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Networked spectators

Social media conversation and moderation at the Olympic opening ceremony

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to analyse the 2012 Olympic opening ceremony with the goal of making a nuanced contribution to the discussion of online participation and engagement afforded by social media.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper applies a qualitative approach of sequential video analysis to the 2012 Olympic opening ceremony interpretive segment.

Findings – Despite the Olympics being a “networked media sport” where countries compete against each another in various sporting events, the paper argues that the overarching narrative of the London 2012 opening ceremony is one that breaks down traditional barriers, while simultaneously situating the individual at the centre of “networked spectatorship”.

Originality/value – Beyond merely watching media events, the paper proposes the term, “networked spectators” to identify how people participate in the content creation, social media moderation, and conversation using social media. Networked spectatorship moves away from the binary of active and passive participation, and rather reflects on the multiple ways people can engage in media events, which specifically includes social media monitoring/moderation as a form of participation.

Keywords Social media, Sports, Olympics, Networked spectators, Opening ceremony

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The Olympics represents an event where the world comes together physically, and more recently virtually, to compete, celebrate, and communicate. Over 16 days, there were over 150 million tweets about the 2012 Olympics (Twitter, 2012c). There were more tweets on a single day at the 2012 London Olympics than the entirety of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, which is indicative of the tremendous growth and adoption of social media in this short time (Twitter, 2012b). While social media was certainly used in past Olympic Games, the 2012 London Olympics was dubbed the “first social media Olympics” (Bell, 2012).

People from around the world watched the London 2012 Olympics begin with the highly anticipated opening ceremony on 27 July 2012. Created by internationally acclaimed film-producer Danny Boyle, the opening ceremony titled, *Isles of Wonder*, was watched by more 900 million people (Ormsby, 2012). Accordingly, the 2012 Olympics opening ceremony was the most prolifically tweeted event of the entire Olympics with over 9.66 million tweets (Twitter, 2012a). The opening ceremony is considered a critical marker to commence the mega-event because it the standard by which the international community judges the host country’s success; the opening ceremony is also significant because of the narrative presented about the national culture and global society.

This paper critically analyses the opening ceremony interpretive segment: *Frankie & June say Thanks Tim* by embracing Rainie and Wellman’s (2012) concept of networked individualism. This segment of opening ceremony featured a tweet from



Tim Berners-Lee: “This is for Everyone [...]” that was retweeted over 10,000 times. Despite the Olympics being a “networked media sport” (Hutchins and Rowe, 2012) where countries compete against each another in various sporting events, the paper finds that the overarching narrative of the London 2012 opening ceremony is one that breaks down traditional barriers, while simultaneously situating the individual at the centre as a networked spectator.

Instead of being about the Olympics, this paper takes a fine-grained approach to understand what the Olympic opening ceremony indicates about digitized society. The term “networked spectatorship” is introduced, which refers to the spectrum of participation afforded by use of social media, including the content creation, social media moderation, and conversation.

Situating the opening ceremony

“‘Mega-events’ are specially constructed and staged large-scale international cultural and sport events” (Roche, 2008, p. 286). Mega-events – or “mega-event phenomenon”, (Roche, 2008, p. 287) – like the Olympics, “[...] are designed to highlight human cooperation, camaraderie, esprit de corps and common humanity” (Rojek, 2013, p. 80). The Olympics brings together global athletes to compete against one another in one location. The size and cultural importance of the Olympics cannot be underestimated. As L’Etang (2006) suggests:

The Olympics are the ultimate “mega-event”, not only because of their sporting impact, but due to their wider cultural significance shaped by a range of PR and media sources that set agendas, create or promote ideologies, shape myths and icons, promote goods and thus create international reference points and touchstones (p. 390).

The Olympics offers a fantasy of unity, which encourages people to feel that they belong to a single community (Brownell, 2012, p. 309) in an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983; Gruzd *et al.*, 2011). More important than the physical sporting event itself, it is the interconnectedness of online discussions that fosters this imagined community. Watching the Olympics is a profoundly social event with people gathering around a family television, big screens in bars, mobile phones, and computer screens.

The interpretive cultural segment of the opening ceremony affords the host country the ability to showcase creativity, which stands alongside other parts of the Olympic opening ceremony that are mandated by the International Olympic Committee. Hogan (2003) outlines the obligatory segments of the opening ceremony:

[...] a parade of Games participants, speeches and declarations by local and international Olympic officials and the head of the state of the host nation, the raising of the Olympic flag to the accompaniment of the Olympic anthem, the performance of the host nation’s national anthem, the torch relay and lighting of the Olympic cauldron, and oaths taken on behalf of participating athletes and judges (p. 106).

On the other hand, the interpretive segment of the opening ceremony often serves as a narrative of national identity for the host country. Hall (1992) describes the “narrative of the nation” as referring to the “[...] set of stories, images, landscapes, scenarios, historical events, national symbols and rituals which stand for or represent the shared experiences, sorrows, and triumphs and disasters which give meaning to the nation” (p. 293). The opening ceremonies in the Nagano 1998, Sydney 2000, and Salt Lake City 2002 Olympics constructed Japaneseness, Australianness, and Americanness, respectively (Hogan, 2003), and more recently Chinese nationalism at the 2008

Beijing Olympics (Kim, 2011). Furthermore, Housel (2007) states, “Complex flows across borders, cultural hybridity, and the disintegration of rigid national borders are all characteristics of the global condition” (p. 457). The emergence and widespread use of media and new media has been fostered by globalization.

Historically, the narratives of the Olympic opening ceremonies are fraught with various ideological tensions between “modernity and globalization” (Tomlinson, 1996, p. 601), “[...] the local and global, the culturally specific and universal, spectacle and festival [...]” (Qing *et al.*, 2010, pp. 1591-1592), “historicity and modernity” (Lawson, 2011), “universalism and nationalism and the tensions between tradition and change” (Hogan, 2003, p. 103). The research question of previous scholarship analysing Olympic opening ceremonies has often focused on what the opening ceremony illustrates about the host country (Dyreson, 1992; Mobley, 2008; Iorwerth *et al.*, 2010; Tomlinson, 1996). Most recently, for example, Oettler (2015) identifies that the 2012 London opening ceremony neglected the country’s imperial past, while the major focus of the Beijing 2008 Olympics commentary was on the complicated politics of China (see Askew, 2009; Bond, 2009; Close *et al.*, 2007; Kim, 2011; Price and Dayan, 2008).

Methodology

Considering that the opening ceremony was the most mentioned event at the 2012 Olympics on Twitter, this paper analyses the interpretive segment of the 2012 Olympic opening ceremony. Rather than a comparative analysis of the broadcasting (Larson and Rivenburgh, 1991; Qing *et al.*, 2010), a longitudinal comparative analysis (Tomlinson, 1996), or an analysis of the entire London 2012 Olympic opening ceremony, this paper applies a qualitative approach to video analysis to focus on a specific segment of the opening ceremony, entitled *Frankie & June say Thanks Tim*. The 20 minute and 57 second segment is a story of young love and digital communications in a celebration of youth culture and communications technology; it is a global story dedicated to the present and future, rather than a mere recollection of the past. The research explores the socio-cultural meaning of the sequential visual video data to understand the overarching narrative that frames the Olympics; the interpretive segment of the opening ceremony is analysed to facilitate a holistic understanding.

The interpretive segment began approximately one hour into the London 2012 opening ceremony. This segment was one of the highlights of the opening ceremony production, which pays tribute to Sir Tim Berners-Lee – inventor of the World Wide Web – and the rise of social media (Duffin, 2012). Aside from live theatrics, the tech-heavy segment also made use of video projections with rapid-succession montages. The following list provides a sequential overview of the interpretive segment.

Sequential overview:

- (1) A mum, British slang for mother, drives a Mini Cooper car with her son to their “typical house” set inside the Olympic Stadium (London 2012 Olympic Games, 2012, p. 30).
- (2) The mother unloads her groceries from the car with her purse in hand, and her young son gets out from the backseat of the car with his eyes and hands glued to a handheld video gaming device.
- (3) The mother walks into the house and the distracted young son sits outside on the curb playing video games.

- (4) In the house, June, the main female character, and her sister, take fun photos, listen to popular music, update their social media, and get ready for a night out.
- (5) A large group of people run to the house and start waving their cell phones in the air.
- (6) The entire Olympic stadium turns into a video game screen with fast-moving lights and sounds.
- (7) The mother grabs her son from outside and pulls him into the house, but he remains fixated on his gaming.
- (8) The outside of the house turns into a large television with video projected onto it, which is used throughout the remainder of *Frankie & June say Thanks Tim*.
- (9) The frustrated mother yells, "Everybody gadgets down now. I told you to put that down".
- (10) The teenage girls rush down the stairs to leave the house, but not before their parents intervene at the front door.
- (11) A video snapshot of *The Cosby Show* plays where the father, Cliff Huxtable (played by Bill Cosby[1]), tells his daughter that the skirt she is wearing is too short.
- (12) As June and her sister leave the house, the dad signals a "call me" hand gesture.
- (13) The girls leave the house and meet up with female friends for a night on the town.
- (14) Frankie, the main male character, and his friends send a photo update: "THE LADS! Out on the town!!!"
- (15) The girls communicate via text message as multiple text messages are sent simultaneously to different people.
- (16) The girls hold giant curved neon glow sticks, which, according to the official opening ceremony media guide, depicts the London Underground transit system (the Tube) as they travel from club to club (London 2012 Olympic Games, 2012, p. 31).
- (17) June and Frankie see each other for the first time, and there is an instant connection.
- (18) June is pulled away by a friend and unknowingly drops her mobile phone.
- (19) Frankie picks up June's mobile phone.
- (20) June is at a nightclub that plays 1960s music, including The Rolling Stones' Satisfaction, and The Beatles' She Loves You.
- (21) Frankie contacts June via mobile phone (presumably, June uses a friend's mobile phone), and Frankie tells her that he found her phone.
- (22) The girls go to a '70s nightclub, with Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody*, and the Sex Pistols' *Pretty Vacant* playing.
- (23) June sends Frankie a text and a photo herself dancing and having fun.

- (24) People dressed as punks with oversized heads dance wildly with powerbocks, which are elastic-like spring stilts attached to the feet that allow the wearer to jump high and run fast.
- (25) At an '80s club playing Frankie Goes to Hollywood's Relax, and Soul II Soul's Back to Life, June sends Frankie a text message asking his name.
- (26) There is a brief snapshot of two video scenes of boys wearing dresses.
- (27) Frankie and June meet face-to-face at the contemporary club, with The Prodigy's I'm a Firestarter playing.
- (28) They kiss and a video projection shows a montage of famous kisses, including Kate Middleton and Prince William's wedding kiss, and the kiss from Shrek.
- (29) June sends out a social media blast by updating her status to "in a relationship" and invites all of her online ties over to her house for a party.
- (30) June's friends send messages back and forth about her new relationship.
- (31) Rapper, Dizzee Rascal, performs Bonkers live for a large youth audience.
- (32) The entire Olympic stadium goes quiet as groups of people surround the original house.
- (33) The house lifts off the ground and Sir Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web, sits at a desk working on a computer.
- (34) At this moment, Berners-Lee sends out a tweet on Twitter, stating, "This is for everyone".
- (35) The "This is for everyone" message is illuminated in the Olympic stadium.
- (36) As the audience gives a thunderous applause to Berners-Lee, he stands up and applauds the audience.
- (37) End of segment.

The networked opening ceremony

The (inter)connected narrative of the London 2012 Olympic opening ceremony was developed by the Danny Boyle. Boyle reflects on the three revolutions that served as the vision for the opening ceremony: "The Ceremony will take us through great revolutions in British society – the Industrial Revolution, the revolution of social attitudes that began in the 1960s and the digital revolution through which we're living now" (London 2012 Olympic Games, 2012, p. 11). Similarly, Rainie and Wellman (2012) discuss a triple revolution that has led to the current state of networked individualism: the social network revolution, the mobile revolution, and the internet revolution.

Networked individualism describes how people now network as individuals rather than being entrenched in a group: "In the world of networked individuals, it is the person who is the focus: not the family, not the work unit, not the neighbourhood, and not the social group" (Rainie and Wellman, 2012, p. 6). People have changed how they interact with one another on a day-to-day basis. Networked individualism is "an 'operating system' because it describes the ways in which people connect, communicate, and exchange information" (Rainie and Wellman, 2012, p. 7).

At the centre of networked individualism is the individual, rather than a well-defined and tight-knit group.

Each of the triple revolutions is symbolically referenced in *Frankie & June say Thanks Tim*. The triple revolution is described below, in relation to *Frankie & June say Thanks Tim*, to uncover the story of networked individualism that lies at the heart of the London 2012 opening ceremony, which points to the evolving mediated experience afforded by social media.

Social network revolution

Before the internet or the mobile revolution, there was a societal shift that enabled people to reach beyond the confines of the group: the social network revolution. The social network revolution does not refer to a technological shift, but rather a societal shift in the way that people relate to one another: “[...] household members now act at times more like individuals in networks, and less like members of a family” (Rainie and Wellman, 2012, p. 12). As evidenced in the interpretive segment of the opening ceremony, the family members do not operate as a closely bound unit: the daughter goes out with friends, the parents stay home to watch TV, and the younger brother plays video games. Various historical changes have led to the shift towards a social network revolution, which has partially laid the foundation for networked individualism. Three of these changes can be found in the interpretive segment of the 2012 Olympic opening ceremony.

First, automobiles and other advances in transportation have allowed networks to spread even further (Rainie and Wellman, 2012, p. 22). At the beginning of interpretive segment, audiences observe the mother driving her car home. Advances in transportation technologies have afforded people the opportunity to live further from their workplace, change cities more easily, and maintain contact with ties in more distant places.

Second, women’s work outside the home, fewer marriages, and smaller families have shaped the traditional bounded family household (Rainie and Wellman, 2012, p. 27). The number of women employed outside the home has more than doubled since 1976 (Ferrao, 2011). In the interpretive segment, the mother comes home at the end of the day – perhaps returning from employment.

Finally, society has become less bound by ethnic, racial, sexual, and religious boundaries (Rainie and Wellman, 2012, p. 32). The family in the interpretive segment is interracial: June’s father is black, her mother is Caucasian, and June and her siblings are interracial. Mixed unions grew 33 per cent in the five years (from 2001 to 2006), which represents more than five times the growth for all couples and there is a consistent trend towards the acceptance and celebration of interracial couples (Milan *et al.*, 2010).

Even though the social network revolution is arguably more invisible than the internet and mobile revolution, the interpretive segment shows the shift in how people connect with one another. These changes have contributed to the weakening of traditional boundaries and the shift to the social network revolution.

Internet revolution

Unlike the social network revolution, the internet revolution represents a technological shift. The internet is an important technology: “[...] the internet’s creators built something that would enhance the broader social, economic, and political forces that were already pushing people in the direction of networked individualism in the network operating system” (Rainie and Wellman, 2012, p. 59). Internet use is widespread: 87 per cent

of American adults use the internet and 78 per cent of the UK population use the internet (Pew Research Centre, 2014; Dutton and Grant, 2013). Rather than question whether the internet has weakened or transformed community, it is more appropriate to understand the role of the internet in enhancing existing relationships. The internet provides an additional venue through which people can communicate, which adds to existing communication channels, such as face-to-face or telephone communication (Hampton and Wellman, 2003, p. 282). The internet affords the opportunity for people to further act as individuals, but in a networked way.

Tim Berners-Lee, who wrote the code for the World Wide Web, is clearly an important person in the history of the internet. It is, however, essential to also recognize that the evolution of the internet, and the internet revolution, have been influenced by many people. Berners-Lee (1996) describes, "The World Wide Web is simply defined as the universe of global network-accessible information" (p. 69). The difference between the internet and the World Wide Web is often confused: the internet is the network infrastructure that links the computers together, whereas the World Wide Web is the means by which people access information over the internet.

In the final scene of the interpretive segment, Berners-Lee is revealed when the house in the Olympic Stadium literally lifts off the ground. This symbolically represents the dissolution of the traditional bounded society and ushers in a society of networked individualism using the World Wide Web. As the title, *Frankie & June say Thanks Tim*, suggests, this segment of the London 2012 opening ceremony gave recognition to Berners-Lee for his contribution to making networked society what it is today.

The meaning of community has changed as the internet has become widespread in use. Community has evolved from place-based to space-based as virtual communities are liberated from the constraints of place. Use of the internet has also freed communities from the social characteristics, including racial, ethnic, gendered, and socioeconomic identity (Hampton and Wellman, 2003, p. 281). Internet use affords an additional way for people to communicate with their existing ties, rather than replace face-to-face. Internet dystopians (Putnam, 2010) fail to recognize that the time spent in front of a computer on the internet can be useful for the maintenance of strong and weak ties, at both local and far distances (Wellman, 2003). The strength of the internet revolution is also closely coupled with the final revolution: the mobile revolution.

Mobile revolution

Mobile phones have become cheaper, more mobile, and, subsequently, more prevalent (Ling, 2004). Rather than bringing about the demise of relationships, as has been suggested by headline-grabbing media, Rainie and Wellman (2012) state, "This mobilization strengthens the three pillars of online engagement: connecting with others, satisfying information queries, and sharing content with others" (p. 108). The proliferation of mobile devices has created the "always on" culture where information and communication technologies (ICTs) have become "body appendages", as people carry their devices with them (Rainie and Wellman, 2012, p. 12). The old saying, "attached at the hip", referring to two friends who are always together, would be more appropriate today to refer to the relationship between an individual and their mobile phone.

As seen in the interpretive segment, teenagers carry their mobile phones with them at all times. In fact, the storyline revolves around June being reunited with her phone (while finding love along the way). June does not have pre-established plans for the evening, and is able to constantly update Frankie as to her whereabouts using the

mobile phone. Mobile phones afford a “softening” of the organization and coordination of plans (Ling, 2004, p. 74). Rather than rely on arranged plans, just in time communication means people have the ability to contact one another to make or change plans on the go.

As the history of technological innovation demonstrates, people are repeatedly fearful of the negative “effects” of a new technology. The term “crackberry” became popularized in the 2000s, which referred to the drug-like addiction and excessive use of a Blackberry, or other smartphone. In the interpretive segment, the mother yells, “Everybody gadgets down now. I told you to put that down”. This scene alludes to the dominant idea that technology is taking over and negatively affecting people’s lives. People can be highly sociable using ICTs, as indicated by the name, information communication technologies. Research indicates that the technologies are not isolating: “People are not hooked on gadgets, they are hooked on each other” (Rainie and Wellman, 2012, p. 6). Despite the fact that cultural critics suggest that technology is causing the demise of society, socialization, and the family unit; people are using mobile technology to foster new relationships (like the budding relationship between Frankie and June), and strengthen or maintain existing relationships (like the relationship between June and her parents) (Boase *et al.*, 2006).

Specifically, the mobile phone has afforded a renegotiation of the relationship between parent and child. The mobile phone has been used as a device to keep parents at a distance (Rainie and Wellman, 2012, p. 66), as well as being used for “remote mothering” (Rakow and Navarro, 1993, p. 144), or helicopter parenting. An example occurs in the opening ceremony scene where June’s father reminds her to call. On the one hand, youth equipped with a mobile phone may be given the freedom to go out, and on the other hand, the mobile phone has offered parents the ability to communicate with their children at any time.

A criticism launched at use of mobile phones is that mobile communication is taking over other types of communication – such as face-to-face. However, one medium (webphone or PC) does not replace the other (Miyata *et al.*, 2005, p. 150). Young people’s use of the internet and mobile phones are complementary activities (Madell and Muncer, 2005); youth elect to use a specific type of communication technology depending on the purpose. For example, it would be highly impractical for June to make a phone call at a club as it would inevitably be too loud to communicate verbally, so she chooses to text message.

Beyond mere voice communication, text messaging has become increasingly popular, especially among youth. Frankie and June elect to communicate face-to-face, as well as, via phone call, text messaging, and MMS (a combination of a text message and photo). Texting is emblematic of networked individuals:

It is personal. It can be customized to individual tastes and purposes. It allows people to be socially engaged with others outside the room. It provides ready access to multiple networks. It allows people to stay in touch with the flow of chatter that is coursing through their networks (Rainie and Wellman, 2012, p. 166).

Young people often prefer texting as it can be done privately and silently; furthermore, young people enjoy the unobtrusive convenience of asynchronous communication whereby sender and receiver can communicate on their own time (Madell and Muncer, 2007). Mobile communication lies at the heart of interpretive segment of the opening ceremony, which mirrors the reality of the importance of the mobile phone in much of society today. Mobile communication has shifted the way people communicate and has cut the “umbilical cords” of place-bound media (Wellman, 2003).

Not all activities that begin online stay online (Hampton and Wellman, 2003), and similarly, offline activities can transfer online. As indicated in various examples in the interpretive segment, people migrate their relationships online and offline. Frankie and June first meet face-to-face, continue communicating through text messaging, begin an offline relationship, and then begin an official online relationship by June updating her social media status to “in a relationship”. June uses social software as a tool to spread information to both her strong and weak ties. In a similar way, Frankie and June’s friends also network using various technologies, but as individuals rather than as a group. Use of the mobile has afforded the weakened importance of one’s physical location for communication.

As illustrated in the interpretive segment, the three revolutions – the social network, internet, and mobile revolution – have made networked individualism possible. The following section discusses the relationship between networked individuals and viewers’ participation in watching media events.

Networked spectators

Media events as spectacle

The opening ceremonies at the Olympics have frequently been labelled a spectacle. A spectacle “is a form of social integration presupposing audiences rather than participants” (Dean, 2004, p. 270). The link between the Olympics and spectacle is widespread: Qing *et al.* (2010) identify that surprise is used “to satisfy the need for spectacle” (p. 1631); Tomlinson (1996) refers to the “Olympic spectacle” (p. 601); Hogan (2003) discusses the “globalized sporting spectacles” (p. 101); Larson and Rivenburgh, (1991) assert the Olympic spectacle creates multiple realities; and Silk (2011) refers to the “seductive spectacle” of the Olympic opening ceremony (p. 735). In this way, use of new media has changed the production, marketing, delivery, and consumption of sport (Santomier, 2008, p. 15). Marshall *et al.* (2010) identify the shift from older media and new media forms, and call the 2008 Beijing Olympics a “new layered media environment or media matrix” (p. 275).

The high-tech nature of the Olympic Games was evidently paraded at the opening ceremony in Beijing, and continued at the London 2012 opening ceremony. As the Opening Ceremony Guide states, “The London 2012 Opening Ceremony is a celebration of – and a showcase for – 21st-century technology” (London 2012 Olympic Games, 2012, p. 15). Technology is both vilified and celebrated, and is often identified as the culprit of the Olympic spectacle: due to the emphasis on high-tech (Ding, 2010), the live event becomes the product of mediated technologies (Auslander, 2008) and becomes an “elaborate media spectacle” (Marshall *et al.*, 2010, p. 263).

Given the magnitude of the Olympic opening ceremony, it was certainly spectacular in the colloquial sense of the word meaning impressive and dazzling. However, in an age of social media, many viewers, and society more largely, are far from merely spectators. The term spectator has a strong connotation of passively watching, which alludes to critical cultural theories (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1944/1986); the spectacle is a tool of spectator pacification and passive spectators have been lured by the powerful, spectacular images (Debord, 1994).

Networked spectatorship

This paper introduces the term “networked spectatorship” to refer to the spectrum of participation afforded by social media, including the content creation, social media moderation, and conversation. In today’s digitally mediated and connected society, participating as a networked spectator means not merely watching media events as a

spectator, but rather participating in the production, consumption, monitoring, and discussion surrounding the event using social media.

Networked spectatorship move away from the binary of active and passive participation, and rather reflects on the multiple ways people engage in media events, which specifically includes social media monitoring/moderation as a form of participation. Networked spectators create content using a variety of media; the emphasis is on the social media monitoring and/or creation of commentary to events they are “spectators” of. In this way, the “passivity” of watching is removed, and replaced with participation in the form of networked communication. The ability to collaborate and create is made possible by lowering the technological, economic, structural, and societal barriers.

Beyond contributing content on social media, participating as a networked spectator also includes social media monitoring. Without contributing, online audiences can simply “lurk” by reading the posts without contributing to the site, or one can engage in more sophisticated analytics using social media monitoring tools. For example, Marketwire launched the “Marketwire Summer Games Dashboard” for the 2012 Olympics, which was a freely available tool for people to monitor social media activity in real-time that was updated every ten minutes (Levine, 2012). This type of social media monitoring embraces an alternative form of online participation that is afforded by social media analytics tools.

Far from taking place in an isolated locale, or only at the Olympic stadium, the Olympic opening ceremony simultaneously takes place across the networked online and offline world. The use of new technology in the Olympics affords the audience’s construction of their own narratives, which may increase intercultural exchange via digital platforms and mobile phones (Qing *et al.*, 2010, p. 1631). Ordinary citizens play an active role in shaping the narrative of the Olympics (Hiller, 2013) whereby participation becomes “[...] a mark of responsible citizenship” (Rojek, 2013, p. vi), which represents one’s current and aspiration identity. Afforded by social media, responsible citizenship takes the form of participating as a networked spectator.

The concept of networked spectators builds on Rainie and Wellman’s (2012) “networked creators”, which describes the participatory and collaborative content creators. Similarly, Kreiss *et al.* (2014) argue that use of social platforms afford “active spectatorship” in political events. There has been a shift from a society that is “informed” to a society that is “involving” (Lievrouw, 1994, 2009). Instead of a one-way channel of communication to large audiences, new media technologies have enabled a plethora of voices to be heard in a network that is inherently participatory. Individuals often elect to volunteer their time in the collaborative content creation that makes the sites, as well as the collective knowledge, more powerful. Evidenced in the 9.66 million tweets during the opening ceremony, television viewers are not merely distant spectators; rather, they responded to the events, communicated with one another, engaged in the activities, and networked with each other. The second-screen experience refers to when people use a second electronic device (often a mobile device) while watching television; for example, people use social media, often Twitter, as a real-time “backchannel” to discuss what is seen on television (Giglietto and Selva, 2014; Harrington *et al.*, 2013). Instead of the internet being a one-way broadcast channel, “Web 2.0 invites users into play” (Gauntlett, 2011, p. 6-7). Importantly, the strength of online communities is the ability to gather based on shared interests, like the opening ceremony, rather than the convenience of physical location (Rheingold, 2000).

Berners-Lee’s “This is for everyone” message serves as the theme, not only for the interpretive segment, but for the opening ceremony and the entire London 2012 Olympics. Even though Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web, the true power lies in the countless people who have made the web the collaborative network that it is

today. This is evidenced online as Berners-Lee's "This is for everyone" tweet from the inside of the Olympic Stadium was retweeted by over 10,000 people.

People can relate to each other, as well as events in the world, differently using social media. As evidenced in the audience's relationship with the London 2012 opening ceremonies, viewers can participate as networked spectators.

Conclusion

The opening ceremony is undoubtedly a television mega-event whereby the media coverage of the Olympics reaches into distant corners of the world. In the 2008 Beijing Olympics, athletes and spectators had access to blogs, chat rooms, websites, and other social networking sites thereby creating the first "Web 2.0 Olympics" (Hutchins and Mikosza, 2010, p. 284). However, there were 300,000 tweets per day at the Beijing 2008 Olympics; in comparison, the London 2012 Olympics saw approximately 400 million tweets sent per day (O'Kane, 2012).

As measured by public activity on Twitter, the London 2012 opening ceremony is the single Olympic event that received the most public interest. The Olympics undoubtedly captures the attention of the global community, which is evidenced in the plethora of tweets, blog posts, and face-to-face conversations.

In the sports community, 2012 was recognized as a challenging and exciting year, as well as, an interesting year for social media enthusiasts, marketers, and the general public (Desbordes, 2012). Having previously hosted the Olympics in 1908 and 1948, the 2012 Olympics marked the third time that London has hosted the international event. Britain had less of a need to tell its national story, and instead presented a quirky narrative of Britain's interconnectedness with the world, with a celebration of British popular, exported, and mediated culture.

The export of British culture could be attributed to globalization and an emerging global culture. The 2012 Olympic opening ceremony did not suggest a tension between the global and local, but rather a conflation. The London 2012 Olympic opening ceremony celebrates universalism and change, over nationalism and historicity. While much research finds the Olympic mega-events propagates national narratives (Oettler, 2015) or "nationalistic ideology" (Roche, 2008, p. 288), this paper finds that in addition to British culture that is celebrated in the 2012 opening ceremony, what is celebrated most enthusiastically is the export of British culture and the global connectedness of popular culture. The 2012 opening ceremony does not represent a story of isolation, but rather connection between Britain and the rest of the networked world.

Given the dominance and importance of the Olympics, there are multiple lens and theories that can be applied to understanding the impact and narrative of the mega-event. At the same time, it is important to consider, "who gains from the Olympics, and who loses" (Wagg, 2015) while also reflecting on the commercialism, neoliberalism, and activism that surrounds the Olympics, as well as the socio-political climate at the time. Furthermore, hosting mega-events, like the Olympics, often has devastating impacts and is "a dubious long-term strategy" (Appelbaum, 2014, para. 4).

The Olympics are a cultural construct and there is a need for a critical lens to understand multiple perspectives as interpretations are largely shaped by individual social, political, and cultural experiences. Accordingly, this paper has analysed the *Frankie & June say Thanks Tim* interpretive segment of the London 2012 Olympics and finds that the deep-seated narrative of the opening ceremony uncovers a story of networked individualism that lies at the centre of the London 2012 opening ceremony and networked spectatorship (Rainie and Wellman, 2012).

The paper introduces the term “networked spectators” to describe the dispersed audience’s mediated participation – including in the production, consumption, monitoring, and discussion of an event using social media. Networked spectatorship moves beyond the binary of active and passive participation, and rather includes a broad spectrum of ways people can participate using social media. Importantly, the paper acknowledges social media monitoring as a form of participating as a networked spectator, which seeks to remove the passive and negative connotation of lurking. Even though the closing ceremony of the 2012 London Olympics brings an end to the Games, it merely represents the beginning for networked spectatorship.

Note

1. Since this time, Bill Cosby stands trial on sexual assault criminal charges after allegations by almost 60 women (Esteban and Roig-Franzia, 2016).

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