A Comparison of National and International Media Frames of Professional Cyclist Ryder Hesjedal

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Introduction

Sport and media have a strong association (Bernstein & Blain, 2002) since the sports media (including news articles) present cultural elements and communicate specific information to the audience (Altheide, 1996; Rowe, 2011). It is fitting that the Grand Tours of professional bicycling racing, including the Tour de France (Reed, 2003) and the Giro d'Italia (Maloney, 2012), have a strong historical foundation and association with newspaper coverage. The noteworthy event that occurred in Canadian and professional cycling on May 27, 2012 was when Canadian and Garmin team cyclist Ryder Hesjedal became the first Canadian to win any of the Grand Tours of cycling with victory at the Giro d'Italia (Hood, 2012, May 27).

This presentation focuses on the results of a media framing analysis. Frames are a combination of text (e.g., keywords), images (Entman, 1991) and patterns (Ryan, Carragee & Meinhofer, 2001) that are used by journalists to present an issue or concept (Entman, 1991). “Frames highlight some bits of information about an item that is the subject of a communication, thereby elevating them...[to be] more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences” (Entman, 1993, p. 53). Through media framing the journalist is able to highlight certain elements of the story and minimize or draw attention away from others (Ryan et al., 2001). In this way the media documents and communicates sport events and issues (Entman, 1993; Rowe, 2011; Van Gorp, 2007).

Previous research utilizing media framing has included stadium development and funding (e.g., Buist & Mason, 2010; Norman, Ventresca, Sztó, & Darnell, 2012), sport events and marginalised groups (e.g., Sant, Carey, & Mason, 2013) and sports such as mixed martial arts (Naraine & Dixon, 2014). Cycling research is largely absent from the media framing literature. Also, while framing literature typically collects data (e.g., news articles) from multiple sources it is not common for the frames to be compared across news sources. However, Entman (1991) stated that “Comparing media narratives of events that could have been reported similarly helps to reveal the critical textual choices that framed the story...” (p. 6). Therefore this presentation is based on components of a larger study which analysed the media frames of international cycling media and Canadian media about Ryder Hesjedal over the period of two years beginning with his 2012 Giro d'Italia championship and culminating with the 100th Anniversary of the Tour de France.

Method

A total of 179 articles from Canadian media sources and 180 from an international media source were included in this study. Canadian sources for the Giro d'Italia 2012 and 2013 included the Victoria Times Colonist (n= 89 & 9), the CBC (n= 11 & 1), the Globe and Mail (n= 17 & 3). For the 2012 and 2013 Tour de France Canadian sources were the Victoria Times Colonist (n= 26 & 14), and the Globe and Mail (n= 2 & 7). International media articles were retrieved from Velonews.com as follows: the Giro d'Italia 2012 and 2013 (n= 57 & 65) and the Tour de France 2012 and 2013 (n= 17 & 41). Identical data collection and analysis procedures were followed in both studies. Data collection consisted of accessing the websites of the Canadian and International media sources before, during and after each Grand Tour. Relevant headlines and associated article links begin the data collection and methodical searches utilizing key words (i.e., Ryder Hesjedal, Giro d'Italia, Tour de France) followed. All articles were qualitatively reviewed using inductive line by line coding in order to identify emergent themes (Patton, 2002), which is consistent with recent media framing analysis. The Canadian and international media sources were analysed independent of each other. Co-authors conducted the first stage of coding independently. Consultation between co-authors permitted codes to be compared and condensed to identify frames and themes. For this presentation, both studies were analyzed and compared for convergent and divergent frames, themes and meaning was extrapolated.
Results
Results presented here offer a comparison of media frames of cyclist Ryder Hesjedal identified in two prior studies. Four frames were identified in the first study of Canadian media source framing: Adversity, Ryder Style, Uncontrollable Circumstances and Effects of Success. Adversity emphasized the strenuous nature of the cycling events and the incredible effort required to compete. Ryder Style documented Hesjedal’s skill set and local, regional and national connections. Uncontrollable Circumstances were encountered throughout the two years of racing and influenced Ryder’s cycling and his narrative. The Effect of Success produced accolades and increased the status of both Ryder and Canadian cycling.

Three frames were identified in the second study of International media source framing: Contender, Effects of Success and Being Ryder. The contender frame showcased Ryder’s evolution from non-contender to Grand Tour favourite back to a period when his performance was questioned and cycling plans needed to be amended. The Effect of Success frame captured the utility of Ryder’s successes, which were credited for popularising Canadian and international cycling. Finally, Being Ryder, highlighted his trials and tribulations along with his skills and nationality.

Conclusion
The results presented in this presentation are the culmination of a somewhat long-term media framing analysis and permit the authors and audience to compare and contrast the salient frames about one athlete across multiple sources, events and years. Of interest are the similarities of some of the frames (e.g., Effect of Success) and the different discourses that are contained within some frames. For example, the international Contender frame had an ebb and flow of support for Ryder where comparatively there was somewhat unwavering support from Canadian media sources. Even though there is potential that Nationalist bias (e.g., Sabo, Jansen, Tate, Duncan & Leggett, 1996), may exist in the media’s representation of Ryder, it is evident that both the International and Canadian media ultimately portrayed Ryder as a cycling and Canadian sport icon (Allen, 2013; Hansen, 2014). “The concept of ‘icon’ has been applied to numerous athletes as a result of their sporting achievements, likeable public personas and stories of triumph, resilience and courage” (Dashper & Fletcher, 2013, p. 488) all of which were highlighted and discussed by media sources surrounding Ryder Hesjedal throughout 2012 and 2013. In a sport management context, the results document and exemplify the global nature of sport and internationality of the sport narratives where frames are similar or replicated. For the cycling general manager and management team, these results illustrate the resiliency of the media frames across global boundaries. They can use the frames reported here as a starting point to become cognizant of the frames that might be used to discuss their team and its athletes; they might attempt to become a stakeholder in the construction of future frames. Future research could examine the frames of other professional cyclists (e.g., males and females) to explore if there is a trend of using similar frames for all cyclists. Investigations should also seek to examine how cyclists from different nations are framed by media (e.g., riders from Italy versus riders from United Kingdom and the United States).