**A major sporting event or an entertainment show? A content analysis of Australian television coverage of the 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games**

Outside of the Paralympic Games, elite athletes with disability rarely feature in the media. Using mixed method content analysis, the aim of this study was to compare the production and content of the 2016 Paralympic and Olympic Games broadcasts of an Australian commercial television network. Data were collected from recordings of a daily highlights show of the Paralympic and Olympic Games using a data abstraction tool with *a priori* codes. Data were coded for – content, participant(s) and context. Results suggest the Paralympic Games was broadcast as an entertainment show rather than a major sporting event. There were greater attempts during the Paralympic broadcast to elicit emotion; notions of competition versus participation were raised; and stories of disability ran parallel to those of hardship. These differences in media portrayal of elite athletes with disability feed into existing notions that under-values their athleticism.

Keywords: media; athletes; disability; Paralympics; sport

**Introduction**

Elite athletes with disability have the opportunity to challenge societal attitudes to disability and our understanding of what it means to live with a disability (Chin-Ju and Brittain 2006). Current societal attitudes view disability as a tragedy and are a known barrier to participation for people with disability (Rimmer et al. 2004). Elite athletes with disability rarely feature in the media outside of the Paralympic Games (Hardin 2006, Brittain 2016). Conversely elite athletes without disability feature often, dominating daily print and televised sports news reports, and through regular television programming of elite sporting events. Sports media has the capacity to reflect cultural perspectives (Billings 2008) and analysis of media and the Paralympics Games can help demonstrate where sports and events for people with disability fit on the social agenda.

**Context**

Media coverage of the modern Olympic Games began in 1936 (Greenberg 2011). In Australia, televised coverage of the Olympic Games commenced in 1956, coinciding with the launch of television transmission and the Melbourne Olympics Games (The National Museum of Australia n.d.). The Olympic Games has remained a permanent fixture on national commercial television networks, and in 2012 had an estimated international media audience of four billion (International Olympic Committee 2017).

The Paralympic Games as it is known today began in 1960 (International Paralympic Committee n.d.-b) with infrequent Australian newspaper coverage (Naar 2016). In 1992 televised highlights of a Paralympic Games commenced on the Government funded Australian Broadcast Corporation (ABC) channel (Naar 2016). The ABC broadcast expanded during the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games, with increased coverage at each subsequent games through to London 2012 (Naar 2016). During this time international television audiences of the Paralympic Games grew from 300 million in 2000 to 3.8 billion in 2012 (International Paralympic Committee n.d.-a). While broadcast on the Government funded channel, sponsors of the Australian Paralympic Committee’s (APC) were unable to advertise (Naar 2016), and in 2016 in Australia both the Paralympic and Olympic Games were broadcast for the first time on a national commercial television network.

**Literature review**

Investigating media portrayal of elite athletes with disability is dominated by studies of Paralympic Games coverage in print (newspaper) media (Rees, Robinson, and Shields 2017). Previous studies analysing media portrayal of elite athletes with disability have focused on the frequency of articles and photos; athlete nationality; athlete gender; athleticism; and athlete disability (Rees, Robinson, and Shields 2017). A recurrent theme is the comparison of the Olympic Games with the Paralympic Games, including the ‘desire of Paralympians to compete in the Olympics’ (Tynedal and Wolbring 2013); ‘equity’ (Ik Young et al. 2011); and, ideas of ‘inclusion’ and ‘exclusion’ (Smith and Thomas 2005). In contrast, analysis of media and elite athletes without disability is dominated by inquiry into gender, ethnicity and nationality (Sherwood and Nicholson 2015).

A recent systematic review found elite athletes with disability rarely feature in the media, and when they do domestic athletes with disability are favoured over international athletes (Rees, Robinson, and Shields 2017). For example, a retrospective study of one newspaper (1955 to 2012) found 10,487 articles on the Olympic Games and 246 on the Paralympic Games (Tynedal and Wolbring 2013). A second study analysing the text and photographs of eight newspapers found a ‘very strong ethnocentric and nationalistic tenor’ in 93% of articles (Schantz and Gilbert 2001). Despite a positive shift towards an athletic narrative, a medicalised description of disability (where the physical, intellectual, or vision impairment of the athlete is the focus) remains, with the expression ‘supercrip’ commonly used (Rees, Robinson, and Shields 2017), The ‘supercrip’ narrative describes an athlete with disability who has taken on ‘superhuman feats’ in disregard to their disability (Haller 2010). Other terms used alongside ‘supercrip’ include ‘freak show’ (Beacom, French, and Kendall 2016), ‘suffering entity’ (Tynedal and Wolbring 2013), and ‘cyborg’ (Maika and Danylchuk 2016). Analysis of media and elite athletes without disability show that male elite athletes without disability feature more prominently than female (Bernstein and Kian 2015), athletes from minority groups are frequently portrayed in a negative or stereotyped way (Eagleman and Martin 2015), and similar to elite athletes with disability, media favours domestic elite athletes without disability (Billings and Brown 2015).

Despite the pervasiveness of television media, only four studies (Schell and Duncan 1999, Castillo and Saez 2014, Van Sterkenberg 2015, McPherson et al. 2016) have examined television portrayal of elite athletes with disability. A content analysis of television coverage of the 1996 Paralympic Games found that although elite athletes with disability were portrayed positively, negative references remained (Schell and Duncan 1999). The Paralympic Games were not considered a ‘real’ competition, and athletes were perceived as not ‘real elite athletes’ (Schell and Duncan 1999). Television coverage was minimal (four hours in total in the United States) and a ‘hierarchy’ of disability was noted with greater coverage of wheelchair athletes compared with amputee or blind athletes (Schell and Duncan 1999). Athletes with cerebral palsy were not shown at all (Schell and Duncan 1999). A content analysis of a Dutch television broadcast of the 2012 Paralympics Games also showed scant coverage (Van Sterkenberg 2015). The Paralympic broadcast was described as a ‘spectacle’, where the ‘quality and competitiveness of an Olympic Games’ was absent (Van Sterkenberg 2015). Another study analyzing ‘moving image’ to compare athlete portrayal during the 2008 Beijing Olympic and Paralympic Games broadcasts (Castillo and Saez 2014) found no differences for image scale, camera position, or shot duration, suggesting no differences in the television production between these events. Lastly, one study examining both newspaper and television content relating to athletes with disability during the 2014 Commonwealth Games (McPherson et al. 2016) reported a positive shift towards a social model of disability, however did not report explicit data or findings for the television coverage. No previous study has been identified which was designed to investigate how television media portrays elite athletes with disability compared with elite athletes without disability.

**Theoretical framework**

‘Agenda setting theory’ (McCombs and Shaw 1972) and ‘framing theory’ (Goffman 1974) are commonly used theoretical frameworks in sport media analysis (Billings 2008, Sang Keon, Reichart Smith, and Kim 2015) and have been applied in previous studies investigating the media portrayal of elite athletes with disability (Buysse and Borcherding 2010, de Leseleuc, Pappous, and Marcellini 2010, Maika and Danylchuk 2016, Mason 2013, Schantz and Gilbert 2001). Another theoretical framework which has underpinned studies in this area is disability theory(Beacom, French, and Kendall 2016, Thomas and Smith 2003), including DePauw’s three phases of disability and sport (DePauw 1997): ‘invisibility of disability in sport’, ‘visibility of disability in sport’, and ‘(in)visbility of disAbility in sport’ (Bruce 2014, Pappous, Marcellini, and de Leseleuc 2011, Smith and Thomas 2005). These theoretical frameworks lend themselves well to disability studies, however provide a narrow lens to compare the production and content of Paralympic and Olympic Games television broadcasts by the same television network. An alternate, more appropriate framework is ‘disposition based theory’ (Raney 2013). ‘Disposition based theory’ addresses why an audience enjoys different genres of media content, including tragedy, comedy, violence, and sports (Sang Keon, Reichart Smith, and Kim 2015). It also helps to investigate the television Network’s preconceived ideas of how it attracts and holds an audience (i.e. through athleticism, competition, suspense, humour, and/or emotion), assuming this is the primary goal when broadcasting a major sporting event.

Investigation of television broadcasts of the Paralympic and Olympic Games also lends itself to the transactional model of sports media inquiry. This model identifies the interplay of three key areas: production, content, and audience consumption (Sang Keon, Reichart Smith, and Kim 2015, Wenner 1989). The production process determines what is and what is not shown, and where the emphasis should lie (Gitlin 2003). These decisions ultimately shape the audience experience (Billings and Brown 2015). For the purpose of this study, production included the channel selected by the Network, broadcast time, content, and advertisements and sponsors. Content considers how messages in narrative influence cultural and societal opinions, and how messages are received and interpreted by the audience is the third component (Wenner 1989). For the purpose of this study, content examined participants and context. No previous study has been identified which has used both ‘disposition based theory’ and the transactional model of sport media enquiry in the comparative analysis of media portrayal of elite athletes with disability against elite athletes without disability.

**Research aims**

Given the paucity of research investigating media portrayal of elite athletes with disability, the primary aim of this study was to compare the production and content of the 2016 Rio Paralympic and Olympic Games broadcasts on an Australian commercial television network. A secondary aim was to explore audience consumption via social media messages posted during the broadcast, and how athletes with disability are portrayed is explored.

**Method**

***Design***

A mixed method, descriptive, content analysis of television coverage of the Paralympic and Olympic Games was conducted. A mixed methods research design, where both qualitative and quantitative data are collected and collated, was chosen to promote objectivity (quantitative analysis), with the opportunity for deeper exploration of meanings and impact (qualitative analysis) (Macnamara 2005). Data was then analysed through the lens of ‘disposition based theory’ (Raney 2013). The study did not require ethics approval, but was registered with the La Trobe University College of Sciences, Health and Engineering, Human Ethics Sub-Committee.

***Sample***

The content of one Australian commercial television network (Seven Network), which has the sole broadcast rights to the 2016 Paralympic and Olympic Games in Australia. The highlights show called *In Rio Today* was chosen because it featured in both Paralympic and Olympic Games broadcasts, providing a platform for comparison. Analysing *In Rio Today* also assumes the Network would produce content they felt was worthy of highlighting, to appeal to and attract viewers for both broadcasts. The sample included 30 hours of *In Rio Today* from the Olympic Games, and 25 hours from the Paralympic Games, inclusive of advertisements. Recordings were set to the electronic recording guide as per the high definition digital receiver (TEAC HDB850) used in the study. As a back-up, recordings of *In Rio Today* for both the Olympic and Paralympic Games were also collected from the online database Informit EduTV (advertisements excluded).

***Data collection***

Based on a comprehensive literature review of content analyses investigating elite athletes with disability, and viewing previous Paralympic and Olympic Games recordings, a data abstraction tool was created (see supplementary material). To promote validity, data collection guidelines (see supplementary material) were developed through ideas gathered from content analysis best practice literature (Macnamara 2005, 2008, Krippendorff 2013, Neuendorf 2002, Hsieh and Shannon 2005). Along with the identifying the network channel and the time of broadcast, three tiers of data were collected within each broadcast segment (i.e. the part of the broadcast between advertisements) – content, participant(s), and context (Table 1). Content was coded first, after which the participant(s) were identified if applicable, with further detail recorded if the participant was an athlete (gender; nationality; sport; impairment if applicable). Context was coded last. The data collection guidelines offered explanations for each of the *a priori* codes to help improve objectivity. To answer the secondary question on how the broadcast was received by the audience, social media posts that featured on screen were recorded verbatim, acknowledging that these would have been selected by the television network. In addition, to identify brands that associated themselves with each Games, and help shape comparisons in production, companies who sponsored and advertised during both broadcasts were documented. The data abstraction tool was tested on existing recordings of previous Olympic and Paralympic Games, with minor changes made to create coherence with the style of a highlights broadcast. One researcher (LR) collected the data, with any issues resolved through consultation with a second researcher (PR).

***Data analysis***

Quantitative content analysis was performed on the coded data using Stata 14.1 Software (StataCorp 2015). Association was explored using a conventional comparative analysis approach. Data that did not fit with the *a priori* context codes (i.e. they were coded as ‘other’) were analysed using thematic analysis, where patterns could be identified in data to collate into themes. Athlete impairment during the Paralympic Games was not always clear. Where information was available, the sports classification of the athlete was collected and clarification on impairment type was made via a search on either the athlete’s international sports federation website or the International Paralympic Committee website for the description of impairment type to a sports classification. A descriptive analysis was also performed, including which sports were highlighted in both broadcasts. Advertisements were classified according to the company and the advertised product. Comparable products were grouped to enable comparisons between the broadcasts. Advertisement data were not collected from four highlights shows during the Olympic Games due to unforeseen channel changes.

**Results**

***Production***

The Paralympic Games was programmed on the Seven Network’s channel 7Two, with the daily highlights show airing outside of the peak viewing period (at 8.30-11pm). The Seven Network promotes 7Two as an ‘entertainment’ channel with programming focusing on ‘lifestyle, drama, adventure, reality observational-documentaries, comedy, and children’s programming’ (Seven West Media 2017). The Olympic Games was programmed on three Seven Network channels, with the daily highlights show featuring on Channel 7 during the peak viewing period (at 7-9pm). Channel 7 is promoted as Seven Network’s ‘primary’ channel with programming focusing on ‘reality, drama, sport and infotainment programs’ (Seven West Media 2017). Three presenters hosted the Paralympics show (a Network Sports Presenter, a retired Australian Para Athlete, and a comedian), and one Network Sports Presenter anchored the Olympics show. There was no evening highlights shows on the final day of both competitions, hence 10 out of 11 competition days were captured for the Paralympic Games (25 hours of highlights), and 15 out of 16 competition days were captured for the Olympic Games (30 hours of highlights).

The television production for the Paralympic Games was more varied than the Olympic Games with significantly more panel discussions, interviews, medal ceremonies, montages, and sponsorship promotions (Table 2). Human interest stories featured more often during the Olympic Games broadcast (Table 2). Human interest stories during the Olympic Games included a daily produced light entertainment segment called *Buzz from Brazil.* Presented by two hosts, *Buzz from Brazil* was a wrap of light entertainment news stories from the previous day’s events. There were no differences in the amount of replay action (Table 2). Live crosses to an event were absent for both Games, probably due to the time difference between Australia and Brazil. News reports were absent from the Paralympic broadcast but the Olympic broadcast included an average of one news update per highlights show. There were more montages during the Paralympic broadcast (Table 2) with three montages per hour, compared to one montage per hour for the Olympic broadcast. Music accompanying montages varied from up beat dance music through to slow emotive melodies. Images also varied from athletic feats, celebrations, mishaps, and behind the scenes activities.

*Advertising and sponsorship promotion*

Advertisements were shown between broadcast segments. Thirty three companies advertised during the Paralympic Games, compared with 115 during the Olympic Games (Table 3). Despite the difference in the number of companies advertising, analysis on the types of products advertised show similarities between the broadcasts (Table 3), with some advertisements including both Paralympic and Olympics athletes. The Australian military and companies associated with exercise and/or health advertised during the Olympic Games but not during the Paralympic Games.

Corporate sponsorship promotion was a feature of both broadcasts. Nine of 10 company sponsors were similar between broadcasts. The only difference was that the Australian military provided sponsorship of the Olympic Games but not the Paralympic Games. During the Olympic Games the military’s sponsorship messages centred on support, patriotism, and simulation of athletic abilities. The only time the military was mentioned during the Paralympic Games was in the context of an athlete’s injury from combat resulting in impairment, and how sport helped their rehabilitation. Another point of difference between broadcasts was the style of one of the sponsorship promotion segments. During the Olympic Games a car manufacturer promoted ‘Memorable Moments’ - a competition where viewers could vote for their most memorable moment from the day’s competition and go into the draw to win a car. During the Paralympic Games the same company promoted a segment called ‘Moments that move you’ - a montage of Paralympic footage shown to emotive music.

***Content***

*Athletes*

There were no differences in the proportion of Paralympic and Olympic male athletes and Paralympic and Olympic female athletes discussed on the broadcast panel, interviewed, or shown in replay action (Table 4). Female Olympic athletes featured more in human interest stories compared with female Paralympic athletes (Table 4). The Olympic Games broadcast included more interviews, replay action and human interest stories about international athletes, for example Usain Bolt (athletics), Michael Phelps (swimming), Mo Farah (athletics), Simone Giles (gymnastics), and Katie Ledecky (swimming). In replay action during the Paralympic Games, 45% identified as standing athletes, 43% as sitting athletes, 7% athletes with vision impairment, and 2% athletes with an intellectual impairment.

*Sport*

Seventeen out of 21 sports were replayed during the Paralympics broadcast (81%) and 19 out of 33 sports were replayed during the Olympics broadcast (58%). Athletics (Paralympic Games 27%; Olympic Games 33%), swimming (Paralympic Games 26%; Olympic Games 23%), and basketball (Paralympic Games 7%; Olympic Games 8%) were the most featured sports in both broadcasts. Athlete performance dominated commentary during replay action for both broadcasts, but featured more often during the Olympic broadcast (Table 4). Social profile featured significantly less during the Olympic broadcast commentary (Table 4), as did the explanation of rules and regulations (RR 0.31, CI 0.12 to 0.89, *p* .01). During the Olympic Games descriptions of sport featured often in human interest stories and included computer animated images of sport information, indicating greater production preparation.

A greater number of medals were won by the Australian Paralympic team compared to the Australian Olympic team, which explains the higher number of medal ceremonies shown during the Paralympic Games compared to the Olympic Games (Table 2). However, of the 57 ceremonies shown during the Paralympics broadcast, none included a full ceremony (i.e. only brief footage of athletes receiving their medals was shown) while the full ceremony was shown on 12 occasions out of 33 during the Olympic Games.

*Context*

Interviews with Olympic athletes featured more comments on performance compared to interviews with Paralympic athletes (Table 4). When performance was discussed, significantly (*p*.01), more than two and a half times more comments on performance were negative (e.g. *‘not the night we were looking for, for the backstroke king and queen’*) during interviews with Olympic athletes (18%) compared to those with Paralympic athletes (7%). There were more discussions/stories of hardship (e.g. *‘Dad passed away when she was 4 years old’*), friends and family and leisure with Olympic athletes compared to Paralympic athletes. During the Paralympic Games there were more discussion/stories about disability as might be expected. Stories specific to Rio/Brazil also featured more often during the Paralympic Games broadcast (Table 4).The context of a significant number of segments during the Paralympics broadcast were coded as ‘other’, i.e. the context did not fit into any *a priori* code (Table 4). These discussions and stories centred on light entertainment/humour (e.g. introducing computer gaming as a Paralympic Sport; athlete nicknames; and, ‘Taste of Rio’ – a discussion on the food of Brazil), emotive reflections (e.g. *‘goosebumps from those images’*, *‘we are underachievers when we see what these Paralympic athletes are capable of’*, and *‘brave and courageous ride’*), patriotism (e.g. *‘ANZAC spirit’*), and team culture.

***Audience consumption***

During the Paralympic Games broadcast there were three social media messages (two Twitter and one Instagram) displayed on screen. During the Olympic Games broadcast there were 28 social media messages (25 Twitter and three Instagram). Two of the three social media messages during the Paralympic Games were from the same athlete, whereas the social media messages posted on screen during the Olympic Games were a combination of current athletes and well known retired athletes, primarily offering messages of congratulations and support. Given the small amount of data, thematic analysis was not performed.

**Discussion**

Our findings suggest the Paralympic Games was produced as an entertainment show rather than a major sporting event. Analysis of production and content revealed three main findings: (1) differences in ideas of competition versus participation, (2) greater attempts to elicit emotion, and (3) stories of disability for Paralympic athletes ran parallel to those of hardship for Olympic athletes. Narrative during the Paralympic broadcast was more diverse, deflecting from discussion of competition and athleticism. Differences also existed in the brands that affiliated themselves with each of the Games.

The Olympic broadcast featured on a primary network channel during peak viewing periods, with a sports journalist anchoring the daily highlight’s show. A greater number of human interest stories suggest more pre-production work, and integration of formal news reports indicates a greater sense of news worthiness. In contrast, the Paralympics broadcast featured on the network’s entertainment channel outside peak viewing periods, anchored by a panel including a comedian and guest panellists from the entertainment industry. The Paralympics broadcast was more diverse with a greater number of panel discussions, interviews, medal ceremonies, sponsorship promotions, and sports. Structured news reports were absent. There was greater use of humour and light entertainment, which has been previously observed in media coverage of the Paralympic Games to help with audience engagement (Ellis and Goggin 2015, Giuffre 2015, Van Sterkenberg 2015). Humour can also been considered an extension of traditional sports coverage that uses ‘satire and comedy’ (Ellis and Goggin 2015).

Key findings of this study were the greater number of comments about athletic performance in interviews and replay action during the Olympic broadcast compared to the Paralympic broadcast, and more negative tones about athlete performance during the Olympic broadcast. The negative tone evident during the Olympic broadcast was primarily linked to stories of disappointment. A thorough narrative analysis was not completed and would help inform a more subtle interpretation, however the data suggest greater emphasis on competition rather than participation during the Olympic Games. Conversely, the near absence of negative tones on athlete performance during the Paralympic broadcast suggest an emphasis on participation rather than competition supporting theory that media will amplify success and deemphasize failure in athletes with disability (Pate and Hardin 2015).

Emphasis on eliciting emotion through montages and narrative during the Paralympics Games was a point of difference between the two broadcasts. Montages are designed to elicit emotions (Dancyger 2014), and the greater number of montages during the Paralympic broadcast feeds into the feelings of empathy and pity that already exist for people with a disability. Emotive reflections through narrative also dominated, mostly during the Paralympic broadcast panel discussion. This narrative shifts emphasis from an athlete’s performance, and reconfirms the role inspiration has on the newsworthiness of Paralympic stories (Ellis and Goggin 2015).

While athletes’ social profiles were discussed similarly between broadcasts, the stories of hardship that featured during the Olympic broadcast were absent in the Paralympic broadcast. Understandably stories about disability featured more often during the Paralympic broadcast. The absence of hardship stories during the Paralympic broadcast reveals a difference in athlete portrayal. Stories of hardship align with the concept of evoking emotion, a strategy used by media to engage an audience. The paucity of hardship stories from the Paralympic Games questions if disability was the alternate means of evoking emotion, or was it considered inappropriate to allude to hardship with Paralympic athletes. Some athlete’s stories of acquired disability could have been perceived as hardship, however these stories were lined with tones of positivity, as opposed to the hardship stories in the Olympics which were dominated by themes of loss and sadness e.g. death in the family, poor performances leading up to the games.

More companies associated themselves to the Olympic Games compared with the Paralympic Games. This likely reflects differences in perceived level of media impact and commercial value between the two broadcasts. Challenges for the Paralympic Games broadcast to attract sponsorship include its infrequent nature, scarce presence in the public domain in between Games, and differing sports and rules (Hibberd 2015). The absence of the military and companies associated with exercise and health during the Paralympics broadcast is a point of disparity, both affiliated with images of athleticism and able-bodieness. The decision by the military not to advertise during the Paralympics is unlikely to be accidental, and the absence of companies promoting exercise and health supports pre-existing notions of passivity and non-participation among people with disability. This omission dismisses the importance that health and exercise play for people with disability.

Athletic profiles of an athlete or team were discussed similarly between both Games, a positive shift that has been noted in more recent studies (Geok Cheong, Khoo, and Razman 2016, Maika and Danylchuk 2016, Mason 2013, Tynedal and Wolbring 2013, Buysse and Borcherding 2010). However, despite news worthy performances by international Paralympic athletes, the profile of these was notably absent from the Paralympic broadcast, a theme consistent with previous studies (Ik Young and Crossman 2009, Geok Cheong, Khoo, and Razman 2016, Bruce 2014, Schantz and Gilbert 2001). Focusing on domestic athletes can create a sense of familiarity for the audience, tapping into nationalistic pride, in turn promoting viewership.

A secondary aim of this study was to investigate audience engagement by analysing on screen social media posts, but the small amount of social media posts in both productions meant thematic analysis could not be completed. However, the larger number of social media messages posted on screen during the Olympics broadcast reflects a further difference in production style. Incorporating social media posts during a broadcast reflects the Network’s engagement with the audience, and the audience’s engagement with the Games, the athletes, and the broadcast. It is not clear if the discrepancy in social media messages was due to a lack of engagement of the Paralympic Games audience or a Network decision not to screen social media messages. Television ratings from previous Paralympic Games suggest an audience would be engaged, hence it is more likely a decision made in advance by the Network’s editorial and production team.

Disposition based theory helps explain the contrasting broadcasts. It suggests viewers will engage in media for ‘emotional reward’ (Raney 2013). Enjoyment from watching sports media can be received through an emotional reaction to competition and its outcomes, engaging in the aspects of competition, acquiring knowledge, and sharing the viewing experience (Raney 2012). Enjoyment through media can also be received through humour and drama (Raney 2012, Giuffre 2015). With this in mind the findings of this study suggest the television network relied solely on competition during the Olympic Games broadcast to attract and engage an audience, and entertainment during the Paralympic Games broadcast.

Strengths of this study were the comparison of televisions broadcasts of both events by the same network and the comprehensive data collection tool used to collect data. Limitations include having only one researcher code the data, however the use of the comprehensive data collection tool helped to reduce bias. A second researcher also checked the data coding and assisted with coding where a second opinion was needed. Content was recorded as counts (presence or absence) as opposed to time. Using time as the measured variable may have resulted in a more thorough quantitative analysis, however it was the decision of the researchers to focus on the coding of content and context, to simplify the data collection process. There are many complexities in the production of a television broadcast and this study only analysed some of these components, which is a limitation. Exploration into the Networks’ editorial policies and decision making would have provided extra depth to the analysis and further studies might consider incorporating these perspectives into their design. Lastly, multiple comparisons in data analysis increases the risk of Type I error, meaning there is an increased risk of incorrectly rejecting the null hypothesis. However, an adjustment to the p value was not made as this would increase the risk of Type II error, meaning real differences may be missed (Portney and Watkins 2009).

**Conclusion**

This study shows that elite athletes with disability are portrayed differently to elite athletes without disability during the broadcast of a Paralympic Games compared to an Olympic Games on an Australian commercial television network.The Olympic Games was broadcast as a major sporting event, and disposition based theory supports that competition and athletic performance was sufficient to attract and maintain viewership. In contrast, the Paralympic Games was broadcast as a light entertainment show, with more diverse programing, using humour and emotion to enhance audience engagement. The idea that a Paralympic broadcast could not rely solely on competition and athletic performances feeds into existing notions that undervalue the athleticism of people with disability. The contrasting broadcast styles could reinforce negative societal attitudes towards disability. Current theories suggest society’s views are shaped by what is seen on television and networks broadcast what they assume to be entertaining for its audience. Given the dearth of investigation into media portrayal of elite athletes with disability, findings of this analysis contribute in a substantive manner to the study of disability and sport in a social context. Bearing in mind other avenues of media engagement (including social media) further inquiry into audience engagement, shaped perceptions and consequent attitudes and beliefs towards people with a disability will help extend the findings of this study.

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Table 1. Descriptors of Codes for Content, Participant and Context Categories

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Content Code** |  | **Description** | |
| Broadcast Panel |  | Panel of broadcasters/journalists (one or more) discussing the days events | |
| Interview |  | Discussion between a representative of the broadcaster and other person/s | |
| Replay Action |  | Replayed action of a sport or competition | |
| Replay Ceremony |  | Replayed coverage of a medal ceremony (in part or full) | |
| Replay Ceremony Footage |  | Replayed coverage of a medal ceremony – footage only (over riding commentary/music) | |
| Replay Opening Ceremony |  | Replayed coverage of the Opening Ceremony | |
| Human Interest Story |  | A planned story about a person, place or thing. | |
| Live Cross |  | Live coverage of an event. | |
| News Report |  | Purposeful news updates on the games, presented by a journalist | |
| Montage |  | A sequence of edited footage put to music | |
| Sponsor Promotion |  | A section of the broadcast linked to a sponsor | |
| **Participant Code** |  | **Description** | |
| Journalist/Commentator |  | Person representing the network and participating in the broadcast | |
| Athlete - Gender  Athlete - Nationality |  | Male | Key athlete is identified as male |
|  | Female | Key athlete is identified as female |
|  | Both | Combination of male and female athletes |
|  | Australian | Athlete is identified as being part of the Australian Team and they are the primary focus of the discussion/interview/race/competition/story. |
|  | Other | An athlete/team from another country and they are the primary focus of the discussion/interview/race/competition/story |
|  | Mixed | There is a mix of nations with no primary focus on any nation e.g. montage/introduction/recap |
| Official |  | A person identified as an official of a sport; international or national Olympic or Paralympic Movement (e.g. IOC, IPC, AOC, APC); national team; or local organizing committee. A team official including team coaches, medical staff, administration etc. | |
| Family/friends |  | A person identified as a friend or family member of a competing athlete. | |
| Other |  | A person who does not fit into the categories above | |
| Mixed |  | A mix of different participants | |
| **Context Code** |  | **Description** | |
| Introduction/Recap of Events |  | Summary of the upcoming broadcast/segment and/or recap of events. | |
| Performance |  | Performance of the athlete or team at the games. Tone coded as positive e.g. the tone of the performance is reported on in a positive manner, negative e.g. the tone of the performance is reported on in a negative manner (including themes of disappointment) or neutral e.g. the tone of the performance is neither positive nor negative; or performance is in context of the medal tally. | |
| Athletic Profile |  | Pre games athlete or team’s performance, including training in preparation for the games and prior competitions.  Excludes disability | |
| Social Profile |  | Social background of the athlete. This can include stories of hardship, injury, work/study, friends/family, other (including disability) | |
| Sport Profile |  | Explanation/description of the sport, (including history, tactics, excluding rules and regulations, and equipment); rules and regulations of the sport (including drugs/doping, classification); and equipment used by the athlete for competition. In the Paralympics this can include adaptive equipment necessary for competition e.g. prosthetics, wheelchairs. | |
| Games |  | Story of the Olympic and Paralympic movement, history of the games, preparation of the games, future games (Tokyo), logistics, and the village | |
| Rio/Brazil |  | Hosting city and nation. | |
| Finances |  | Financial costs involved for an athlete or team to attend the games. | |
| Other |  | Context of the content does not fit into the above categories. | |
|  |  |  | |

Table 2. Overview and Comparison of the Television Production Content Between Paralympic and Olympic Games

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Content** |  | **PG** | **OG** | **Risk Ratio (95% CI)** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Broadcast Panel |  | 157 | 154 | **0.80 (0.66 – 0.97)** |
| Interview |  | 116 | 95 | **0.67 (0.52 – 0.86)** |
| Replay Action |  | 122 | 168 | 1.12 (0.91 – 1.38) |
| Replay Medal Ceremony |  | 57 | 33 | **0.47 (0.31 – 0.72)** |
| Replay Opening Ceremony |  | 2 | 0 | - |
| Human Interest Story |  | 62 | 126 | **1.66 (1.24 – 2.20)** |
| Live Cross |  | 0 | 0 | - |
| News Report |  | 0 | 139 | - |
| Montages |  | 74 | 36 | **0.40 (0.27 – 0.58)** |
| Sponsorship Promotion |  | 82 | 105 | **0.74 (0.55 – 0.99)** |
| TOTAL |  | 672 | 856 |  |

OG = Olympic Games; PG = Paralympic Games; CI = confidence interval

Bold type indicates statistical significance (p ≤ .05)

Table 3. Advertisement Content

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **Paralympic Games** | | |  | **Olympic Games** | | |
| **Product Type** |  | **Number of companies** | **Number of advertisements** | **%** |  | **Number of companies** | **Number of advertisements** | **%** |
| Food/supplements |  | 8 | 198 | 30.4% |  | 23 | 134 | 20.5% |
| Seven Network |  | 1 | 133 | 20.4% |  | 1 | 99 | 15.2% |
| Home/personal wares |  | 8 | 91 | 14.0% |  | 20 | 88 | 13.5% |
| Cars |  | 2 | 57 | 8.8% |  | 15 | 68 | 10.4% |
| Entertainment |  | 4 | 6 | 0.9% |  | 8 | 63 | 9.7% |
| Travel |  | 2 | 39 | 6.0% |  | 7 | 42 | 6.4% |
| Telecommunications |  | 2 | 52 | 8.0% |  | 6 | 40 | 6.1% |
| Superannuation/legal |  | 2 | 45 | 6.9% |  | 6 | 30 | 4.6% |
| Military |  | 0 | 0 | 0 |  | 2 | 23 | 3.5% |
| Bank services |  | 1 | 6 | 0.9% |  | 9 | 22 | 3.4% |
| Insurance services |  | 1 | 5 | 0.8% |  | 8 | 19 | 2.9% |
| Wagering |  | 2 | 19 | 2.9% |  | 3 | 14 | 2.2% |
| Exercise/health |  | 0 | 0 | 0 |  | 4 | 5 | 0.8% |
| Accounting/census |  | 0 | 0 | 0 |  | 3 | 5 | 0.8% |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| TOTAL |  | 33 | 651 | 100% |  | 115 | 652 | 100% |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

Table 4. Content Analysis and Comparison of Athletes and Context

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **Broadcast Panel** | | |  | **Interviews** | | |  | **Replay Action** | | |  | **Human Interest Stories** | | |
|  |  | **PG** | **OG** | **Risk Ratio (95% CI)** |  | **PG** | **OG** | **Risk Ratio (95% CI)** |  | **PG** | **OG** | **Risk Ratio (95% CI)** |  | **PG** | **OG** | **Risk Ratio (95% CI)** |
| **Athlete Gender\*** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Male |  | 59 | 54 | 0.94 (0.70 – 1.26) |  | 60 | 46 | 0.94 (0.71 – 1.23) |  | 67 | 94 | 1.02 (0.83 – 1.26) |  | 15 | 42 | 1.38 (0.83 – 2.28) |
| Female |  | 33 | 28 | 0.87 (0.55 – 1.37) |  | 51 | 42 | 1.01 (0.74 – 1.36) |  | 49 | 72 | 1.07 (0.81 – 1.41) |  | 9 | 49 | **2.68 (1.41 – 5.09)** |
| Both |  | 19 | 61 |  |  | 2 | 1 |  |  | 6 | 2 |  |  | 2 | 4 |  |
| TOTAL |  | 111 | 143 |  |  | 113 | 89 |  |  | 122 | 168 |  |  | 26 | 95 |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Athlete Nationality\*** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Australian Athlete |  | 79 | 65 | 0.84 (0.66 – 1.07) |  | 106 | 75 | **0.86 (0.77 – 0.97)** |  | 103 | 117 | **0.82 (0.73 – 0.94)** |  | 23 | 72 | **1.54 (1.10 – 2.20)** |
| Other Nation |  | 27 | 40 | 1.52 (0.98 – 2.35) |  | 7 | 14 | **2.44 (1.03 – 5.80)** |  | 19 | 51 | **1.95 (1.22 – 3.13)** |  | 2 | 23 | **5.66 (1.38 – 23.24)** |
| Nations Mixed |  | 5 | 38 |  |  | 0 | 0 |  |  | 0 | 0 |  |  | 1 | 0 |  |
| TOTAL |  | 111 | 143 |  |  | 113 | 89 |  |  | 122 | 168 |  |  | 26 | 95 |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Content not centered on an athlete** |  | 48 | 10 | **0.21 (0.11 – 0.41)** |  | 3 | 6 | 2.44 (0.63 – 9.51) |  |  |  |  |  | 36 | 31 | **0.42 (0.29 – 0.61)** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Context\*** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Introduction/Recap |  | 17 | 110 | **10.80 (6.69 – 17.41)** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Performance |  | 83 | 50 | 1.01 (0.74 – 1.36) |  | 115 | 106 | **1.47 (1.19 – 1.81)** |  | 122 | 168 | **1.14 (1.00 – 1.30)** |  | 0 | 5 | . (. - .) |
| Athletic Profile |  | 34 | 12 | 0.59 (0.31 – 1.11) |  | 56 | 31 | 0.88 (0.59 – 1.33) |  | 17 | 16 | 0.78 (0.40 – 1.50) |  | 17 | 68 | **1.89 (1.16 – 3.08)** |
| Social Profile |  | 47 | 11 | **0.39 (0.21 – 0.73)** |  | 93 | 68 | 1.16 (0.89 – 1.53) |  | 28 | 19 | **0.56 (0.33 – 0.97)** |  | 29 | 97 | **1.58 (1.11 – 2.26)** |
| Sports Profile |  | 40 | 2 | **0.08 (0.02 – 0.34)** |  | 40 | 16 | 0.64 (0.37 – 1.11) |  | 20 | 15 | 0.62 (0.33 – 1.18) |  | 24 | 46 | 0.91 (0.58 – 1.41) |
| Games |  | 6 | 1 | 0.28 (0.03 – 2.29) |  | 9 | 3 | 0.53 (0.15 – 1.94) |  | 0 | 0 | 0 (0) |  | 3 | 19 | 3.00 (0.90 – 9.95) |
| Rio/Brazil |  | 15 | 1 | **0.11 (0.01 – 0.84)** |  | 4 | 1 | 0.40 (0.04 – 3.55) |  | 2 | 3 | 1.24 (0.21 – 7.36) |  | 27 | 9 | **0.16 (0.08 – 0.33)** |
| Other |  | 75 | 3 | **0.07 (0.02 – 0.21)** |  | 69 | 17 | **0.39 (0.24 – 0.65)** |  | 4 | 12 | 2.48 (0.82 – 7.58) |  | 25 | 20 | **0.38 (0.22 – 0.66)** |
| TOTAL |  | 317 | 190 |  |  | 386 | 242 |  |  | 193 | 233 |  |  | 125 | 264 |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

PG = Paralympic Games number of counts; OG = Olympic Games number of counts; CI = Confidence Interval

Bold type indicates statistical significance (p ≤ .05)

\* Refer to Table 1 for descriptors