



Entertaining Ideas

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Media Olympics Much Different From Real Thing

By Kelly Poniatowski Duquesne University



The 2010 Olympics in Vancouver are by now a distant memory. We celebrate the triumphs of medals won and mourn the loss of luger Nodar Kumaritashvili. By the way the media portrayed the events that occurred in Vancouver we might think the games were a complete disaster.

First, the Games suffered from a lack of snow, then Kumaritashvili's tragic death was surrounded by Olympic finger pointing, and then Olympic headlines in newspapers seemed to focus on anything and everything negative. Headlines included "2 Nabbed in protest," "Olympics Vancouver Vandalism," and "Thousands more tickets at risk as VANOC scrambles to make Cypress safe for fans." Other stories that made the news included a flame behind a wire fence, security threats, long lines and traffic problems, and Olympians who felt Canadians were wrongly given medals just because they played host to the games. This doesn't mean that the

media didn't also celebrate the triumphs of Lindsey Vonn, Apolo Ono and many other athletes but with all of the negative coverage anyone who didn't attend the games might think they were the most poorly planned ever.

I had the privilege of attending the games for a few days. What I saw was not a complete disaster the way the media might have made me think. Instead I saw a city that was proud to be hosting the world and welcoming them with open arms. Canadians would ask me where I was from and say, "Welcome." Then because I was from Pittsburgh there was usually some talk about Sidney Crosby, Canada's great hockey hero. Venues were easy to get to and there were no transportation problems. I didn't notice any security threats. Perhaps

because I had not time to watch or read the media while there, I was unaware of them. I didn't see any protestors either.

While I did go and see an Olympic flame "behind bars" and found it to be a little depressing, I also understood that because of its location—on the ground rather than at the top of a stadium—it only made sense to limit access. I saw people filling the streets, many of them Canadian and American but also Swiss, Russians, Czech Republic etc., cheering and celebrating the games. The Swiss also seemed to have cowbells that they were swinging and the Canadians were yelling, "Go Canada Go!" There were many hospitality areas throughout the city with free concerts, and fun activities such as ziplines and ice skating. I attended a

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Today's music ain't got the same soul...

By **Brian J. Bowe** Michigan State University and **Cynthia Nichols** University of Alabama

Just take those old records off the shelf, I'll sit and listen to 'em by myself, Today's music ain't got the same soul, I like that old time rock and roll.... or at least Brian J. Bowe does. Bowe, a doctoral student in Michigan State University's Media and Information Studies Program, recently wrote the liner notes for Columbia/Legacy's reissue of new Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductees Iggy & the Stooges' influential album *Raw Power*.

In an essay titled "Raw Power Got a Son Called Rock 'n' Roll," Bowe wrote: "If ever there was a record that lived up to its name, Iggy & the Stooges' *Raw Power* is it. Released in 1973, it documents the band during a brief period of cohesion before it exploded in bloody drug-fueled madness. Savagely bombastic, it is perhaps the first record that could truly be called punk. Yet the songs have a beauty and complexity that make it more than that."

Raw Power has an April 27 release date. Bowe has written extensively about the Stooges, including writing an essay on

the album *Metallic K.O.* in 2009's *The Stooges: The Authorized and Illustrated Story* (Abrams). He also wrote liner notes for the U.K. box set *Heavy Liquid* and the DVD *Live In Detroit*. Bowe also wrote the liner notes for an anthology by Was (Not Was) titled *Pick of the Litter: 1980-2010* (MicroWerks), which was released in February. Check out his work, you may find a collaborator. ★

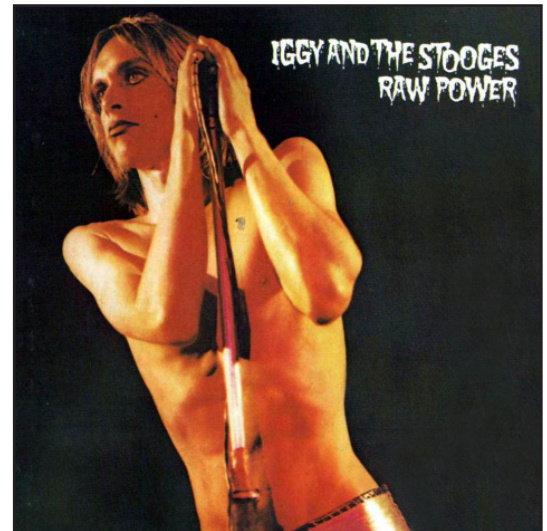


Photo by Mick Rock

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medal ceremony and watched Lindsey Vonn and Canadian Maelle Ricker receive their gold medals. People celebrated every athlete at the games, not just the North Americans.

No, the Olympics I saw celebrated the true athleticism of the athletes and welcomed the world. The Olympics I saw were not a complete disaster as some media have suggested. I think that no event that large will ever be problem-free. Remember Nancy Kerrigan and Tonya Harding? What about the controversy over the Beijing Games or the boycotting of the Games in 1980 and 1984? Or the bombing of the Atlanta Olympic Games? There will always be something to complain about, but the true spirit of the games will continue to survive as it always has. ★

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The G-20 Comes in Pittsburgh: Sensationalism, Conflict, and Entertainment in the News

By Kelly Poniatowski and Mike Dillon, Duquesne University

In May of 2009, federal and local officials announced that the Group of Twenty Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors (commonly known as the G-20) would hold its annual summit in Pittsburgh in September, 2009. Pittsburgh was a surprise choice, as the ministers typically meet in cities considered international capitals. Organizers explained, however, that Pittsburgh was a “poster child” for the rejuvenation of a rust-belt metropolis. It likely didn’t hurt that Pittsburgh Steelers owner Dan Rooney campaigned hard for Barack Obama and Obama wanted to give something back to Pittsburgh that would have a positive economic impact and raise the city’s international profile.

The story arc of the 2009 G-20 Summit, from the May 28 announcement that it would be held in Pittsburgh until its denouement in late September, as depicted in the local press, provides an illuminating case study of how political power (or the lack of it) frames media coverage, and vice-versa. In the months leading up to the summit, international, national and local officials vied with critics of the G-20, who saw the summit as a chance to air their concerns on a world stage, to set an agenda for news coverage and thus civic discussion.

Framing and agenda setting played a large role in the way the G-20 was presented... as a celebrity event.

For local citizens, who were now hosting an international conference, the G-20 depicted in the local media was not so much an economic summit as a hydra-headed beast bearing down on Pittsburgh to snarl traffic, deplete the treasury, and spark civic chaos in the form of protests from supposed “anarchists” and other opponents of the G-20.

In the end, though, the G-20 ministers produced few significant policies, while conflicts between protestors and police paled in comparison to the aftermath of the Pittsburgh Steelers’ Super Bowl victory in February 2009. Pittsburgh was reimbursed by the federal government for its expenses – mainly overtime and the hiring of temporary police officers from across the U.S. – and the economic catastrophe critics warned of did not come to pass.

The fact that the expectations created by the media as the G-20 approached were wildly inaccurate only heightens the value of the press coverage of it as a case study in the construction of perceptions that then shape public understanding and, ultimately, policy. In the case of the G-20, those perceptions were framed by the disparity between legitimated sources (government officials) and marginalized sources (protestors). In addition, the events of past world economic summits, particularly the 1999 WTO debacle in Seattle, created an alarmist frame for the Pittsburgh summit a decade later.

Framing and agenda setting played a large role in the way the G20 was presented to local Pittsburgh media audiences. The news was about action, the local angle, and soft news. This served to frame the G20 as a celebrity event—what heads-of-state wore and where they ate—as opposed to discussing topics such as what the G-20 actually was and what their agenda was. The media-hype surrounding the G-20 also served to frame the event as a security threat to downtown Pittsburgh—location of security perimeters, safety, preparation, and potential traffic problems. The result was that the real issues were never addressed because



they were not action-packed enough or did not provide a local angle. Who was the G-20? What was there agenda? Why were protestors opposing them?

Agenda-setting became integral in the media as the media continually reinforced that the G-20 was good for the region and that the meeting would “showcase” Pittsburgh to the world. Government agencies, which had an existing working relationship with the media and contacted the media in the months prior to the event, got their key messages reported directly in the news, many times verbatim. The media viewed government agencies as legitimate. Journalists have a working relationship with public relations practitioners who work with the mayor’s office on a daily basis. Thus, indexing became a key factor in the not only the agenda that was set, but the frames that the media used. In addition, the mere fact that the media room was located inside the convention center where the meetings were being held reinforced the legitimacy of government agencies as legitimate players within the mediascape.

In contrast, security perimeters were set-up to keep protestors out and protestors had to apply for permits just to protest. The media framed the event based on past events of the 2009 London meetings, or the 1999 World Trade Meeting in Seattle

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where protestors destroyed both cities, and gave audiences something they could relate to while providing action news. Protestors became increasingly upset with the media coverage because they could not get the media to accurately cover their events. The hyperlocalism focus on traffic problems, city closures, cost to taxpayers, and inadequate policing became the larger frames in the media. The result was that these frames, which came from legitimate sources, forced the protestors to respond to those issues rather than be able to set the public agenda. The protestors became reactive rather than proactive. Similarly, the dramatic looping of tape showing a small skirmish between police and protestors only reinforced the image of the radical protestor trying to destroy the city. The skirmish lasted no more than

20 minutes but the looping of the tape made audiences think it was an all-day battle. The media-hype distorted reality while serving to fill a news hole on a limited deadline. Yet again, the reason for protesting was still not covered. The sensationalism of exciting action news took precedence over the real facts.

By the time the media decided to actually cover more international and less action-packed topics such as the G-20's agenda, the tone for the summit meeting had already been set in the minds of the public. Support of policy depends on how that policy is framed. But the framing of the event was already portrayed at the hyperlocal level—traffic closures, protestors, where celebrities were dining etc.—leaving the real issues buried. ★

Congrats!!!

Congratulations to everyone who is finishing their degrees this May and August. We at ESIG can't wait to have you as colleagues. Good luck at your new jobs!

ICA is coming soon, and some of our members will be presenting. Here's one to look for: Tsay, M., & Krakowiak, K. M. (2010, June). Engaging beyond the screen: Investigating audience's use and appeal of television program websites. Paper to be presented at the 60th annual conference of the International Communication Association, Singapore.

Don't forget! The AEJMC deadline is April 1.

Here are some helpful links:

Call for Papers - http://www.aejmcdenver.org/?page_id=7

Uniform Paper Call - http://www.aejmcdenver.org/?page_id=444

How to "Clean" Your Paper - http://www.aejmcdenver.org/?page_id=93

UPLOAD Your Paper - <http://www.allacademic.com/one/aejmc/aejmc10/>

Paper Submitter FAQs - http://www.aejmcdenver.org/?page_id=1940

Good luck to everyone!



Denver | August 2010

We'll see you in Denver!