Chapter 7

Critical Role of Emotions in Media Events:
Anger Dynamics in Political Scandals

Monika Verbalytė
Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

ABSTRACT

This contribution relates recent theoretizations of media events with the emotion theory in order to get a better picture of what role emotions play in these events. Critical view toward media events helps to understand the limitations of the claims made by those who established this concept 30 years ago: Rather than instances magically integrating society, media events are seen as struggles over the meaning in the contested media field where by far not every winning meaning enhances societal integration. Additionally, psychology and sociology of emotion gives a necessary foundation for the concise theory of emotions in the media events and guides the empirical inquiry into the subject by suggesting that research should focus on the arousing rhetoric as well as narratives interpreting this arousal and turning it into the specific emotion. The analyzed media event – political scandal – very well exemplifies the theoretical argument made in regard to media events, demonstrates the power of emotions in establishing particular versions of reality and illustrates what I call the recursive logic of media events: the fact that their meaning is established at the very end of their occurrence, whereas their event-ness is implied at the beginning with the intensive arousal attracting everyone's attention.

INTRODUCTION

The main instance of this contribution is the lack of attention to the emotional logic of media events in its classical as well as current conceptualizations. To pursue my goal – to theorize and empirically analyze emotions in media events – I will start with the short overview of the way media events were understood by the founders of this concept and how it was reshaped by its critics. Then, I will explain how research of the political scandal fits into the context of ongoing debates on the nature of media events. Next, I will argue that the right definition of emotions could enrich the analysis of both, media events in general and media scandals in particular, as well as present an example of such an analysis.

MEDIA EVENTS

The concept of media events cannot be separated from the aesthetization and ritualization of politics, processes mainly criticized for turning people's attention from the real political issues to the political spectacle which only fakes political activity and deceives citizens. (Goodin, 1980; Schwartzenberg, 1980) On the other hand, this symbolic layer of politics is indispensable for making politics visible and experiencable for the people. (Edelman, 1964, pp. 3-7) Media events contribute to this by interrupting the flow of daily life, mobilizing and involving the audience, attracting its attention to the most abstract level of politics – its basic norms. (Dayan & Katz, 1994, p. 2; Fiske, 1996, pp. xv–xvi; 8) The magic of media events seems to lie in their ability with apparently primitive measures to fulfil very complex societal functions: to redefine the boundaries of and integrate society, to clarify and reflect on its fundaments.

One of the main features of media events is their ritual-like course. Rituals attract people's attention to and condense complex relations in symbolic representations to which society ascribes special significance, e.g. politicians and institutions; they use known patterns of behavior, repetitive performative practices and dramatizing narratives. Familiarity and predictability of used patterns together with the significance of objects to which attention is directed strengthen the normative power of these objects and societal norms related to them. (cf. Lukes, 1977, pp. 53–54) At the same time, public involvement in media events redraws the boundaries of community for which these norms are valid and relevant. For example, Watergate unified American society in its common focus of attention to the significant political actor - the Head of the State – representing the general standards of political behavior. By questioning his actions as normatively appropriate, society actualized and reshaped its normative foundations. The dramatic tone of accusations signaled extraordinarily situation, whereas court-like hearings drawing on law procedures and justice rituals recreated the order and increased the prescriptive power of renewed norms of political behavior.

The mediation of events not only increases their intensity, omnipresence, and accessibility, but also reshapes them. Cameras and reporters transform time and space in order to be everywhere simultaneously what makes the vision of the media more capacious, faster than and thus superior to the perception of viewers. Therefore, reality produced by the media becomes more „real" and more truthful than the original. (Dayan, 2009, pp. 24-26; Dayan & Katz, 1994, pp. 1-24; pp. 94-100) It is especially true for political events, as most of the politics reaches us exclusively through the media. Live transmission of Watergate hearings with the detailed close-ups and background information on participants for the audience provided an insider perspective with a much stronger and more immediate feeling of involvement than any factual – if at all possible - participation at the hearings would have been able to induce.

This capacity of the media to engross (the production of) reality also gives media the power over the meaning of event, allows to prioritize screened reality over the everyday life and distinguish themselves as the singular source of this "superior" reality. (Couldry, 2002) However, the situation becomes more critical if we take into consideration the fact that media often strategically deploy ritual patterns in order to legitimize their privileged access to reality: they use dramatization to direct public attention to the event and to increase its significance; they employ familiarity and normative integrative claim of these ritual actions to naturalize their power, e.g. media assert to speak for the people to justify their leading role in representing reality. (Coman, 2005, pp. 47–51; Couldry, 2005)

Definitely, the introduction of power dimension changes the very nature of and so the way we understand ritual. It becomes a mode of influencing on the content of social representations and beliefs of society. Then, it does not promote integration, but mobilizes bias, i.e. support views of one group of the

15 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:
www.igi-global.com/chapter/critical-role-of-emotions-in-media-events/153398

Related Content

Technology Impact on New Adult Behavior about Health Information
Lesley S. J. Farmer (2016). *Psychology and Mental Health: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 257-270).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/technology-impact-on-new-adult-behavior-about-health-information/153402

Clinical Forensic Issues in Child Trauma Stemming from Juvenile Fire Setting and Bomb Making: Culturally Responsive Risk Assessment and Treatment Paradigm for Rural Settings
Ronn Johnson, Karla Klas, Eric Jacobs, Elizabeth Graceand Alejandra Murillo (2016). *Identifying, Treating, and Preventing Childhood Trauma in Rural Communities (pp. 190-211).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/clinical-forensic-issues-in-child-trauma-stemming-from-juvenile-fire-setting-and-bomb-making/155213

Lived Experiences of Women Over 50 Who Lost Their Jobs
Roxine D. Phillips (2021). *Handbook of Research on Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Managerial and Leadership Psychology (pp. 134-146).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/lived-experiences-of-women-over-50-who-lost-their-jobs/270807

What If a Whole Community Came Together?: Collaborating to Ensure No Wrong Door to Services
Rebecca Hoffmann Frances (2016). *Identifying, Treating, and Preventing Childhood Trauma in Rural Communities (pp. 136-148).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/what-if-a-whole-community-came-together/155210

Emotional Labour and Stress
Reena Alias (2022). *Handbook of Research on the Complexities and Strategies of Occupational Stress (pp. 184-199).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/emotional-labour-and-stress/305666