

National Sport Discourses and the 2007 NBA Finals: An Analysis of the Portrayals of American and International Basketball Players by US Broadcast Media

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Abstract

Aim of Paper

Since the 1900s the media-sport complex has evolved from simple game descriptions and recaps in print and radio/televisual modalities to its current state utilising new techniques and technologies, such as the Internet and video-on-demand. Media events attract millions of viewers. As broadcasters attempt to increase ratings they must add entertainment value, it can therefore be assumed that there will be some bias in the reporting of sport events through, amongst other means, nationalistic scripts.

Often, there are play-by-play and colour commentators during sporting broadcasts to enhance the telecast, capture, entertain, and maintain viewer interest. Accordingly, announcer discourse is an important concept to be studied, because viewers might be receiving biased reporting during an event.

This study compared between announcer discourse surrounding the 2007 National Basketball Association (NBA) finals. Players were grouped based on citizenship: American or International. This study builds upon the existing body of knowledge regarding media bias during sporting events and the favouring of "home" country athletes [1, 3, 5, 11, 13].

Theoretical Background

The notion of framing is based upon recognition and recall by pairing an identifiable concept with a story or an event [7]. Though the use of schemes, commentators are able to provide meaning of what is occurring on the playing field to their viewers [2, 9]. This study will employ Goffman's [7] social framework, which refers to the "background understanding for events that incorporate the will, aim and controlling effort of an intelligence, a live agency" [7, p. 22]. The reporting of sport would be a social framework, because commentators provide meaning to the audience about what is occurring on the playing surface and announcers are able to narrate the coverage of an event to attract, inform, and entertain audiences, therefore, creating a narrative and discourse that contain bias. Previous research has found that broadcasters were biased in their reporting of major sporting events [2, 4, 9]. Delgado [6] found that the media are not always able to create a consistent frame surrounding an event, while Billings

and Tambosi [5] established that the United States of America (US) media was biased in the reporting of the 2002 FIFA World Cup. As a result, media outlets will encode discourse "based on the 'meaning structures' available to them that are located within the frameworks of knowledge, relations of production, and technical infrastructure characteristic of such organizations" [13, p. 127]. Other research has found differences in the reporting of the same event in three different countries during the Opening Ceremonies of the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games [10]. Thus, the framing function of the media will be able to be studied utilising the 2007 NBA finals.

Research Design

Framing theory will be employed by a content analysis to detect differences in the amount and quality of commentary that is provided to American and non-American basketball players during the 2007 NBA finals. Of the thirty players who were on the rosters of either the San Antonio Spurs or the Cleveland Cavaliers, eight were not American-born or naturalised citizens. This series is a best of seven format, which enables the broadcaster to alter the discourse, based on previous matches in order to capture and maintain viewer interest throughout this event. Because of the duration of each game and the length of the series, it is important for a broadcaster to provide the audience with more than the "sight and sound" of the event [12, p. 172].

The four games of the 2007 NBA finals were videotaped from the American Broadcasting Corporation's telecast. The announcer discourse was transcribed verbatim and quantitatively analysed [5]. This study focused on the citizenship of the players as a guide for placing these individuals in either grouping. Implications and Discussions The aim of the study was to uncover whether television announcers described American or international players differently during the 2007 NBA finals. The nature of television commentary is to provide the audience with more than play-by-play commentary of an event, the announcer gives meaning to the viewer about what is occurring [2].

This study will reveal whether there are differences in the commentary that is provided to international basketball players who compete in the NBA. It will increase the body of knowledge regarding the broadcasting of television events and how people of various nationalities are portrayed by American media during a championship series. If biases do occur, then NBA announcers have the ability to influence viewers' perceptions culturally [5], and this study will provide indication how these broadcasts were framed to American viewers.

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