanket statement, it could equally lead us into reductionist and mistaken logical territory (Girginova, 2016b). This is why, as alluded to earlier in the dissertation, I believe it is important to retain the word ‘audience(s)’ in the broader context of media industry research alongside ‘citizens’ and ‘publics’; while it is important to acknowledge and seize upon empowering, participatory experiences some people have with the media, we must not forget the overall corporate framework and power dynamics within which these experiences most frequently exist.

In short, successful social media events rely upon the effective interplay of the three domains in the architectures of participation framework. However, the success of social media events should not be measured solely by the productive output of content creation or proprietary digital audience ‘traces’, which corporations have ready access to alone. Yet, finding ways to capture and measure social media events beyond the visible, productive acts of audiencing is certainly a methodological challenge. A focus on community and collaboration resulting from social media events could be one means by which to approach this issue, which would be positively bolstered by further qualitative research and attention to audiences’ lived experiences. In addition, the potential for audience participation ought

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95 Of course, these distinctions are linguistically-bounded and need further exploration in other languages. For some work on this topic see Butsch and Livingstone, 2013.
to be carefully examined and taking holistic approaches to doing so, such as the architectures of participation framework advocated by this dissertation, is one such means for keeping our expectations of the work of social media events in check.

**Theoretical, methodological and practical contributions of the dissertation**

February 9th marked the opening ceremony of the 2018 Winter Olympic Games in PyeongChang, South Korea. I watched it with a group of friends and colleagues, and at the end of the event one of them turned toward me and asked: *so, what’s the point of it all?* The pageantry, the traditions, the idea of peace and friendship without exact prescription for how to achieve it? Indeed, public events rarely offer a prescription for what exactly to do with them or how to achieve the ideals they present. They do, however, offer us the collective time, space, and often, incentive for reflection and for asking such questions. Perhaps, *that is* the point. Furthermore, by better understanding the various affordances and architectures through which global audiences participate in these events we may be able to even more effectively ask and answer such critical questions – maybe in ways we do not even hitherto think possible.

To that aim, as far as can be ascertained, this dissertation has presented the first systematic and comparative empirical study of media events from an audience-centric perspective. By focusing on content producing Twitter audiences this study picked up where Dayan and Katz’ (1992) media events work left off: “certain media events do not fall neatly into the tripartite classification of contests, conquests and coronations. Their distinguishing mark… is that they do not have individual actors but collective protagonists,” (p. 49). In turn, this dissertation has theoretically, methodologically and
practically advanced Dayan and Katz’ work by offering a systematic, critical study of
global audience participation; an important, under-examined, constitutive component of
media events thus far.

By arguing for an audience-centric perspective to media events (in fact, this study
has gone a step further to ascertain that media events are primarily a product of the global
circulation of professional and user generated content via audiences), this dissertation has
complemented existing theoretical work that has done much to build upon Dayan and Katz’
early theory. For example, Couldry, Hepp and Krotz (2009) have argued for an
understanding of media events as thickenings of communication and the present study has
empirically illustrated one means by which communication can thicken; namely, through
the content creation practices of millions of people worldwide.

By focusing on media events, the present study has also contributed to our
understanding of audience research. As opposed to superseding extant approaches to
audience studies, this dissertation has opted for a holistic, integrative approach, which
acknowledges and synergistically builds upon previous traditions of the active audiences
and incorporation/resistance paradigms, specifically. This is most notable through the
different, albeit complementary, analytical foci of the three domains of the architectures of
participation framework. While these domains naturally take on different levels of
centrality in each of the case studies, it is argued that social media events and thus, audience
participation, cannot exist without their interplay96.

96 Similar to the necessity the circuit of culture (Hall et al., 1997) places on each of the five analytical
moments in the production of meaning, the architectures of participation framework also requires that each
of its domains be present in order for audience participation in media events to occur. Besides having a
different analytical focus and thus, methodological approach, the latter framework also takes on a slightly
normative dimension, meaning that participation is assumed as a social good, that is worth achieving.
Therefore, the metaphor of architecture or scaffolding, as opposed to an ongoing, circular motion highlights
the idea of certain constructions being more apt at achieving this goal (public participation) than others.
Opting for a synergistic approach toward previous audience studies also means that the present study recognizes the various formations of audiences that previous works have conjured; as Livingstone has convincingly argued, “all (audience studies) paradigms continue to coexist because all roles for the audience coexist,” (2013, p. 26 – brackets my own). Indeed, a look through the IOC’s own documents has revealed no less than 19 different names for the groups of people that make up an audience (i.e. audiences, spectators, consumers, etc.,). Therefore, being able to synergistically draw from various formulations and approaches toward audience studies (for example, examining the technical domain often requires more quantitative approaches, whereas the institutional domain may require a political economy approach) necessitates multi-modal and multiple-method research strategies. The latter then becomes a methodological, epistemological and ontological imperative. It also becomes a contribution of this dissertation toward the advance of audience research, adding to a growing body of work that aims to complicate the notion of active audiences and more holistically capture participation. Of course, taking an integrative approach toward audience studies raises questions about the dominance and compatibility of the various research traditions; this is something that future research will grapple with as it contextually examines the relationships among the three domains making up the architectures of participation framework.

In addition, a number of scholars have called for more data on, and global studies of, media events (Couldry, Hepp and Krotz, 2009; Roche, 2006); hence, this work comes as a response to that call. This dissertation has also built upon Kraidy’s understanding of hypermedia events as bottom-up, decentralized, performative, mediated upheaval, (2010) by focusing explicitly on how and why people around the world create social media content;
namely, in culturally conditioned ways, primarily guided by intrinsic motivators. It is here (often within the context of intrinsic motivators) that creativity, as a process, emerges as a mediator between structure (often organizationally sanctioned) and agency (typified by audiences’ agentic capabilities). The present study has challenged the notion that social media events, through their multiple points of entry, must be contentious (although it certainly acknowledges that many of them are) and has highlighted that even the contentious versions of social media events often still serve powerful, institutional interests despite their contrarian desires.

Lastly, this dissertation has complemented Ytreberg, who has persuasively called for a need to examine media events beyond the medium of television in the broadcast era, as well as past a sanctioned time frame alone (2014; 2017). This study has certainly advanced knowledge beyond the sole broadcast-centric focus of media events, while simultaneously acknowledging the remaining centrality of television in our transmedia storytelling environment. By examining various national groups of Twitter users and their participation before, during, and after the Olympic Games, this study has further expanded upon the singular notion of ‘an audience’ and the bounded timeframe of events; it has demonstrated the idea of multiple Olympic audiences and social media events (MacAloon, 1992; Roche, 2006). While time certainly remains a central feature of social media events (Roche, 2002), it is one that has been etched open for some reinterpretation.

In short, through the bricolage of media events and active audience research this dissertation has provided a new, holistic, theoretical means by which to examine the role of audiences in media event construction. This dissertation has been premised upon the ontological assumption that events and audiences are social constructions. In turn, by using
a sensitizing analytical toolkit of architectures of participation, one methodological contribution of this work, this study has been able to operationalize and examine social media audience participation. The dissertation has critically surveyed what events with collective protagonists look like, what motivations shape and drive them, what cultural differences emerge in participation, and how we may systematically define this new breed of social media-enabled events.

A second methodological contribution of this dissertation is the multiple-methods approach. While this dissertation privileges the qualitative perspective, I firmly believe that ethnographically rooted approaches lack the ability to see the broader picture and breadth of digital data available, and computational social sciences lack the capacity to dig deeply into specific nuances, cases, and questions of subjectivity (Sumiala et al., 2016). Thus, in an attempt to avoid these shortcomings, I mix the scale of data texts and supplement discourse analyses with more ethnographic and quantitative approaches in my work (Hine, 2015; Livingstone, 2004). This worked particularly well in case study three and it is worth noting that this approach breaches a relatively new territory in academic research.

The importance of the multiplicity of communicative experiences resulting from this study is one of the essential practical contributions of the dissertation. The three case studies demonstrated how different audiences participated in content creation and what the nature or outcomes of certain architectures of participation were for shaping their engagement. Subsequently, this knowledge can be used toward more effectively planning and evaluating future public events or, toward structuring content so as to more veritably communicate with and engage various linguistic groups beyond any specific event. Additionally, as case study three in particular has shown, it becomes important not only to
present culturally sensitive content to audiences but also to allow them to respond in culturally conditioned and appropriate ways; thus, the present study has made a contribution toward understanding how that may be done as well.

Lastly, the three case studies lend themselves to being readily appropriated for teaching; both, for more practically and academically oriented purposes. As Lord Seb Coe, chairman of the London 2012 Olympic Games said in reference to the British public; “we recognise that we can’t second-guess what people are saying. The most demanding stakeholder we have is the 60 million people out there,” (Fernandez, 2012, n.p.). It is my hope that with this dissertation we have come a step closer to knowing what these most demanding stakeholders are saying, how, and why.

**Limitations and directions for future research**

As television saturation of the planet is near complete, the next frontier for media events will likely be through social media platforms, or some hybrid form of media. However, as noted earlier, some of the main limitations of this dissertation have been precisely medium specific (and I write ‘medium specific’ with a double entendre). First, examining Twitter as the central platform for participation has carried certain demographic and technological constraints. Thus, future research would certainly do well to expand beyond Twitter, particularly toward understudied social media in the Western academic world, such as VKontakte and WeChat. This would allow for a further fleshing out of the concept of social media events on a global scale.

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97 While the Olympics certainly are unique as a media event, the concept of audience participation is not and the analytical framework of architectures of participation may be tailored to apply to a wide range of events, both big and small.
Second, I recognize the difficulty (and irony) of trying to write about the multiplicity of cultural and linguistic social media experiences equipped only with the toolkit of the English language. This is a difficult limitation to surpass however, drawing from more diverse linguistic repertoires and experiences would help to mitigate this issue. For instance, appropriately borrowing and contextualizing native terms from other cultures could help to more accurately describe audiences’ lived experiences in media events, as well as to broaden academia’s discursive repertoires for participatory analyses in the future. If research were focused on some of the upcoming sport media events in Asia98, the Chinese concept of *shanzhai* which describes a form of copycat creativity (Hua, 2011), could be one example of a way to linguistically enrich our participatory analyses.

Finally, while to the extent possible this dissertation has attempted to take a multi-modal approach toward studying audiences’ media event participation, there are certainly some other data sources that could be examined in more depth. One example would be to better integrate big and small data into research. Case study three took on a more innovative methodological approach by mixing scales of data from millions of tweets to interviews with specific individuals, and revealed broad scale patterns of participation that case studies one and two did not have the empirical reach to do. This was largely done from a qualitative grounding but the reverse would yield interesting findings, too. Another example would be a more concerted focus on visuals. While case study three examined the use of emoji, a general evolution throughout the three case studies has been a vast proliferation in the quantity of multimedia content found in tweets. Indeed, a conversation with Matthew Haley, the Director of Communication and Marketing for World City Links, who oversaw

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98 Indeed, in more recent years, a number of prominent sporting media events have migrated East, toward Asian host countries. This presents new challenges and opportunities for culturally sensitive research.
the cultural exchange between the London and Rio Olympics, noted that the most widely shared social media posts had visual content (Personal Communication, October 16, 2016). A similar sentiment was shared by Rafael Sena, Social Media Coordinator for ROCOG (Personal Communication, November 3, 2017). Surely, giving different priority to various multimodal data would tell different stories about audiences and their experiences; it may hopefully, also, lead us to some new conceptualizations of both.

In short, different data provide different vantage points to public events and their audiences. Thus, a richer mixing of scales and modalities would be a promising avenue for future research. Nonetheless, it is my hope that this dissertation has advanced the imperative for multimodality beyond a methodological approach, toward an epistemological and ontological understanding; one that also implies the need for synergistic theoretical advances to research and more complex, grounded findings.

With this dissertation I proposed the basic assumption that public events, like the Olympic Games, are above all communicative events. This means that all interlocutors or communicative parties must be taken seriously as being constitutive members of these shared realities. Subsequently audiences, the thus far silent party, have in varying ways always been at the heart of these events; they have served as sources of support, revenue, content, and more. Surprisingly however, audiences have not been center stage in media events or Olympic (the world’s biggest media event) research. With this dissertation I have addressed this practical and theoretical gap by inverting the focus of media events to

99 While this study began in the context of relative optimism toward social media and audience participation, it concludes in what is certainly a climate of relative social skepticism and perhaps, even pessimism. Questions of covert government and corporate data exploitation, as well as unethical manipulations of public behavior have cast doubt over the use, regulation, and function of social media platforms. I do not think these recent issues diminish the power of actual audience participation in the construction of event realities – be that via social media or not – however, they do ask of us to be more informed and critical about our modes of participation. Thus, another reason why more research like this is needed.
provide an audience-centric reading. Further, I have argued that media events are animated by global audiences according to certain parameters referred to as architectures of participation; focusing on these parameters invites researchers and practitioners to take holistic, multimodal approaches to the study of participation and audiences writ large.

In order to provide a rich and updated analytical encapsulation of a modern-day media event, the Olympic Games, I proposed the term *social media events* toward the end of the dissertation. Social media events are a way to encompass the narrative and structural flows that audiences, as a group of mediated, mass content producers, bring to the traditional version of broadcast media events. The result, has hopefully been a clearer understanding of the ways in which we participate in these important, social constructions of reality. As public events continue to capture society’s imagination, and as an increasing array of platforms for mediated social participation become available to us, we would all be better served by more such clarity.
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APPENDIX

Appendix A
IRB approval certificate

University of Pennsylvania
Office of Regulatory Affairs
3624 Market St., Suite 301 S
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6006
Ph: 215-573-2540/ Fax: 215-573-9438

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
(Federalwide Assurance # 00004028)

10-Oct-2016

Katerina Girginova
Attn: Marwan Kraidy
kraidy@asc.upenn.edu
katerina.girginova@asc.upenn.edu

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Katerina Girginova
TITLE: Olympic Games Dissertation Research - Katerina Girginova
SPONSORING AGENCY: No Sponsor Number
PROTOCOL #: 824534
REVIEW BOARD: IRB #8

Dear Ms. Girginova:

The above-referenced research proposal was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) on 09-Oct-2016. It has been determined that the proposal meets eligibility criteria for IRB review exemption authorized by 45 CFR 46.101, category 2.

This does not necessarily constitute authorization to initiate the conduct of a human subject research study. You are responsible for assuring other relevant committee approvals.

Consistent with the federal regulations, ongoing oversight of this proposal is not required. No continuing reviews will be required for this proposal. The proposal can proceed as approved by the IRB. This decision will not affect any funding of your proposal.

Please Note: The IRB must be kept apprised of any and all changes in the research that may have an impact on the IRB review mechanism needed for a specific proposal. You are required to notify the IRB if any changes are proposed in the study that might alter its IRB exempt status or HIPAA compliance status. New procedures that may have an impact on the risk-to-benefit ratio cannot be initiated until Committee approval has been given.

If your study is funded by an external agency, please retain this letter as documentation of the IRB’s determination regarding your proposal.

Please Note: You are responsible for assuring and maintaining other relevant committee approvals.

If you have any questions about the information in this letter, please contact the IRB administrative staff. Contact information is available at our website: http://www.upenn.edu/IRB/directory.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Renee Crews
IRB Administrator

Digitally signed by Renee Crews
Reason: I attest to the accuracy and integrity of this document
Date: 2016.10.10 13:18:26 -04'00
Appendix B
Sample interview questions

Sample interview questions in English
(used in semi-structured interviews):

- Can you describe your role in the X Olympic Games/Olympic Organization?
- How did you and your team approach and analyze your audiences?
- What role do you think social media play in the grand scheme of the Olympic Games?
Appendix C
Survey questions sent via Survey Monkey
(sent in Russian, Portuguese and English)

English

Can you help my PhD dissertation research on the Olympics and Twitter by taking a quick survey?

- OR -

I'm doing some PhD dissertation research on the Olympics and Twitter - can you help by taking a quick survey?

1) How do you usually use Twitter?
2) How did you use Twitter during the Rio 2016 Olympics?
3) How did the Olympics on Twitter compare to the Olympics on other media for you?
4) Is there anything else you’d like to add about the Twitter, social media or the Olympic Games?
5) Would you be willing to be contacted for a short, follow-up interview?

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/KKKZPD9 http://svy.mk/2cFEn2K

Russian

Я делаю диссертационную работу о Олимпийских играх и Twitter - вы можете помочь краткого опроса? Заранее спасибо!

Я делаю диссертационную работу по исследованиям на Олимпийских играх и Twitter - вы можете помочь краткого опроса?

1) Как вы обычно используете Twitter?
2) Как вы использовали Twitter во время Олимпийских игр 2016 года Рио?
3) Как Олимпиада на Twitter по сравнению с другими средствами массовой информации для Вас?
4) Вы хотели бы что-нибудь еще добавить о Twitter, социальные медиа или Олимпийских игр?
5) Вы были бы готовы в течение короткого времени принять участие в интервью?

Я делаю диссертационную работу о Олимпийских играх и Twitter - вы можете помочь краткого опроса? Заранее спасибо! http://svy.mk/2cdqJ6j

Portuguese

Esta é uma pesquisa de doutorado sobre os Jogos Olímpicos e Twitter. Você pode participar?

Estou fazendo uma pesquisa de doutoramento sobre os Jogos Olímpicos e Twitter - você pode ajudar participando de uma pesquisa rápida?

1 Como você costuma usar o Twitter?
2 Como você usou o Twitter durante os Jogos Olímpicos Rio 2016?
3 Para você, como os Jogos Olímpicos no Twitter se compara com os Jogos Olímpicos em outras mídias?
4 Existe alguma coisa que você gostaria de acrescentar sobre o Twitter, mídia social ou os Jogos Olímpicos?
5 Você estaria disposto a ser contactado para dar seguimento à pesquisa com uma entrevista curta?

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/55NYTP5  http://svy.mk/2czd0Jp

Follow up questions: English

How were you involved with the Rio Olympic Games?

Did Twitter provide you a different perspective on the Olympics than traditional/other media such as television? How?

Did you follow or tweet at other people who were tweeting about the Olympics? Did other people respond to you?

What did you like the most about the Olympics on Twitter?

What did you like the least about the Olympics on Twitter?

Is there anything else you’d like to add?
Follow up questions: Russian

1) Do you get a different perspective of the Olympics on Twitter than you do on TV?
2) What type of content do you enjoy tweeting the most/least around the Olympics?
3) Do you follow other people who tweet about the Olympics (and why/why not)?
4) Do you comment on other people's tweets/Do they comment on yours? Why or why not?

1) Отличаются ли точки зрения об Олимпиаде в твиттере и по телевизору?
2) Какую информацию об Олимпиаде Вам нравится больше / меньше всего выкладывать (упоминать) в твиттере?
3) Подписываетесь ли Вы на твитты других людей об Олимпиаде? (да или нет, и почему?)
4) Комментируете ли Вы твитты других людей? Комментируют ли они Ваши? да или нет, и почему?

Follow up questions: Portuguese

1) How were you involved with the Rio Olympic Games?
2) Did Twitter provide you a different perspective on the Olympics than traditional/other media such as television? How?
3) Did you follow or comment to other people who were tweeting about the Olympics? Did other people respond to you on Twitter?
4) What did you like the most about the Olympics on Twitter?
5) What did you like the least about the Olympics on Twitter?

1) Qual foi o seu envolvimento com os Jogos Olímpicos do Rio?
2) O Twitter forneceu para você alguma perspectiva diferente das outras mídias como a TV nos Jogos Olimpicos? Como?
3) Você seguiu ou comentou outras pessoas que estavam Twitando sobre os Jogos Olimpicos? Alguém respondeu a você no Twitter?
4) O que você gostou mais sobre os Jogos Olímpicos no Twitter?
5) O que você gostou menos sobre os Jogos Olímpicos no Twitter?

Is there anything else you’d like to add?
Tem alguma coisa a mais que você gostaria de acrescentar?
Appendix D

Olympic audiences timeline

Audiences have always been central to the Olympic movement and to the implementation and success of the Olympic Games. However, with this dissertation I argue that the centrality of the audience has taken different shapes and meanings throughout history – from the ancient Olympic Games in 776 BC, which were often used as a political tool to appease warring nations and tensions between lower classes and the ruling elites (Spivey & Spivey, 2005), to the modern Games, which are sustained by broadcast fees and, ultimately, audience viewership (Olympic Marketing Fact file, 2014). Below are some of the historical highlights in the evolution of Olympic audiences and their relationships to the Olympic movement.

- **776 BC** Ancient Olympic Games – this makes the Olympic Games the world’s most ancient ‘media event’

- **1749** First “Olympick” dissertation by Gilbert West, Oxford University. With West’ dissertation, the Olympic Games gained another audience; the academic one. This is notable because it shows interest in the Olympic movement long before it entered ‘media events’ discourse. In his dissertation, West notes that the Ancient Olympic Games were basically a political project but he also poses a fundamental question for scientific inquiry; how is it possible to accurately understand the (ancient) Olympics given that so much of the material available is based on myth, fable and tradition?

- **1896** First modern Olympic Games – with 12 media personnel (‘journalists’)

- **1924** Games in Paris were the first to be broadcast on radio. During these Games newsreel cameras also captured and conveyed scenes to cinema audiences and an early form of social media, personal photocameras, made capturing experiences of audience members possible

- **1924** First Winter Olympic Games – these Games became important for tapping into a new audience of winter sports, and for serving as platforms for Olympic communication innovation tests (such as digital forms of broadcasting, new camera equipment, etc.), which were then adopted more confidently into the Summer Games

- **1932** LA, California Games organizers block radio broadcasting waves for fear of loss of live ticket sales revenue
• **1936** Games in Berlin were the first to be televised *nationally* (there were 3 cameras and the Games were broadcast in public auditoriums)

• **1948** The London summer Olympics (and the St. Moritz, Switzerland, winter Olympics), become the first Games to resume the Olympic tradition post WWII. In turn, these Games become an important governmental tool for the normalization and cohesion of society, as well as for the rebuilding of national morale through sport.

The London Games also become the first Games that are broadcast on television (the BBC) to the nation, and became available for viewing in the home.

• **1956** The televised Games in Melbourne, Australia became the first to be designated as entertainment – not news – which marks the beginning of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) selling viewing rights and perhaps, the beginning of Olympic audience commercialization.

• **1956** The first winter Games coverage from Cortina D’Ampezzo, Italy. (Although the first Winter Olympics were held in 1924, France, the 1956 Games were the first ones to be broadcast)

• **1960** Rome, Italy Olympics: First global TV coverage

• **1960’s** The Olympic Press Commission is established with the purpose of fostering a better relationship between the Olympic organizers, press and the general public.

• **1964** Tokyo, Japan becomes the first Asian country to host the Olympic Games

Tokyo Games also become the first to broadcast the Olympics live by satellite

• **1980** Moscow, Russia becomes the first Eastern European country to host the Olympic Games. Notably, neither African nor Middle Eastern countries have yet been hosts

• **1992** The IOC codifies the roles of volunteers and takes charge of coordinating and controlling the whole volunteering process (Albertville, winter Olympics and Barcelona summer Olympics). The role of volunteers becomes essential for the successful hosting of future Olympic Games.
• **1994** Winter Olympics (Lillehammer, Norway) moved to a separate, four-year cycle as not to overlap and compete with summer Games and thus, to capture a wider audience.

• **1995** The first non-official Olympic website is built by Sun Systems (Microsoft). This is essentially a hijacking of the Olympic product, or a ‘fake’ version, which becomes highly contested.

• **1996** The first official Olympic website is built for the Atlanta Summer Games. As early as 1996 the official website allows audiences to chat with athletes.

• **1996** The UK’s Code on Sports and Other Listed and Designated Events goes into law via the 1996 Broadcasting Act, meaning that the Olympics are designated as a public interest event (interpreted almost as a basic, civil right) and must be broadcast freely to the UK public (i.e. be available without additional television subscription beyond a television license, such as in the US).

• **2001** The IOC creates the Olympic Broadcasting Services (OBS) division in Spain, which creates all Olympic broadcasts and sells them to interested countries.

• **2007** The IOC launches a ‘360 management program’, which aims at managing and unifying all aspects of the Games into a coherent and engaging event. This program also aims at unearthing and engaging new audiences as well as tapping into younger ones through research, the inclusion of new sports and the practice of activities beyond the Games.

• **2008** The Beijing Games officially integrate YouTube into the communications plan.

Beijing Games are first to be broadcast entirely in HD.

Beijing includes a record-breaking number of half a million official citizen volunteers for the Games. The number of those that applied was even higher but in this case 500,000 refers to those who were screened, selected and trained as official Games volunteers.

• **2009** IOC holds Olympic Congress in Copenhagen about the “Digital Revolution”.

• **2009** IOC appoints its first Director of Social Media.

• **2010** The “First social media Games” in Vancouver, (Winter Games) using Twitter and Facebook as well as various blogging tools and YouTube.

• **2010** Steve Jobs announces the launch of the iPad right before Vancouver winter Games

• **2012** London introduces first 3D broadcasting

  London claims to be first “social media Games”

  #NBCFail hashtag goes viral during London Olympics

  The first post-Games surveys are conducted about the Olympic audience experiences by Nielsen

• **2014** Sochi Winter Games: NBC becomes the single biggest contributor (25%) of Olympic revenue

  For the first time a majority of US television viewers watch the Sochi (or any) Olympics on ‘double screens’; television plus some form of digital media

• **2016** Rio, Brazilian Olympics mark first time the Games are held in a South American country, opening up the Games to yet another set of global audiences

• **2016** IOC launches Olympic television Channel
Appendix E
Closer-range country images

Closer-range geolocation of Portuguese language tweets using #Rio2016

The three cities with most intense Twitter activity are Sao Paolo, Rio de Janeiro and Recife, respectively.

Closer-range geolocation of Russian language tweets using #Rio2016

The two cities with the most significant Twitter activity are Moscow and St. Petersburg, respectively.
## Appendix F

### Mentions per country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Portuguese Sample</th>
<th>Russian Sample</th>
<th>TOTAL mentions</th>
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## Appendix G

Top English Twitter accounts posting on #Rio2016 (as of 2017)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Account name</th>
<th>Number of tweets</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Following</th>
<th>Followers</th>
<th>Tweets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ymanojkumar023</td>
<td>7819</td>
<td>Undergrad student at IIT (Indian Institute of Technology) Kharagpur, India</td>
<td>1,027</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kanishkkr</td>
<td>5142</td>
<td>Indian man</td>
<td>796</td>
<td>725</td>
<td>55,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peterkonnecke</td>
<td>4490</td>
<td>Australian man. Works as school administrator and was involved in Sydney Games as PR speaker, volunteer coordinator. Heads volunteer Olympic group</td>
<td>2,119</td>
<td>829</td>
<td>92,800</td>
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<tr>
<td>arafeed1</td>
<td>4108</td>
<td>Account suspended</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BrianDsouza1</td>
<td>3724</td>
<td>Christian, sports fan. Mangalore India</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>918</td>
<td>32,300</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jarvis96Chris</td>
<td>3140</td>
<td>Arsenal/Juventis fan</td>
<td>6,702</td>
<td>6,346</td>
<td>678,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>SteveBrookes69</td>
<td>2885</td>
<td>Graphic Designer, man. Birmingham, UK. Sports and boxing fan/reporter</td>
<td>21,600</td>
<td>19,600</td>
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<td>NarrendraM</td>
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<td>randomlaura14</td>
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<td>First female account - TV fan</td>
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<td>McCarrenBill</td>
<td>2343</td>
<td>Sport Fan. Michigan, USA</td>
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<td>4,221</td>
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<td>imMayur17</td>
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Appendix H
Top Brazilian Twitter accounts posting on #Rio2016 (as of 2017)

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<th>Account name</th>
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<th>Following</th>
<th>Followers</th>
<th>Tweets</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pronomerelativo</td>
<td>3862</td>
<td>Sao Paolo, Brazil. Sport fan. Young user</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>893</td>
<td>186,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>zerohora</td>
<td>2818</td>
<td>Noveleiro?</td>
<td>1,214</td>
<td>7,535</td>
<td>15,100</td>
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<tr>
<td>NesterTweets</td>
<td>2021</td>
<td>Philosopher, writer journalist</td>
<td>1million+</td>
<td>960,000</td>
<td>351,000</td>
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<td>defast1</td>
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<td>Sao Paolo, sport fan. Young</td>
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<td>sylmargel</td>
<td>1510</td>
<td>&quot;Active Retiree&quot; - woman</td>
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<td>jupabelmok</td>
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<td>Espirito Santo. Young boy. TV fan</td>
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<td>mat_aurelio</td>
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<td>Leo_Balmant</td>
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<td>Cotagem. Sport, news politics, personal views. Young man</td>
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## Appendix I

Top Russian Twitter accounts posting on #Rio2016 (as of 2017)

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