

ANALYSIS OF A MEDIA EVENT. CASE STUDY: EUROVISION 2012

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Abstract: *The objective of the study is to identify the characteristics of a media event and to analyze the specific features of a major event in Europe, the Eurovision Song Contest. The research design was based on the theoretical presentation of the media event concept related to the interpretation of the specific features of this year's edition. This case study starts from framing the event into the restorative event category because the event itself is the result of an over-exposure, both pre and post event and especially during it. Another aspect that gives Eurovision the label of a "media event" comes from its interrupting nature. That is given by the mobilization of the public who abandoned their daily activities and participated at the event on the ground, in Baku, or in front of the TV. The anticipated nature of the event is reflected in the frequency with which it has taken place from 1956 to present and in its over-exposure as well, being the longest running program in the television history, with the largest international audience of the non-sporting broadcasts.*

Keywords: *media events, Eurovision, journalistic tone, Romanian media, the social status of journalists*

JEL classification: Z

1. Media events. Definition, typologies, hypostasis, characteristics

In order to build a relevant analysis, we should define, in the first instance, the concept of "media event" from many perspectives and according to many approaches, as well as the fundamental features of this concept and the two instances in which this phenomenon occurs in the public and media.

In 1992, Elihu Katz and Daniel Dayan were the first to propose the "media events" phrase, in the book called *"Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History"*. Defining the concept was the basis of an extensive study conducted by the two researchers. They started from the assumption according to which there are two main categories of news in the media: the routine ones and the non-routine ones. The former refers to the ordinary events that do not have a big impact on the public and the non-routine ones are related to the news with a big social impact that interrupt the normal journalistic activities and trigger extraordinary media coverage (the breaking news).

In a certain approach, media events are defined as *"those public events that are widely covered by the media and trigger processes of social mobilization and (sometimes) political action because of such an exposure"* (Coman, M, 2003). Moreover, in another approach, media events are considered to be an *"acceleration of the ordinary and of the history upsetting a state of the world by introducing a new state of novelty, unexpected and turbulence to it. Generally, it is considered that a revolution, by its instant brutality or by the murder of a personality, leads to some historical events"* (Lardellier, P., 2003).

Viewed in terms of the hypostasis in which this phenomenon occurs in the public and in the media, there are two major directions: the *restorative events* and the *transformative events*.

The *restorative events* are the result of an excessive media exposure of some common public ceremonies that are familiar to a wider audience. Also, another characteristic is given by the generally accepted meanings that confirm the already existing socio-political structures, norms, values and the already established symbols.

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The *transformative events* are achieved by the fusion of some relatively disparate ceremonial segments which are more related to the attitudes in the political or diplomatic meetings with certain media genres.

From the perspective of the media institutions, the *media events* generate (Coman, M., 2011):

- a) Presentations of events or facts, at a form level, in a way completely different from the usual reports. The event is prepared by numerous advertisements, it is anticipated.
- b) Changes in the journalistic tone. The event is presented in a formal manner and more subjectively than objectively.
- c) Privileging the narrative structures, the messages and the scenes presented as a show. Unity is suggested both among the participants at the events and among those watching the scenes broadcast.
- d) Changes in the social status of journalists. The journalists replace the courts and officials that usually mediated the entire transmission throughout the event.

By classifying the concept of *media event*, D. Dayan and E. Katz believe that there are 3 divisions, seen both as actual facts of history and types of media, as follows: Confrontations, Conquests and Consecrations.

2. Methodology

By using Google, we have selected the articles that have reflected the Eurovision Song Contest in the traditional media and in the online media. The monitoring of these articles was made from January (the selection of the candidates who would represent Romania at Eurovision) to the end of May 2012 (May 26, 2012 was the date on which the Eurovision finals took place) and 8 articles were selected for this purpose.

In order to include in our analysis all the media sources that have made references to this event, we have selected articles from newspapers such as Gândul, Evenimentul Zilei, Jurnalul Național, Ziaua Veche and from websites such as www.unica.ro, www.realitatea.net, www.protv.ro, www.b1tv.ro.

The selection criteria of these articles focused on the existence of the constitutive elements of a media event into a revealed form: changes in the journalistic tone, presentations of events or facts, at a form level, in a way completely different from the usual reports, privileging the narrative structures, the messages and the scenes presented as a show, respectively the changes in the social status of journalists. The analysis of the articles also took into account the hypostasis in which the media events occur in the public space and in the media: the restorative events or the transformative events, in terms of the typologies of the media events (Confrontations, Conquests and Consecrations) and also in terms of the interrupting and anticipated characteristics of the media event.

3. Case study: Eurovision 2012

3.1. Description of the event

Eurovision Song Contest is a European pop music festival to which some countries in Asia and North Africa joined as well, in addition to some European countries. The first edition of the festival was held in May 1956 in Lugano, Switzerland, and the latest edition was held in May 2012, in the capital of Azerbaijan, Baku.

Moreover, Eurovision is considered the longest running program in the television history, with the largest international audience of the non-sporting broadcasts.

The European Broadcasting Union, an organization founded in 1950 by 23 representatives of the European television, came up with the idea of Eurovision in 1955. “*It was a very ambitious project for those times – the satellite television had not been invented yet, and Europe no longer had any such kind of event that would bring countries together. Nevertheless, it was a success*”. (Gândul, Wednesday, 11 January 2012).

Only seven countries participated in the first year - Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Switzerland and Luxembourg, but the contest was watched by four million viewers in seven countries - a record for that time. The Romanian Television, a member of the EBU, has been the organizer of the national selection and has participated in the European competition since 1993.

3.2. Restorative event

The biggest controversy that has been created around this contest was the criteria for voting, political rather than related to the quality of the music. For example, in 2008, and in other editions as well, many countries have voted on regional considerations, giving maximum points to their geographical neighbors in particular. Also, the countries of the former Soviet bloc have voted each other and so have done the former Yugoslavian states. In the edition of this year, 2012, there was also plenty of controversy on the political criteria for voting. This is an additional argument for choosing this event which we will keep under review in this research.

Undoubtedly, this media event can easily fall into the *restorative event* category, and that because the event itself, not necessarily this edition, is the result of an over-exposure, both pre and post event and especially during it. Also, Eurovision is an event that gathers several cultures and the public is familiar with it, and it also has some generally accepted meanings which, offering no surprise, confirm the already existing social and political structures, norms, values and the already established symbols.

There were some issues related to both the security of the event and the national security even before the start of the event. Thus, according to Realitatea TV Channel, *“the Azerbaijani authorities announced, on Wednesday, that they foiled a series of terror attacks that were to take place during this year’s edition of the Eurovision Song Contest held in Baku, and arrested 40 people, according to the National Security Ministry, quoted by AFP. [...] ‘The attack was designed to be held in the concert hall where the competition took place, and there were also another four attacks planed against President Ilham Aliev, police stations, hotels where foreigners were housed and against some places of worship,’ said the Ministry of Azerbaijan”* (Realitatea TV Channel, Wednesday, May 30, 2012).

3.3. Changes in the journalistic tone and in the social status of journalists

In the period before the final competition, another controversy held the headlines in the Romanian newspapers. Thus, Adevărul Newspaper headlined in an article: *“Finals with political nepotism at Eurovision in Baku. The groom of the President of Azerbaijan wants to conquer Europe.”* Right in the *intro* of the news we can be noticed the change in the journalistic tone by which the event is presented in a formal manner and more subjectively than objectively: *“Azerbaijan has prepared, for the more than 100 million viewers, a show that exceeds not only the imagination of many, but the good taste also.”*

This article also refers to the controversy mentioned in the title: *“As the final act, after the performance of the 26 finalists, it will be on the stage Emin the <<Incredible>>, in the true sense of the word.”* This <<incredible>> is not any Azerbaijani manelist* but *“the biggest star of the country, known abroad, in Russia and in the UK.”* These are the words with which the singer Emin is presented to the public and will be made an international star overnight, thanks to the benevolence of the organizing committee. Due to his musical talent, the incredible Emin would probably have missed any qualification to the national selection for Eurovision. This is not only my point of view, but also of many European media representatives. In martial rhythms with traditional touch, the concert hall is lit with

* A Romanian singer who performs a specific gipsy genre of music called “manele”.

torches while the stage is lit with a crown of lights around which a lot of shadows gather. When everyone would have expected Michael Jackson to appear, an artist was lowered from the hall ceiling and his name does not say much to anyone except to the Azerbaijani, Russians and some Brits. Arrived on the scene, he performs, in an absolutely insignificant voice, a little song that wants itself a hit, not even pop, not even rock, with little chance to rank among the top 20 if it were a finalist song". (Adevărul Newspaper, Saturday, May 26, 2012). By means of this example, it can be noticed that the journalistic tone glides easily from an objective one to a subjective one and the involvement of the journalists is a deep one, replacing the role of the courts or officials, such as the judges of this competition or the general public who participates in voting the winner.

Another example on the change in the journalistic tone and on the journalists replacing the courts can be noticed in an article published in the Ghimpele Newspaper (Saturday, 26 May 2012), citing the Associated Press British news agency. The British journalists catalogue the Romanian song *Zaleilah*, sung by the Mandinga band as a "jumble" with Cuban trumpets, salsa and bagpipes, resembling to a "gypsy frenzy".

Also, in an editorial published in the *Jurnalul Național Newspaper*, the author, led by a highly subjectivism and in a less common language, says "*I dare say it is a performance that we ranked the 12th place in the European Championship musical Chart. Let's say it right! They hardly raised money not to miss Baku [...] and they started promoting the song in Europe very late. For some time now, we do not respect our neighbors and each time Eurovision starts, we expect declarations of friendship to be materialized in points. It is commonplace to state, in 2012, that the Eurovision votes reflect a geopolitical record! That has not happened since yesterday or today. It happened as well when Romania took the silver medal with Luminița Anghel and Sistem Band, in 2005, or in 2010, with Paula Seling and Ovi. It is good, however, to mention that this arrangement is not exclusive. Value matters as well. If we have had a song really to convey something, besides "Zaleilah", and even to be liked by our European neighbors, more votes would have come in number, even if Romania has not deigned to maintain diplomatic relations with its neighbors.*" (Jurnalul Național Newspaper, Sunday, May 27, 2012).

On the other hand, the Public Television in Romania, not only replaced the court or officials, but also publicly rebuked the neighbor states that they have not acquiesced to vote on geopolitical criteria, confirming once again the less objective sense given by a media event to the journalists: "*TVR considers our neighbors from Bulgaria, Hungary and Ukraine to be cheeky for having jumped Romania at the distribution points.*" (Ziua Veche Newspaper, Sunday, May 27, 2012).

3.4. The interrupting and anticipated characteristics of the media event

Another aspect that gives Eurovision the label of a "media event" comes from its interrupting nature. That is given by the mobilization of the public who abandoned their daily activities and participated at the event on the ground, in Baku, or in front of the TV. Also, officials, celebrities, even prime ministers or presidents of states have stopped their regular activities to take part in this event.

The anticipated nature of the event can be noticed both in the frequency with which this event has taken place – annually since 1956 – and in its over-exposure as well, being the longest running program in the television history, with the largest international audience of the non-sporting broadcasts. (www.unica.ro, Friday, 25 May 2012). This year also, the event generated a *ratting* record to the station that broadcast it live, TVR 1 Channel.

The final broadcast was preceded by a special edition at 9:20 p.m. presented by Gianina Corondan and Leonard Miron. In the show called "On the way to Baku", they

released details about the preparation of Romania for Eurovision and exclusively presented backstage images of Eurovision.

Approximately 2.3 million Romanians, of which nearly 1.5 million in the urban area, viewed the performance of the Romanian representatives live, on Saturday, May 26, 2012. Moreover, the performance of the *Mandinga Band* was the most watched moment on TVR 1 Channel, but the public channel was on the first place for the entire duration of the broadcast, between 10⁰⁰ pm and 1²⁴ am.

The average ratings throughout the contest were of 1.64 million Romanians, of which 1.13 million in the urban area, resulting in 10.8 rating points (www.paginademedia.ro, Monday, 27 May 2012).

3.5. Confrontations, Conquests and Consecrations – the typologies of the media event

If we refer to the 3 typologies supported on the *media event* by D. Dayan and E. Katz, Confrontations, Conquests and Consecrations, we can state that Eurovision, as reflected in the media, falls into all the three sections. Journalists underline the competitiveness of the event, often using terms like “confrontation” or “battle”, “*Mandinga fall in battle. Who are the opponents of Romania tonight? Do you think we have chances?*” (Pro TV Channel, Saturday, May 26, 2012).

The print media also highlighted the “conquering” nature of the performances of this competition opponents in the relationship to the public, “*As ambitious as Russia’s choice for Eurovision 2012 seemed to be, it seems to have been equally inspired. The band designated by Russians to represent them in the contest in Baku conquered not only the Balkna public, but many of the Europeans who voted for it and got it up in the second position of the chart*”. (Evenimentul Zilei Newspaper, Sunday, May 27, 2012).

Relating to the latter type of *media event*, the one of Consecrations, we can notice that this feature is common in the national media. “*In terms of music, Loreen released <<The Snake>> single, but nevertheless, her true consecration was to be in 2011. Last year, she participated in the national selection of Eurovision in Sweden with the song “My Heart is Refusing Me”. Ranked fourth in the semifinal, the song reached the ninth place in the Swedish charts. But the song with which she was appreciated in Eurovision this year brought her good luck right from the start. “Euphoria” helped Loreen to become a star. Immediately after the release of the song, it topped the national charts in Sweden and Finland, 3rd in Estonia and 4th in Norway*”. (B1 TV Channel, Sunday, May 27, 2012).

3. Conclusions

In conclusion, by its amplitude and impact at the European and international level, by mobilizing the media and especially the public (viewer or attending the event) beyond example, by the ability of the event to generate a collective feeling of belonging to a group, by the subjective tone of the journalists and the changes in their social status by means of which they replace courts and officials, by the exuberance, the anticipated and interrupting nature of the event, we can state that *Eurovision* falls into the structures of a *media event*.

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