

## Evolution of Media Event Concepts and Innovation in Communication Perspectives: Postprint

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### Abstract

With the advancement of communication technology and the transformation of social contexts, the definition of media events proposed by Dayan and Katz in *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* has undergone a process of enrichment and expansion in both its connotation and denotation. This paper reviews the conceptual evolution of media events while analyzing the soft power and hard power factors that influence their dissemination. Furthermore, it presents a case study of the coverage of the 100th anniversary celebration of the founding of the Communist Party of China on the official Weibo accounts of People's Daily and Xinhua News Agency, exploring innovations in communication perspectives and methods for media events in the new media environment.

### Full Text

## The Evolution of the Media Event Concept and Innovation in Communication Perspectives

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**Abstract:** With advances in communication technology and changes in social context, the definition of media events proposed by Dayan and Katz in *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* has undergone a process of enrichment and expansion in both connotation and denotation. This paper reviews the evolution of the media event concept while analyzing the soft power and hard power factors that influence media event dissemination. Using the coverage of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China by the official Weibo accounts of *People's Daily* and *Xinhua News Agency* as a case

study, this research explores innovations in communication perspectives and methods for media events in the new media environment.

**Keywords:** media events; national image; soft power; international communication; communication technology

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## 1. The Evolution of the Definition of Media Events

In 1992, the concept of “media events” was formally introduced. In their book *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*, French scholar Daniel Dayan and Israeli-American sociologist Elihu Katz defined media events as televised historical events that compel nations and even the world to pause and watch, particularly those with ritualistic significance, primarily at the national level [1]. They categorized media events into three main types: Coronation, Conquest, and Contest—collectively known as the “3C” framework—with these categories being interconnected and mutually permeable.

Over the nearly two decades since its introduction, the concept of media events has continuously evolved and developed, a process that continues alongside advances in information technology, transformations in reporting methods, and deepening research. First, at the theoretical level, Dayan and Katz have repeatedly expanded, supplemented, and revised the concept. In 2007, Katz and Hebrew University professor Tamar Liebes published “No More Peace!” : How Disaster, Terror and War Have Upstaged Media Events,” proposing the concept of “traumatic media events” (or “destructive media events”). They argued that the importance and frequency of traditional ritualistic media events were diminishing, while live broadcasts of destructive events such as disasters, terrorism, and war were moving to center stage [2]. In 2008, Dayan wrote “Beyond Media Events: Disenchantment, Derailment, Disruption,” categorizing Disenchantment, Derailment, and Disruption—the “3D” framework—as a distinct mode of media events parallel to the “3C” model. He noted that while the “3C” model concerns integration and consensus, the “3D” model not only promotes dissent but even “creates division” [3].

Second, in terms of reporting forms, communication technology has brought a series of changes: reporting carriers have become increasingly diverse, with online platforms becoming mainstream; communication patterns have been subverted, with traditional top-down transmission receding to a secondary position; communication subjects have become more open and pluralistic, with weakened media integration and issue management; audience demands have grown more diverse, highlighting the trend of segmented communication; and “information overload” has become increasingly severe, intensifying the competition for attention. Under the influence of these new characteristics, media events have been endowed with qualities of openness and spontaneity.

The application of new communication technologies and the accompanying

changes in reporting forms have led to collisions and mutual supplementation between old and new media mechanisms within the media matrix, imprinting media events with the mark of new media. Consequently, the shared experience and profound engagement characteristic of traditional television broadcasts have gradually diminished, while ritualistic television events focusing on agenda-setting and issue management have shown signs of decline. In contrast, “traumatic media events” emphasizing continuous coverage without scripts have gained more visibility among audiences. Such media events are more uncertain in their trajectory and better reveal the authentic conditions of various levels of a nation. Accordingly, the proliferation of fake news from self-media has posed greater challenges to the truthful reporting of such events.

## 2. The Impact of Media Events on National Image

In the information age, communication media—especially emerging media—have become the primary channels through which people obtain and share information, playing an increasingly indispensable role in daily life and exerting growing influence on how people perceive the world. Correspondingly, national image construction has become closely linked to media events. Whether ritualistic media events emphasizing pre-designed ceremonies or traumatic media events highlighting emergency responses, both play important roles in the process of national image construction.

Ritualistic media events no longer rely solely on traditional television media; various new media forms such as Weibo, WeChat, and Douyin have played crucial interactive and supplementary roles. Through their interaction, the “3C” model achieves integration and consensus, actively conveying national image through “shaping communication.” On one hand, governments and official bodies actively organize and manage agendas, reporting through traditional media centered on television to strengthen internal cohesion, enhance national pride and self-confidence, and demonstrate political, economic, and socio-cultural strength externally. Live broadcasts of the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the 2018 celebration of the 40th anniversary of reform and opening-up belong to this category, conveying China’s national image from different perspectives across a decade. On the other hand, propelled by new communication technologies, the dissemination methods of ritualistic media events have expanded beyond television broadcasting, with various emerging media participating more actively and leveraging their unique characteristics and advantages. New media methods can both achieve live broadcasting and break through spatiotemporal limitations to reselect scenes, identifying the most newsworthy moments from complex rituals while enhancing audiovisual effects and emotional resonance through processing of audio-visual and textual elements, achieving “reproduction” of live video and text. The Weibo live broadcast of the 2021 celebration of the CPC’s 100th anniversary falls into this category.

Traumatic media events are often characterized by suddenness and uncontrollability, making them more challenging to report than ritualistic media events and

posing greater challenges to national image construction. Official and government bodies cannot control all information sources. In addition to traditional mass media, various new media release information in “fragmented” forms, resulting in low controllability and difficulty in integration. Traumatic media events involving disasters, terrorism, and war are often negative news; if handled improperly, they become negative energy in national image construction. The “3D” model that “promotes dissent and even creates division” often better reveals a nation’s real conditions, particularly its social mobilization and organizational capabilities, and tests media responsiveness to conduct “corrective communication.” The 2008 Wenchuan earthquake belongs to this category. After the earthquake, the performance of the government and people in rescue operations fully demonstrated China’s social mobilization capacity and governmental organization and## 3. The Interaction Between Media Events, Soft Power, and Hard Power

Currently, the competition of comprehensive national strength determines the future world order while profoundly affecting a nation’s regional and international environment for survival and development. To a certain extent, this competition represents the collision and fluctuation of hard power and soft power among different nations—in other words, soft and hard power serve the construction and enhancement of national image and international influence.

Soft power and hard power are not completely distinct or unrelated. Hard power represents the aggregation of a nation’s economic, military, technological, and other forces, serving as the foundation for soft power. The strength of hard power profoundly influences a nation’s comprehensive strength and international discourse power. Soft power represents the synthesis of a nation’s ideology, culture, values, and social systems—the product of hard power development at a certain stage, providing spiritual and cultural guidance for hard power. As Joseph Nye stated, changes in the nature of international politics often make intangible power more important. National cohesion, universal culture, and international institutions are being endowed with new meaning, with power shifting from “having abundant capital” to “having abundant information” [4]. The winding course of world history demonstrates that the competition, fluctuation, or mutual learning and integration of hard and soft power among nations and regions presents a grand scene involving national rise and fall, regional prosperity and decline, and even changes in world order.

National image constitutes an important component of soft power, and media events play a crucial role in national image construction. Consequently, media events are inextricably linked to soft and hard power. Specifically, successful and effective communication of media events results not from soft power alone nor from hard power alone, but from the combined and orderly functioning of both. Hard power provides the foundation and guarantee for effective media event dissemination, while soft power serves as the internal motivation. In successful examples of media event reporting and dissemination, the absence of strong hard power support or effective assistance from soft power elements such

as popular cohesion, cultural appeal, and a complete news system would lead to failure.

Media events have a distinct impact on enhancing a nation's comprehensive strength, particularly its soft power. On one hand, global media events possess certain media diplomacy functions, effectively accelerating diplomatic decision-making while supplementing and supporting official diplomacy. In the era of globalization, as international interactions broaden and media influence increases, journalists have become more active in media diplomacy, even becoming direct participants in media events. The 2019 debate between CGTN anchor Liu Xin and Fox Business anchor Trish Regan on China-U.S. trade issues exemplifies this category. On the other hand, through active agenda-setting and management, full and positive reporting of media events can more directly disseminate Chinese culture, enhance international discourse power, shape national image, and strengthen national soft power. During the 2008 Beijing Olympics, while Chinese media integrated resources for concentrated reporting, China also invited foreign media to observe and interpret the event up close, allowing foreign journalists to serve as disseminators of the media event, forming synergy with domestic media reports and effectively conveying China's national image.

#### **4. Media Events and the Reshaping of Ritual: A Case Study of Weibo Coverage of the CPC Centenary Celebration**

The celebration of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China was held on July 1, 2021, with the theatrical performance "The Great Journey" broadcast that evening. As a "national-level" ritualistic media event, the live broadcast of these important activities became "televised historical events that compel the nation and even the world to pause and watch," aligning with Dayan and Katz's early definition of media events. However, the CPC centenary celebration occurred within a new media environment and social context, where the role of online platforms as communication carriers became more prominent and audience demands more diverse. Consequently, the reporting form for this media event no longer relied solely on television broadcasting but represented a media "spectacle" created by the interaction of old and new media mechanisms and the joint efforts of various media outlets.

##### **4.1 A Media "Spectacle" Capturing National Attention and Participation**

The ritualistic media event of the CPC's 100th anniversary achieved "reproduction" on new media platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, and Douyin. Leveraging their advantages of timeliness, strong interactivity, and dual attributes of "social" and "media," these platforms provided comprehensive and in-depth displays of the day's celebrations, attracting widespread audience attention. By 12:00 on July 1, 2021, the topic "CPC 100th Anniversary Celebration" initiated by

CCTV News on Weibo had reached 2.2 billion views, while the topic “CPC 100th Anniversary” exceeded 5.6 billion views. Furthermore, around 10:00 on July 1, the top ten items on Weibo’s trending list, Toutiao’s “Hot List,” and Baidu’s hot search all related to the CPC centenary.

On July 1, the *People’s Daily* and *Xinhua News Agency* Weibo accounts posted 96 and 76 tweets respectively, with videos accounting for 58 (60%) and 27 (36%) of their posts. During the live broadcast of the centenary celebration from 8:00 to 10:00, they posted 33 and 37 tweets respectively, with video reports numbering 17 (52%) and 6 (16%). During this period, *Xinhua’s* Weibo focused primarily on the full text of General Secretary Xi Jinping’s speech.

#### 4.2 Emotional Attribution, Resonance Through Interaction

As research deepens and information technology advances, the concept of “media events” has undergone continuous enrichment and development—from the “3C” model to the “3D” model, from television broadcasting to the involvement of new media methods. Media events construct national image through the organic interaction and collision of soft and hard power. In reporting the CPC centenary celebration, besides television as a carrier, online platforms also played important roles. Television broadcasting and video and graphic reports from new media forms like Weibo interacted and complemented each other, reshaping the ritual sense of media events in a pluralistic context and conveying a comprehensive image of the Party and the nation from new perspectives.

Media events relying on television broadcasting often emphasize tight continuity and elaborate design of rituals, focusing on grand scene displays and audiovisual impact. In contrast, media events presented through new media forms, especially short videos, undergo “reproduction” of audio-visual and textual elements, paying greater attention to reporting angles and audience emotional resonance. Based on importance and empathy, they extract prominent emotional points and concerns from continuous expression, achieving upgraded audiovisual effects and emotional focus. This process resembles sifting or extracting specks of gold from a vast sea of ore.

On July 1, among *People’s Daily’s* 96 Weibo posts, 80 received over 10,000 likes, with 17 exceeding 100,000 likes. The post with the most likes, “Today’s Weibo comments are making me cry,” reached 819,000 likes. Other highly liked posts such as “Our planes never need to fly another round” and “This prosperous era is as you wished” carried strong emotional and empathetic resonance. Meanwhile, among *Xinhua’s* 76 Weibo posts, the most liked was the video “100 cannon salutes resound through the clouds, the flag guard marches 100 steps,” which precisely captured the event’s ritualistic and solemn nature and evoked audience pride, receiving 303,000 likes.

Simultaneously, television broadcasts of media events feature low audience participation and limited choice, restricting viewers to “watching.” In stark contrast, the new media environment has dramatically increased interaction between me-

dia and audiences. Audiences can not only watch media rituals but also become important participants in media events. In the Weibo coverage of the CPC centenary celebration, audiences participated in real-time interaction through Weibo and WeChat while watching the live broadcast, becoming an integral part of the reporting “spectacle.”

### 4.3 Deconstructing the Scene, Organic Integration of Points and Lines

Television broadcasting of media events is linear, with ritual content and processes strictly constrained by time and space. However, new media like Weibo and WeChat break these limitations, employing a scattered reporting model that intersperses thematically expansive content alongside linear television broadcasts. They “reproduce” ritual segments for panoramic, penetrating coverage that encompasses both diachronic and synchronic dimensions, focusing on rituals while transcending them. To both align with the event’s sequence and form synergy with television’s ritual sense to strengthen media agenda-setting, while simultaneously achieving on-site “reproduction” through short, fast, and flexible methods that integrate points and lines and balance motion and stillness, new media forms like Weibo and WeChat face significant challenges.

The July 1 celebrations included multiple important ritual activities with extensive duration and information volume. In the Weibo coverage by *People’s Daily* and *Xinhua*, they reported both the ceremonial activities in real-time and edited memorable moments from the celebration. Their coverage included not only key reports of the main event but also interspersed light shows and fireworks displays in Shenzhen, Shantou, Changsha, and other locations. They presented both the current state of comprehensive moderate prosperity and a general historical review of the CPC’s 100-year milestones. The reports focused on Beijing’s honor guard while also covering the first Chinese-style flag-raising ceremony in Hong Kong in 24 years since its return—achieving integration of points and lines and blending history with reality to comprehensively and vividly present the media event of the CPC’s centenary.

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*Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.*

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