

Paralympics as a Tool for Communication for Social Change: Audience Perceptions, Affect and the Social Change Potential in Rural Malawi

Os Jogos Paraolímpicos como Ferramenta de Comunicação para a Mudança Social: Percepções do Público, Fatos e Potencial de Mudança Social nas Zonas Rurais do Malawi

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Abstract

The Paralympics was broadcast in Sub-Saharan Africa for the first time during the 2020 Tokyo Games. This offered a unique opportunity to approach this phenomenon from a communication for social change perspective. Specifically, in this paper we conceive of the Paralympic broadcasts as a form of edutainment. This novel conceptual intervention brings attention to, not only how audiences interpret and make meaning from Paralympic media content, but also to the dialogical processes required to engage communities in processes of change. Drawing on findings from a four-year action research project, we explore the extent to which the Paralympics can be a useful and relevant platform for addressing disability stigma. We argue that mobile screenings of the Paralympics created a critical awareness, new perspectives on disability rights, and served to spark ideas for collective action.

Keywords

communication for social change, communication for development, edutainment, paralympics, disability, Malawi

Resumo

Os Jogos Paralímpicos foram transmitidos na África Subsaariana pela primeira vez durante os Jogos de Tóquio de 2020. Isto ofereceu uma oportunidade única para abordar este fenómeno numa perspetiva de comunicação para a mudança social. Especificamente, neste artigo, concebemos as transmissões paraolímpicas como uma forma de *edutainment*. Esta nova intervenção conceptual chama a atenção, não só para a forma como as audiências interpretam e dão sentido aos conteúdos dos meios de comunicação social paraolímpicos, mas também para os processos dialógicos necessários para envolver as comunidades em processos de mudança. Com base nos resultados de um projeto de investigação-ação de quatro anos, exploramos até que ponto os Jogos Paraolímpicos podem ser uma plataforma útil e relevante para abordar o estigma da deficiência. Defendemos que as projeções móveis dos Jogos Paraolímpicos criaram uma consciência crítica, novas perspetivas sobre os direitos das pessoas com deficiência e serviram para desencadear ideias de ação coletiva.

Palavras-chave

comunicação para a mudança social; comunicação para o desenvolvimento, *edutainment*, jogos paraolímpicos, deficiência, Malawi

Introduction

Sport has long been a site and catalyst for societal debate and social change on issues such as racism (Cooper et. al, 2019), LGBTIQ Pride (Sherwood et. al., 2020), and gender equality (Cooky, 2020; Mohammadi, 2020). Despite this, to date there has been very little research investigating sport media and communication from a communication for social change perspective. Following calls from communication and sport scholars for greater cross-fertilization of ideas between the fields of communication and social change and communication and sport (Jackson, Trevisan & Pullen, 2020), this article shares findings from a research project that uses the Paralympics as a platform for communication for social change in Malawi, and its potential to address complex forms of disability stigma.

Empirical research exploring audience responses to the Paralympics has been rare. Emerging audience research has predominantly focused on Global North audiences, and in these contexts, it has become apparent that watching Paralympics content positively shifts societal attitudes about disability, enhancing criticality and levels of comfort on engaging with issues of disability (Pullen, Jackson & Silk, 2020; 2021). However, just as there has been a 'disability divide' in the participation in the Paralympics between the Global North and Global South (Novak, 2014), so too has there been a divide in the engagement and watching of the Paralympics. Indeed, the first time the Paralympics was broadcast on Free-To-Air (FTA) television in Sub-Saharan Africa was in 2021 for the Tokyo 2020 Games. Few studies therefore exist on how audiences in the Sub-Saharan Africa region, and indeed more broadly in the Global South, engage with the Paralympics. One notable study on the participation in Paralympic sport beyond Western contexts is Forber-Pratt's (2015) study in Ghana and Bermuda, which found that engaging in Paralympic sport had positive effects

both for the athletes themselves as well as perceptions and attitudes among wider, able-bodied community members.

Within Global North contexts, the discursive framing of people with disabilities¹ within Paralympic media has been the subject of critique. The (over)emphasis on stories of ‘overcoming’ adversity, often termed ‘supercrip’ (Purdue & Howe, 2013; Berger 2008), is of significant concern in the literature. Defined by Berger “Supercrips are those individuals whose inspirational stories of courage, dedication, and hard work prove that it can be done; that one can defy the odds and accomplish the impossible” (2008, p. 648). This trope is frequently applied in patronising ways to both people with impairments who lead ordinary lives, as well as to people (e.g. para athletes) who excel (Howe, 2011) tending to gloss over structural inequalities and oppression. For this reason, among disability rights groups in the Global North, the Paralympics is often approached with scepticism.

Little is known about how the Paralympics would be read within Global South contexts, nor the relevance for the Paralympics acting as a platform for social change. Therefore, as the Paralympics broadcasts reach new audiences, further research is required to understand the ways audiences interpret and make meaning from Paralympic media and the social change potential. This paper aims to advance our understanding of the potential of Paralympic media to be a catalyst for social change in the Sub-Saharan Africa context by analysing it within a communication for social change, and more specifically edutainment theoretical perspective.

Paralympic media as ‘edutainment’

In this paper we conceptualize the Paralympics as a form of ‘edutainment’. Edutainment is the purposeful and strategic use of media to both entertain and educate, “in order to contribute to the process of directed social change” (Singhal & Rogers, 2004, p. 5). Applying the concept of edutainment to sport media is a novel advance in this field, since the majority of theorization and empirical case studies relating to edutainment focus on scripted drama genres, especially soap operas and telenovelas. We make the case for the inclusion of Paralympic media on the basis that sport media, including the Paralympics, falls under the broad umbrella of entertainment media. This is also on the basis that the Paralympics is a mediated sporting event that has been underpinned by a range of socially-driven motivations. The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) claims that the Paralympics is now “the world’s number one sport event for driving social inclusion,” and that it “boasts a strong track record for transforming attitudes, cities, countries, and the lives of millions of people around the world.” (IPC, 2022). These social change motivations are similarly the driving interests of the broadcasters and producers, such as Channel 4

¹ It is important to explain our choice of terminology in this paper. While recognising that there are sensitive debates ongoing about the use of person-first or identity-first language, in this paper we use person-first language (‘people with disabilities’) in keeping with the preferred usage in the Malawian context, which itself is consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

in the UK (Pullen, Jackson, Silk & Scullion 2019), informing their production of marketing, backstories, and other editorial content.

According to Melkote (2018) edutainment can operate at different levels, including both the individual level, where it influences awareness, attention and behaviour toward a socially desirable objectives, and at the larger community level, where it serves as an agenda-setter or influences public and policy initiatives in a socially desirable direction. A similar distinction is made by Tufte who outlines 'three generations' of edutainment, where the first generation theorized the impact of edutainment in linear, modernization-informed behaviour change communication terms; the second drew upon reception theories, and participatory approaches applied in instrumental ways, and the third generation more informed by communication for social change theories of participatory communication, empowerment and liberating pedagogies (Tufte, 2005). While there are some stakeholders we encountered who assume a rather simplistic, linear effect from watching broadcasts to changing attitudes and behaviours, we consider that the Paralympics is most productively aligned with the third generation of edutainment, since rather than the incorporation of fixed 'messages', social modelling, and expectations of specific, individual behavioural change, engagement in Paralympics is best understood as a mode of involving audiences in process of reflection, problem identification, debate, and social critique, where the problem is not one of a lack of information and knowledge, but instead is "a power imbalance, in structural inequality, and in deeper societal problems" (Tufte, 2005, p 168). This conceptualization is unpacked in this paper.

Contexts of disability in Malawi

Disability and the stigma associated with disability is a major challenge in Malawi. We deploy the term 'stigma' in this paper to move beyond individual level attitudes. Stigma is a concept that brings our attention to the cultural, environmental and economic systems and structures that marginalize and oppress people who are viewed as 'different' within a society (Oliver, 2004; Parker and Aggleton, 2003; Grue, 2016). The cultural context plays a role in stigma, since the attributes that are valued or devalued in a society influence what kinds of differences may be most stigmatized (Westerholm et. al., 2006). Our understanding of stigma also takes into account the ways that bodily difference can be threatening to able-bodied norms at a subconscious level, causing unspoken but persistent prejudices, fears and intolerances (Shildrick, 2012).

It is important to recognize that the concept of disability has different social meanings in different cultural contexts. Scholars have found that rather than a concept emphasising 'deficiency' or a lack (as in the case of 'dis'ability), African thought conceptually refers to 'wholeness' and 'health' as the basis for thinking about categories of difference (Devlieger, 2014). Furthermore, disability is often tied to the balance of communal living and social relationships, where impaired relationships can generate bodily misfortune (Livingstone, 2006). Some research has found that disabilities can be more heavily stigmatized in collective societies because of perceived limitations to contributing to the collective (Westerholm, 2006). Sometimes religious and spiritual moral frameworks and beliefs interplay with disability, where God's will, curses or be-

witching may be associated with disability (Muderedzi and Ingstad 2006), sometimes understood as a consequence of greed, jealousy, or other taboo behaviour that disrupt social relations. Others link concepts of 'fitness to work' with colonialization cultures of standardization and measurement (Livingstone, 2006; Grech, 2015).

A growing bank of scholarship is exploring the complex interconnections between poverty and disability in the Global South. Disability is both caused by poverty (malnutrition, poor sanitation and exposure to bacteria, lack of or delayed access to medical care for difficult births and disease, vulnerability to war, violence and disaster, unsafe working conditions, etc.); and disability can lead to poverty, especially because education and work are often inaccessible for people with disabilities, which in turn limits a person's knowledge of, and empowerment to seek services (Ingstad, Baider & Grut, 2011). Ingstad and Eide (2011) refer to the phenomenon of 'poverty within poverty':

In low-income countries and areas people with disabilities are among the most vulnerable. They are often the first to die when sanitary and food conditions become critical. They do not get to the hospital because transportation cannot be paid for. They are the last to get jobs when employment is scarce. They are often the last in a group of siblings to be sent to school if the parents can only afford shoes and school uniforms for some of their children, or they may simply be blocked from any education due to lack of resources in the schools or other poverty-related barriers in their environment. (p. 3)

However, while there are correlations supporting an interrelationship, scholars caution against interpreting this as a simple cause-effect relationship. The relationship is complex, rather than inevitable, and experiences vary greatly from person to person (Eide & Ingstad, 2011). Fewer individuals with disabilities are consulted about household decisions and fewer go with the family to social events (Eide & Munthali, 2018). People with disabilities may also experience circumstances that limit their participation in everyday life activities such as sport (Massa, 2011).

This paper therefore contributes to a number of gaps in the literature. Conceptually it draws together scholarship on sport communication and communication for social change. In doing so, this paper is not just a study of Paralympic broadcast audiences, but by drawing on action research, explores how to bring Paralympics media content to rural Malawian audiences in ways that would be accessible and relevant, and that would catalyse critical engagement and mobilize action. Empirically this paper adds important new insights into how non-Western audiences respond to Paralympic highlights packages.

Methodology

This research adopted action research in combination with ethnographic approaches. Action research is "learning in and through action and reflection" with a commitment to improvement and hope (McNiff, 2002 p. 17). When combined with qualitative and ethnographic approaches and sensibilities, as in ethnographic action research (Tacchi, 2015), it enables a research approach that generates knowledge through practices of action and reflection supported by holistic, immersive engagement and observation in

context. In this way, this research involved the researchers practising communication for social change in experimental and creative ways coupled with participant observation and other, mainly qualitative, holistic methods of data collection. The research project was able to fund the national broadcaster to produce voice-over commentary in one of the main indigenous languages (Chichewa), making Malawi the only country in Sub-Saharan Africa not to broadcast in only English, French or Portuguese. Other action research experiments included theatre for development exploring themes of disability stigma and para sport, and mobile screenings of the Paralympic broadcast and video content. This paper draws on findings from the latter. During the screenings the researchers undertook participant observation, documenting the events using fieldnotes, photography and video. After the screening of the Paralympic videos, dialogue and discussions with communities took place, exploring their interpretation and feedback on the highlights, and its relevance and meaning for their local community. Interviews were undertaken before and after the screenings with community members to explore knowledge, perceptions and new ideas stimulated by the screenings on both disability as well as para sport more broadly.

Mobile screenings is a term which is used interchangeably with mobile cinema, community screenings or public film screening. Kamlongera (1984) defined mobile cinema as a practice whereby films are produced and circulated in remote places through mobile vans. Another term used by Cain (2009) is community screening, which she defined as a process which takes the video to the broader community for feedback. Mobile screenings make use of portable equipment (a laptop, a projector, a projector screen or white sheet, and a generator) and a local space (a school, a church hall, a community centre) and gather local communities to watch content, and importantly, include a facilitated discussion and debate. Mobile screenings are appropriate since private TV ownership rates are low in Malawi, especially in rural areas.

We conducted mobile screenings in three districts namely: Chiradzulu, at a Special Educational Needs (SEN) demonstration school (Southern Region); Lilongwe, at a secondary school (Central Region), and Mzimba, in a church hall (Northern Region). These districts are the locations where the Malawi National Paralympic Committee (NPC) has trained teachers in the use of the IPC's Paralympic education package, I'mPOSSIBLE, in order that this research contributes to existing, long-term efforts on these themes. We worked with village chiefs, and in some instances, head teachers, to organize the communities to attend the screenings. Due to Covid-19 regulations in place at the time, numbers needed to be limited. Sixty participants were invited for the screening, aiming to include equal participation of men and women, and at least 25 persons with disabilities. Importantly, the audience also comprised of community leaders, faith leaders, teachers, as well as general community members of all ages.

In most of the screenings a mix of content was shown. In addition to one of the 50-minute Tokyo Paralympics highlights packages (with Chichewa-language commentary), other video content was used including: excerpts of the Netflix documentary, *Rising Phoenix*; short YouTube videos of a Malawian para-athlete, Taonere Banda, produced by BBC World Service and Voice of America; and videos produced by the IPC for their education package, I'mPOSSIBLE. The order and content shown during the screenings was adapted in response to the questions that arose.

Findings and discussion

To unpack how the Paralympic Games screenings operate as a form of edutainment, we begin by presenting an analysis of the ways audiences reacted and interpreted the content. Then we consider the processes that enabled meaningful engagement dialogue, and critically reflect on the potential for social change.

Reaction and interpretation of the Paralympic screenings

Immediate reactions, affective responses

The reactions to seeing Paralympics and para sport stories on screen was immediate. From the beginning, the audience cheered, clapped and gestured at the screen and each other in response to seeing the Paralympics for the first time. During the screenings people were murmuring and asking each other questions and pointing out sporting moments they found surprising and interesting. The general feeling was one of excitement and amazement.

A woman said that showing the Paralympic broadcasts to their area was good for her and her community:

This is something you rarely see in the rural communities around here which have made us backwards. It's very interesting to watch the screenings and I am very excited that when I go back home I will spread the news of the knowledge gained here.

These sentiments of pride at being one of the first communities in the area to witness the Paralympics was shared by others as well. One participant said he was thrilled to be a "pioneer". A village chief of the area said he hoped that they will do something to ensure that the news is spread across the entire area.

Some people also expressed some disbelief. One person queried whether what she was watching was real, or whether it was a piece of fake content. She only became convinced when shown videos of the Malawian para-athlete, Taonere Banda, and other videos featuring local children participating in para sport.

Of all the sports shown, perhaps the powerful for Malawian audiences was para swimming. Para swimming was featured in the highlights packages, as well as in the clip shown from the film, *Phoenix Rising*. It provoked a cheer amongst audiences at one event, and during another one of a woman in the audience said "This is something I did not expect. It has left me speechless!" (Woman, Southern Region). Another woman at a screening in the Northern Region said: "This is a completely new experience for me. It has challenged my experience and even that of this community. Imagine a woman without hands swimming like she has both hands. So amazing."

The cultural context is key to understanding why para swimming was particularly impactful. Aside from lakeside communities, swimming in Malawi is a highly valued skill. During the rainy season, for example, people who can swim are depended upon to help other community members cross flooded rivers. Therefore, and per-

haps counter-intuitively, despite competition swimming not being a popular sport amongst Malawians, para swimming was one of the most impactful sports amongst rural Malawian audiences.

All this implies that the content had strong affective power (Ahmed 2004; Pullen 2021) amongst rural audiences, provoking joy, amazement and hope. This is significant for understanding the power of Paralympic media to activate processes of critical reflection and mobilization for action.

Interpretation: re-interpreting disability

The Paralympics is clearly engaging and emotive, but to understand its social change potential it is also important to examine how it connected with local knowledge frameworks for understanding disability. After watching the highlights, audience members often expressed surprise at the achievements of people with disabilities. In the Malawian context, disability is typically equated to 'inability', coupled with a view that people with disabilities are in need of charitable help, protection and care. One woman said "what people with disabilities need is care from able-bodied people". Within religious and spiritual moral frameworks, this status dependence and helplessness is often fatalistically accepted. This notion of help extends to a perception that people with disabilities are vulnerable and need to be protected from danger, as explained by a man from the Southern Region:

You cannot leave a person who is blind to move around to the grocery store alone, which can be equated to leaving them in danger. They need our help and guidance for their protection. Doing so means we love them because we are wishing them well and a good life.

Attempts by people with disabilities to disrupt these expectations are met with disapproval. People shared stories about a woman who has been trying to participate in mainstream daily life despite her disability, leading to several accidents. She is regarded as odd for going against expectations of her abilities: "if a person who is disabled goes beyond what he cannot do, it causes chaos and it becomes a responsibility for able-bodied people to solve such issues" (Woman, Southern Region).

Though care and love are positive values stemming from communitarian living and religious teachings and can be a cultural asset, the positioning of people with disabilities as people who will always need 'help' can also be disempowering (Chataika et al 2013), as there can be an expectation that people with disabilities should be 'grateful' for 'help', rather than being entitled to rights. This perception can also lead to social and economic exclusion, where for example, people with disabilities may be excluded from earning income, and are instead expected to only do micro-enterprise work specifically offered through disability service organizations, or travel to cities to beg for money in urban and peri-urban areas.

Viewing the Paralympics content struck at the heart of these assumptions. A common response was, "I cannot believe this! I never imagined people with disabilities to be this capable that they can do such unbelievable things..." (Woman, Southern

Region). It was particularly notable to see the ways in which the Paralympic stories were able to redirect the notion of 'help' away from (over)protection and pity and into efforts to recognize ability and advocate and support people with disabilities to gain independence. One said of the para athlete featured in the *Phoenix Rising* film:

The life experience of the disabled man who did archery was very interesting. Indeed, God created all of us in his image and all that is required is love. This love needs to be told and shown by letting them know they are as capable as able-bodied people. Although we may not necessarily be the same, they should not be seen as any less capable.

Another person said that those athletes with disabilities are "ten times more able" (Woman, Northern Region) than the entire room of people at the screenings. Although these statements carry potentially problematic ableist discourses since they articulate an ableist 'norm', there was general consensus that as a community the best way to 'help' is to recognize and capabilities and rights.

Responses of persons with disabilities and their families: role models

Clearly, the Paralympic content was significant in shifting mindsets among able-bodied audiences, but the responses and interpretations of audience members with disabilities is also important to understand. Internalized ableism is the emulation of the oppressive ableist norms from the dominant culture, which can lead to self-loathing, low expectations and low self-esteem (Campbell, 2008). In Malawi as elsewhere, it is not uncommon for people with disabilities to experience internalized stigma, or as Campbell (2008) reconceptualizes, internalized ableism. Furthermore, research in the Global North has suggested that people with disabilities have found the Paralympics and its associated narratives and discourses problematic (Pullen et al. 2021; Berger, 2008). Therefore, understanding how audience members with disabilities responded to the Paralympics is important.

In most of the screenings about one quarter of the audience present was a person with a disability. Among this group, as well as among parents of children with disabilities, the Paralympians emerged as important role models. One woman in the Southern Region who has a hearing impairment and who works at the local SEN school said:

In the world we live in, things are very hard for people like us to rise to the top and engage in sports. There is a lot of teasing in terms of what we are capable of. However, seeing this woman with amputated arms performing as the best has made me realize that we are all capable and I am sure in my community here at [school] I will tell the children that they can do anything they want because it is possible.

Similarly, a father who had been struggling financially with taking care of his son, a wheelchair user, said that seeing people playing table tennis provoked his interest. The father said it changed his thinking about his son's future: "At first I thought my child had no opportunities in life. But watching his fellow colleagues who have disabilities has given me hope that my child has a lot of opportunities in his life" (Man, Central Region).

Haslett and Smith (2021) argue that the increased visibility of para-sports and representation of para-athletes as strong, capable, thriving disabled people serves to challenge prevailing negative stereotypes about disability (i.e. disabled people as less than, incapable or limited). Likewise, when the audience engaged with content about the Malawian athlete who competed at the Tokyo Games, their belief system was challenged. Sharing stories about the Malawian para athlete was therefore especially important for people with disabilities. Hearing that a Malawian woman from a rural area had made it to the Paralympics fostered a belief that people with disabilities can achieve.

In this way, while the traditional (first and second generation) edutainment theories emphasized the social modelling opportunities, mainly in association with scripted drama elements of pro-social and anti-social characters, the Paralympics as a form of edutainment works more as a source for personal role models, both for people with disabilities and their families.

Paralympics with a 'third generation' edutainment approach

A key distinction between traditional edutainment approaches and those more informed by liberating, social change theories ('third generation') is the move away from the assumption that embedded 'messages' will lead to specific, individual behavioural change, and towards viewing edutainment content as tool or catalyst for reflection, problem identification, debate, and social critique. This requires an attention to processes of communication as much as to content.

Processes of dialogue and localization

The first challenge related to the relevance of the Paralympic content when being viewed in the context of rural villages in Malawi. The Paralympics is a form of global content, and the idea of using global content for local social change efforts rightly attracts some scepticism (Garthwaite, 2000). Several elements of the production and screening processes contributed to making the content meaningful in context.

The localized commentary was found to be important in making the Paralympics relevant in Malawi. Incorporated as part of the action research, the commentary team included a sports journalist well known for his football commentary, and a disability rights reporter with a radio programme that airs six days a week and who himself has a vision impairment. The findings indicate that the Chichewa commentary significantly enhanced the engagement and enjoyment amongst rural audiences. It not only helped people to understand, but the recognisable voices meant that the highlights packages were clearly associated with Malawian sport and disability issues. One man from the Central Region said, "The commentators were fun. It was just like I was watching Malawian football." Audiences also responded to the humour and local idioms used by the Malawian commentators.

However, some aspects of the Paralympic content were distancing. Two key issues arose. The first related to the types of assistive technology (AT) and sporting

facilities seen on screen, which reflected international, or more specifically Global North standards. In Malawi, AT access is a major challenge, where only 4.5% of people who need AT (such as wheelchairs, canes, hearing aids, crutches) have access (Munthali, 2017), let alone sport-specific AT. The high-tech AT shown on screen during the Paralympics made the Paralympics seem like an event only for people in “rich countries” for many in the audience. Secondly, some of the sport disciplines were not well known amongst rural Malawian audiences. This is important to consider, since the ability to identify with people on screen in edutainment is critical to the process of catalyzing concrete action to improve their lives (Garthwaite, 2000, p63).

There were a number of ways in which our process sought to combat these challenges and to help make the highlights relevant and appropriate in the local context. Firstly, facilitators sought to balance the highlights packages with a careful curation of other supporting content that would help to contextualize and respond to questions arising. The additional content included videos of local para sport produced by the Malawi NPC, and news clips about local athletes. Showing clips of local athletes increased meaningfulness of the Paralympics among the audience. The educational videos produced as part of the IPC’s I’mPOSSIBLE education package, which featured school children participating in para sport, were of particular interest since it related to their situation. This has implications for the kinds of additional editorial content that would enhance the generic broadcast highlights packages in future Paralympic Games, as well as the ways that community engagement processes would continue to require additional content to help audiences relate to the highlights packages. Perhaps key to the success of the process is the mode of mobile screenings itself, which is a collective experience punctuated with facilitated discussions and dialogue. The public, collective viewing is part of what makes video an empowering tool (Cain, 2009). Unlike when videos are watched at home, public mobile screenings provide a platform for dialogue and encounters, binding people from diverse backgrounds together, and opening up the possibility of social and political action. The facilitation contributed to the active interpretation and localization by the audience, giving them a chance to share their ideas and relate it to the local context. In addition, the participants were also able to ask for clarification. If the highlights were not localized via a facilitator who clarified and contextualized the screenings, it is likely that the global content would not have been relatable or understood.

These three aspects: the Chichewa language translation of the highlights; the use of local para-athletes; and the mobile screenings with facilitated discussions; made the content relatable and contextualized the content and was indispensable in enabling the possibility of the Paralympics as a catalyst for social change.

Beyond awareness raising, toward a critical consciousness, empowerment and social change

As we have shown, immediately after watching Paralympic highlights, there was clear evidence of change in perceptions of the abilities of people with disabilities. The Paralympics seems to have significant affective power provoking at an emotional level a much more positive response to disability. Supported by the facilitation and

other localization processes this also seemed to lead to a new critical awareness and reflection. The videos worked to redirect the values of 'help' towards a more rights-based perspective which recognizes capabilities and entitlements. This is a significant contribution in a context where disabling and stigmatising beliefs prevail. In many ways, this is exactly what IPC and others hope and expect that the Paralympics as a form of edutainment would do. As we have argued, key to the impact in this case was the process of the screenings itself, as a communal and dialogical process, as well as the efforts to localize and contextualize the content in Malawian sporting cultures and social contexts.

However, we contend that the possibilities of achieving social change through mobile screenings of the Paralympics has limitations. In keeping with communication for social change theories (Thomas & van de Fliert, 2014; Dutta, 2015) and the third generation of edutainment theories (Tuft, 2005), with roots in Freirean approaches for critical consciousness, social change requires more than individual-level change. Addressing stigma will require systemic and structural change. Systems and structural change are long term processes, requiring collective action, citizen demand, social movements, advocacy, policy changes, and systemic changes. Watching the Paralympics collectively seems to have awakened a critical reflection and an interrogation of assumptions of disability, and indeed, in each of the communities involved in the screenings there were statements of intentions to hold follow up meetings to, for example, discuss how to encourage parents and guardians to bring children with disabilities to school, or to encourage schools to include para sport activities. However, a single screening, once every four years is clearly not enough. A more intense and sustained consciousness raising processes, rooted in local problem identification and problem solving, and in partnership with disability activists and service providers, would be needed to support and strengthen these ideas towards social change. A combination of participatory communication and advocacy communication is needed for both local and policy level change.

Conclusion

Though traditionally discussions about edutainment have been limited primarily to scripted dramas, there is much to be gained in broadening our conceptual boundaries to include sport media. For communication for social change scholars, this opens up a set of new literatures that chart the ways in which various actors, from athletes, to sporting bodies and organizers, and broadcasters harness the popularity of sport to catalyse debate on a wide variety of social justice concerns. For Paralympic media scholars, connecting Paralympic sport with theories of edutainment and communication for social change reveals how the content itself, however powerful, is insufficient for social change.

This paper has advanced this effort towards opening up thinking on edutainment through presenting the case of mobile screenings of the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics to audiences in rural Malawi. Our research has demonstrated that the mobile screenings of the Paralympics had significant impacts on rural community's perceptions of disability. The Paralympics provoked new and positive emotional responses to disability,

and new understandings of disability. In particular, it challenged the widespread and often fatalistic notion that disability inevitably means helplessness, a life of dependency, and lack of a future. Importantly, the audiences reinterpreted the disability after watching the Paralympics in ways that assimilated existing cultural frameworks for understanding disability, such as a progressive and a rights-based understanding of disability and capability as being conceived of as an expression of God's love. People with disabilities and their immediate family and support circle also responded in powerful ways to watching the Paralympic content, especially seeing the Malawian para-athlete, which not only proved that people with disabilities can achieve, but also a Malawian woman with a disability can achieve in sport and beyond.

At the same time, it is important to remain attuned to some of the ableist perceptions that emerged amongst some participants, especially evident in statements that compare the capabilities of people with disabilities to the ableist 'norm'. Indeed, the way that the Paralympics can reinforce ableist discourses, especially through stories of 'overcoming', is one of the key reasons why the Paralympics has been critiqued as unhelpful for advancing disability rights issues in the Global North. The change in perceptions about capabilities needs to be tied to a critical reflection on issues of rights, entitlements, discrimination accessibility and other structural factors in order to be progressive.

The research has shown that although the content itself was powerful, the content on its own is insufficient to catalyze social change. It was the nature of mobile screenings, which has inbuilt processes of dialogue and discussion, that was crucial in deepening the reflections and creating the foundations for social change. Through the mobile screening, the communities were mobilized to consider what they could do about disability, with all the three communities developing plans for future action. Public screenings can be limited in the number of people they can reach but they are successful in engaging with communities at both a personal and collective level. Connecting Paralympic content with theoretical frameworks of edutainment helps to articulate and reinforce how and why the dialogical processes remain crucial.

There are some important implications for future practice emerging from this study. The local commentary significantly enhanced the engagement of Malawian audiences in the Paralympics, not only enabling comprehension but also understanding and enjoyment. The well-known voices already associated with sports commentary made the global content seem Malawian. Funds to support local commentary should be considered in future broadcast projects. The facilitation, including the curation of additional content to support the highlights packages, also contributed to active processes of interpretation and localization of global content into context. While it might be difficult to run mobile screenings at a large scale across the continent, these findings indicate a need to include more editorial, supporting content to help audiences completely new to the Paralympics to find narrative hooks into the sports, especially drawing on national and regional para-athletes, and a wider mix of national and local communication for social change strategies appropriate to the local context that fulfil the role of debate and dialogue to enable active interpretation and localization processes. Finally, we consider the finding that para-swimming was one of the most affective sports shown to be an important and rather surprising insight. Given the limited access to swimming pools in Malawi, and the expensive facilities shown on

screen, para-swimming could be assumed to be one of the more distancing sports. However, with access to backstories via the *Phoenix Rising* clip, and because of the cultural context in which it was being read, para-swimming was one of the most powerful sports. This underscores the importance of continued research with audiences to understand readings of Paralympics within contexts.

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