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Ambivalent rituals of belonging

(Re)theorising hybrid, violent media events

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Abstract

The updating of media event theory for the digital age has been underway for some time, and several researchers have pointed out that the complexity of the hybrid media environment poses a challenge when it comes to understanding how media events in the present digital context ritually create belonging. In this article, we examine violent media events as hybrid phenomena and discuss their ritual workings in the present digital media environment. We apply what we call the 5 A's – actors, affordances, attention, affect, and acceleration – as key analytical tools to empirically study such events. We also develop the concept of hybridity in relation to media events by proposing three auxiliary A's: assemblage, amplification, and accumulation. Building on our earlier work, we call for more analytical consideration of the ambivalences in the ritual constructions of belonging (and non-belonging) in such violent events. We use the Christchurch massacre of 2019 as a case study to illustrate these conceptual developments.

Keywords: hybrid media event, violence, Christchurch massacre, 5As, ambivalence, ritual, belonging

(Re)theorising media events

The concept of event is of enduring scholarly interest in the social sciences. Drawing on existing literature, we can describe events as temporally bound intensifications of social action and related moments of heightened sociality. Events can be analysed using frameworks of singularity, recurrence, transformation, or manufacturedness. Events take different forms and assume active agency. They have also been conceptualised as public rituals (see, e.g., Wagner-Pacifici, 2017; Rojek, 2013).

With the advent of modern society and mass media, the significance of media in making and shaping social action and connected sociality has been amplified.

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The first theory of *media* events was developed by communication scholars Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, who wrote about such events throughout the 1980s and published *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* in 1992. Their book on the interconnectedness of the media and public events in contemporary society is considered a groundbreaking contribution to media and communication studies (Couldry et al., 2010). Their original idea was that media events comprise a special genre with the power to interrupt the everyday media flow and bring the public into touch with society's central (even sacred) values by inviting them to participate in the event through mass-mediated communication (Dayan & Katz, 1992: 5–9). Dayan and Katz demonstrated that the significance of media events lies in their ability to reach larger audiences than events that require physical presence and, consequently, to create a sense of the "whole world watching" as the event unfolds before their eyes. In so doing, Dayan and Katz articulated the importance of media events as media rituals that create a sense of togetherness and belonging (Cottle, 2006; Couldry, 2003; Morse, 2018; Sumiala, 2013).

Since its first publication in 1992, Dayan and Katz's theoretical formulation has inspired a considerable amount of intellectual effort among media and communication studies scholars (Sumiala, 2013; Couldry & Hepp, 2018; Goldfarb, 2018; Rathnayake, 2021). Although it is a landmark study by many standards, Dayan and Katz's work has also drawn criticism. Both authors have responded separately to the criticisms levied against them and revised their thinking (Dayan, 2010; Katz & Liebes, 2007). Critics have denounced Dayan and Katz's original work as too presentist, too focused on ceremonial events (as cohesive creations of belonging), and too tightly associated with mass media – particularly television – and a national level of analysis (see, e.g., Sonnevend, 2016b; Sreberny, 2016). Julia Sonnevend (2016a) has called these later developments in the theorisation of media events a "critical turn". Instead of focusing on theoretical and empirical analyses of media events as ceremonial and ritual national occasions that stimulate a sense of belonging to a nation, as Dayan and Katz (1992) had, scholars in the critical tradition have focused more on the conflicting, global, and digital character of media events (Evans, 2018; Fox, 2018; Mortensen, 2015) and analysed them using a framework of terror, disaster, and war. These studies conceptualise media events as ritual disruptions of social cohesion and polarising performances of non-belonging in society (Liebes, 1998; Nossek, 2008; Sumiala et al., 2018; Valaskivi et al., 2019; see also Katz & Liebes, 2007). Others have questioned the usefulness of media event theory in the current era of fragmented, globalised, and digitised communication (see Frosh & Pinchevski, 2018; Rathnayake, 2021). Some of this criticism has even been imposed by the authors of the theory themselves (Katz & Dayan, 2018).

While we acknowledge the need to revise media event theory to adapt it to the current globalised and digital media environment and to respond to recent debates in media and social theory regarding the interconnection between the media and events as social formations (see also Sonnevend, 2016b), we claim

that – revised and updated to the present communication context – media event theory still has the potential to explain how belonging (and non-belonging) is ritually created and maintained within the framework of sudden, mediatised, and spectacular violence.

Ambivalent rituals of belonging in hybrid, violent media events

In this article, we analyse contemporary violent media events as hybrid phenomena and discuss particular conceptual tools, which we argue are useful for advancing empirical research on rituals of belonging in hybrid media events of global and spectacular violence.

By "belonging", we refer to a process that arises through connectedness in hybrid, violent media events. It is an active social process that is relational in character. We maintain that rituals of belonging in hybrid, violent media events are produced through communication that occurs in the digital media environment and through interactions between human and non-human actors. It is important to acknowledge that belonging as connectivity also implies the exclusion of those who are left out and perceived as not belonging at the centre of the event in question (see, e.g., Halse, 2018; Yval-Davis, 2011). In this article, we define rituals of belonging as patterned and repetitive media-related practices and performative media enactments (Sumiala, 2013) in which "solidarities are summoned and moral ideas of the 'social good' are unleashed and exert agency in the public life of societies" (Cottle, 2006: 411).

We consider hybridity to be a kind of ontology of contemporary media events. For us, hybridity is a theoretical disposition that enables us to develop a nuanced understanding of the intensified sociality and related ambivalent dynamics of rituals of belonging in contemporary media events triggered by mediatised violence (Sumiala et al., 2018). Analysing the hybridity of contemporary media events is inherently complicated, as the idea of hybridity implies the existence of pure baseline forms before they become blended (Chadwick, 2013; Sumiala et al., 2018). In light of these challenges, one way of approaching the hybridity of contemporary media events is to see them, as Marwan Kraidy (2005: 13) does, as "contrapuntal" and "relational". Furthermore, in line with the "critical turn" in the theorisation of media events and Andrew Chadwick's (2013) work on hybrid media systems, we broaden our empirical object of analysis to include not only mainstream broadcast media-orchestrated events, but also social media and other digital platforms. We highlight the role of diverse actors and platforms and their connections in making and shaping belongings in violent media events in today's media environment as ambivalent cultural and social constructions (see also Couldry et al., 2010; Sumiala et al., 2018; Valaskivi et al., 2019).

Furthermore, we regard ambivalence in a hybrid, violent media event as a multilayered phenomenon. This condition of uncertainty shapes both the processes of belonging activated in hybrid, violent media events and the ritual outcomes that

transform the sense of belonging established during such events into a random exercise (see also Lindgren, 2020). To emphasise the ambivalence of belonging in hybrid, violent media events is not to claim that such events have no established patterns of action or recognisable working logics, but quite the contrary. However, the sense of belonging and non-belonging generated in a hybrid, violent media event can be unexpected (or not) and can activate solidarities and animosities between imagined identity positions (e.g., between Muslims and Western, or Christian, culture) that may be fluid or fixed, depending on the countless dimensions at play in the event.

To empirically analyse the ambivalent rituals of belonging in present-day hybrid, violent media events, we have elsewhere developed the five A's model, comprising actors, affordances, attention, affect, and acceleration (Sumiala et al., 2018). Exploring our data from the perspective of the first two A's – actors and affordances – allows us to analyse the environment of the hybrid, violent media event and thus to begin to understand the networks and conditions within which a hybrid, violent media event takes place. Attending to the third element, attention, helps to illuminate the kinetic energy of a hybrid, violent media event. Attention sets the process of circulatory meaning-making in motion. Without attention, there is no media event, and when collective attention shifts to something else, the peak of a hybrid, violent media event has passed. Analysing the circulation of affect reveals how attention is directed, managed, and accumulated in media events. The fifth A, acceleration, can be said to take place due to the workings of the other elements.

In this article, we extend the five A's model to include three auxiliary elements of hybrid, violent media events: assemblage, amplification, and accumulation. We discuss these primary and auxiliary elements using as a case study a massacre that took place in Christchurch, New Zealand, to illustrate the complex dynamics embedded in the ritual constructions of belonging in such events. Finally, we conclude by reflecting on the ambivalences of these dynamics and the social consequences of those ambivalences.

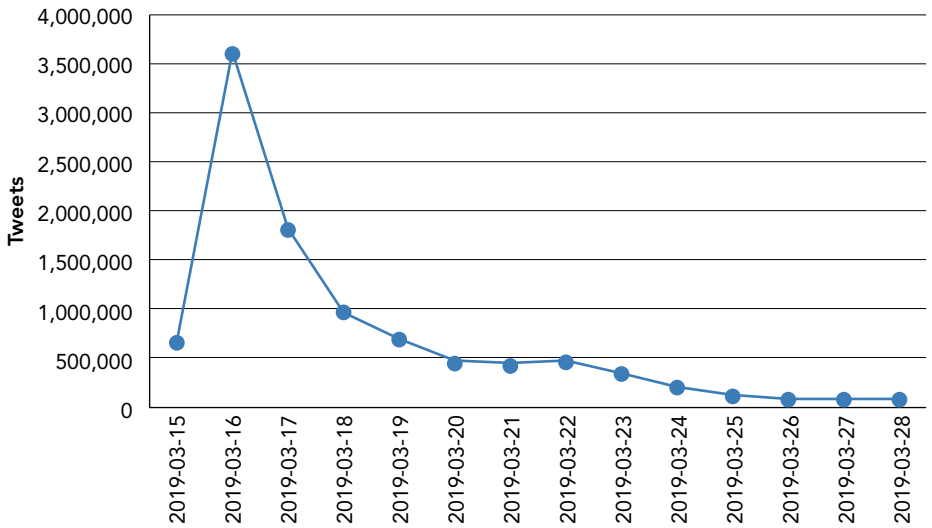
Elaborating on the five A's model: The case of the Christchurch attacks

On 15 March 2019, a far-right white Australian man named Brenton Tarrant[1] attacked two mosques during the Friday prayers in the city of Christchurch, New Zealand. Fifty-one Muslims died in these deadly attacks, and almost as many were injured. Police took the attacker into custody, and he pleaded guilty to all charges in March 2020. New Zealand's prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, described the massacre as one of New Zealand's darkest days and designated it an act of terror. Although the attacks took place in a certain city and country and in a particular cultural, historical, and political environment, an empirical analysis of the international media data on the massacre demonstrates that it became a *media*

event that gained wide translocal attention, as the meanings and interpretations attributed to it crossed local and national borders (Valaskivi et al., 2019) and spread across media platforms.

Our empirical data on the Christchurch mosque attacks was collected using digital media ethnography (Airoldi, 2018; Caliandro, 2018; Sumiala & Tikka, 2020), complemented by computational data collection and analysis methods (see Harju & Huhtamäki, 2021), as part of a large research project[2] to develop a methodology for studying global media events of terrorist violence. To illustrate our conceptual analysis in this article, we focus on the immediate aftermath of the event and the qualitative material collected in the two-week period starting on 15 May 2019, approximately five hours after the perpetrator entered the Al-Noor Mosque, and ending on 29 May 2019, when the national memorial service for those killed in the attacks was held. The computational data collected for the current project as well as previous research (e.g., Valaskivi et al., 2019) indicate that two weeks is the usual temporal range of attention for a violent attack (see Figure 1). The qualitative material used in this article was collected by observing, following, and tracking the digital traces of the event across social media platforms and news media sites. The material was analysed through close reading.

Figure 1 Daily frequency of tweets about the Christchurch mosque attack



Comments: The timeline of the first two weeks after the attack (New Zealand time) shows the quick acceleration and equally sudden decline of daily Twitter activity in response to the Christchurch mosque attack.

Source: Data and analysis by Jukka Huhtamäki (The HYTE research consortium)

In what follows, we first describe the five elements of hybrid, violent media events in relation to the empirical case. In our empirical analysis, we pay special attention to the livestreamed video produced and disseminated by the perpetrator and explain the workings of the 5A's in relation to this incident from different perspec-

tives. While doing so, we extend the theory of the five A's, adding three auxiliary elements: assemblage, amplification, and accumulation, of which assemblage is tied with actors and affordances; amplification with attention; and accumulation with affect. We then specify the features of the five primary and three auxiliary elements that are particularly prominent in hybrid, violent media events and their rituals of belonging. It is important to acknowledge that the five main and three auxiliary elements described here to theorise hybrid, violent media events do not exist solely within the framework of the event, but are latently present in the communication flows of the hybrid media environment itself. However, we argue that these elements are intensified and accentuated in specific ways during today's hybrid, violent media events and consequently shape the struggles over meaning and ritual construction of belonging and exclusion in the aftermath of these deadly incidents.

Actors

As discussed above, the theory of hybrid, violent media events starts with the simple premise that it is impossible to think about such events and related ritual constructions of belonging without emphasising the multiple actors who create and shape them (Sumiala et al., 2018). Moreover, to recognise the multiplicity of actors and their contributions to creating and orchestrating today's hybrid, violent media events, the idea of an actor as belonging solely to a human order needs reconsideration. Inspired by Bruno Latour (2005), we include non-human constellations in our analysis of agency in hybrid, violent media events. Following Latour (2005: 71), we consider that "anything that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference, is an actor". In hybrid, violent media events, this includes not only human actors but also non-human agents, ranging from technologies, such as algorithms of digital platforms, to elements of institutional practices, such as the production routines of news on terrorism (see Uusitalo & Valaskivi, 2020). The formation of rituals of belonging through interactions that cut across platforms and geographical locations, and the involvement of a multiplicity of actors – both human and non-human – means that hybrid, violent media events are highly complex phenomena. They involve manifold actors with diverse functioning logics and conflicting motivations, intentions, and desired outcomes resulting in various social implications.

The multiplicity of media forms that participated in generating the hybrid, violent media event of the Christchurch attacks is an instructive example: In addition to professional news outlets (such as CNN, BBC, and Aljazeera English) and corporate algorithmic social media platforms (such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter), image boards and other fringe social media outlets, including 8chan and 4chan, played significant roles in the development of this violent media event as a hybrid phenomenon and in the related ritual constructions of belonging.

In terms of human actors in the context of Christchurch attacks, two individuals came to the fore. The first was the perpetrator, Brenton Tarrant, who triggered

the event, and the second was Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, who responded publicly to the attacks. Tarrant planned the attacks to invite public attention and aimed to spread information about the event across the digital media environment (Munn, 2019). Before committing the attack, he uploaded his "manifesto" on several file-sharing sites and emailed it to Ardern, the opposition leader, the speaker of parliament, and over 70 media outlets.

Tarrant also gave indications about his plan on 8chan and Twitter, as well as Facebook, on which he then livestreamed the massacre. In line with his plan, his first-person shooter broadcast of the attack and the manifesto were disseminated almost immediately via diverse media platforms, underlining, in a macabre manner, the perpetrator's intentions and agency in the attacks (Macklin, 2019). As a counteraction, Ardern, the leading political decision-maker in her country, took an active role in communicating and performing rituals of belonging in which the Muslim victims of the tragedy were afforded a central role. On the day of the attacks, she participated in a press conference, issued a statement on Twitter, and gave a public speech in which she claimed ownership of the national political publicity (Manhire, 2019). As part of her communication strategy, Ardern exercised clarity, expressing emotion and using symbols to address her fellow citizens and international audiences. She also used the politics of naming – or, more precisely, the politics of not naming – by refusing to mention the perpetrator's name (Wahlquist, 2019) and focusing on the Muslim victims instead. The aim of this communication strategy was to exclude the perpetrator from the national community and render him nameless.

The contesting strategies of communication of the perpetrator and Ardern strengthened two opposing senses of belonging. The perpetrator invited media users to participate in circulating the violent material he produced and, thus, to support his white-supremacist agenda, while Ardern explicitly excluded the perpetrator from the national collective, emphasising the victims and their inclusion in the narrative of solidarity and togetherness (see Valaskivi & Sumiala, 2022). The contrast between the actors and related rituals of belonging was sharp, and their mutual existence in the hybrid, violent media event made belonging a highly ambivalent and contested matter.

Affordances

Hybrid, violent media events are both made possible and conditioned by the digital communication infrastructure. The concept of affordances, as an element of the theorisation of hybrid, violent media events and related ritual belongings, provides a theoretical connection between media events (created by various human and non-human actors) as contexts for social formation and belonging, and the technological infrastructure available for communicating such belongings and bringing them into social existence in a particular manner. In other words, the ways of implementing and adopting technology for social uses constitute a

field of possibilities in hybrid, violent media events. At the same time, however, these possibilities are constrained by the very properties of the technology and by established social practices. The concept of affordances, thus, enables us to look beyond the division between actor and structure (Faraj & Azad, 2012) when theorising rituals of belonging in hybrid, violent media events.

It is important to acknowledge that different users might employ these affordances differently and in transgressive ways. For example, in the case of the Christchurch attacks, the possibility of livestreaming afforded by Facebook was used differently by Tarrant, whose motive was that of a terrorist, and the media user, who used the same technological properties to stream a mourning video of a Haka ritual (a ceremonial Māori dance) to pay their respects to the victims of the attack and demonstrate their belonging to a national unity.

A detailed examination of the element of affordances shows that the livestreaming of the massacre by the perpetrator had a significant impact on shaping and creating the event (see also Mortensen, 2021). Judging by his public actions, we can say that Tarrant utilised the affordances offered by digital media to livestream his crime. He disseminated his messages of misanthropy, Islamophobia, and racism to create a sense of togetherness and belonging around these ideas through mediatised violence. However, the affordances of digital media not only served the social and political purposes of the killer, but also facilitated the formation of a mourning community around the material provided in the video. The video shows Tarrant's view as he walked into Al-Noor Mosque, where he was greeted at the door with the welcoming words "Hello, brother". These were the last words of the first victim of the massacre, Haji Douad Nabi, recorded on the video. They were appropriated by a social media user, and the greeting quickly became the hashtag #hellobrother. This hashtag circulated within the hybrid media environment, where it became a symbol of solidarity with the Muslim community violated in the attacks (Harju & Huhtamäki, 2021). We consider this one example of how the technological affordance of a hashtag can be adopted during a hybrid, violent media event to enable people to express their grief for the deceased and show their support for the community, thereby establishing a sense of belonging through such ritual mourning practices (Sumiala, 2021).

Actors, affordances, and assemblages

As noted above, in our initial formulation of the five A's, actors and affordances were seen as tools to analyse the environment or networks and conditions where the hybrid, violent media event and related rituals of belonging take place. Here, we propose adding the first auxiliary element, assemblage, to deepen our understanding of this environment and its consequences for the construction of ambivalent rituals of belonging in hybrid, violent media events.

In an assemblage, two or more actors come together to interact or form a system. A part of an assemblage can belong to several assemblages and have dif-

ferent roles in each. An actor can also be part of several assemblages at the same time (DeLanda, 2006; Deleuze & Guattari, 1980). Action takes place in the context of affordances that provide conditions where certain conducts, actions, and reactions become plausible and others are rendered unlikely or even impossible (DeLanda, 2006; Latour, 2005). A hybrid, violent media event brings together media institutions, social practices, genres, and modes of communication, as well as technological applications and their complex repertoires of action, to form different assemblages depending on the intricate webs of actors, affordances, and their interactions.

It is the particular assemblages of human action and non-human objects and elements in interaction that shape the hybrid, violent media event, giving it its form. This form also varies slightly depending on the angle from which it is seen and the platforms, locations, and cultural settings included in the research setting.

The ambivalence of the rituals of belonging that form part of hybrid, violent media events is accentuated by the countless ways in which the actors and affordances can assemble in such events. At the same time, the assemblage of hybrid, violent media events plays out in the commodified communication environment, which influences how, where, and for whom the elements of hybrid, violent media events can constitute rituals of belonging and with what consequences. The tool reversibility (Couldry & Hepp, 2016) of the digital media environment – where human actors use the technologies while the technologies also "use" their users by collecting data on their actions and prioritising "popular" content – significantly impacts the tone and social consequences of hybrid, violent media events and the possible sets of belonging available.

For instance, the most vocal criticism of Facebook in the aftermath of the Christchurch attacks was directed at the affordance of "indifference", that is, the platform's claim to be "neutral", with no interest in what its users produce and disseminate. Ardern referred to this principle when she stated in her speech to the New Zealand Parliament that Facebook was "not just the postman". Since then, with whistleblower Francis Haugen's leak, it has become apparent that despite its claims of neutrality, Facebook has for years prioritised transgressive and provocative content in order to incite more reactions from users and thus earn profit for the company in terms of both revenue and data (The Wall Street Journal, 2021). Thus, the discussion on Facebook's role was both significant in the assemblage of the Christchurch attack media event and part of the ongoing global struggle over the organisation principles of media infrastructures and their significance in the rituals of belonging (solidarity for the victims) and exclusion (the perpetrator, hate towards the victims).

Attention and amplification

The third original element of hybrid, violent media events, attention, is, in our view, a prerequisite for a media event to take place. For an event to be an event, it must

draw the attention not only of participants but also of a wider public and generate a (constructed) sense that "the whole world is watching" (Dayan & Katz, 1992). Here, we discuss attention along with the second auxiliary element, amplification.

We argue that hybrid, violent media events are associated with attention in particular ways. During these events, media outlets and social media platforms amplify related content and messages. At the same time, however, attention is dispersed and ambivalent in both temporal and spatial terms. Amplification, then, can be considered a process that is aimed at and often results in the expansion of attention.

Furthermore, we argue that amplification is often consciously performed, not only through marketing and promotion but also via other means, such as trolling, lying, or spreading propaganda (see, e.g., Lindgren, 2020; Phillips & Milner, 2017). At the same time, amplification to draw attention during hybrid, violent media events may be considered unintentional insofar as it is a consequence of the intertwined processes of social media and news journalism, which naturally result in increased circulation of content related to a violent attack.

Prominent theories of the attention economy (Davenport & Beck, 2001) or the marketplace of attention (Webster, 2014) have emphasised the fact that the business logic of the digital media environment is based on attention as a scarce resource that is measured by the reactions of users. Reactions produce data and revenue for social media platforms – and also increasingly for news media platforms. The algorithms used by social media platforms are aimed at maximising user reactions, thereby creating a feedback loop that further amplifies attention (see, e.g., Aral, 2020).

Thus, it can be argued that the attention economy also has a significant impact on rituals of belonging, how they are produced during hybrid, violent media events, and the consequences of these social processes. In this context, it must be considered that attention is not just essential to the economic logic of our contemporary media environment but is, first and foremost, constitutive of our social reality (Citton, 2017). While attention is necessary for an occurrence to become an event, hybrid, violent media events can also be regarded for focusing attention. In other words, they are highly influential in constructing rituals of belonging through the circulation of content and the repetitive practices typical of the intensified media-immersed participation that immediately follows a violent attack.

Regarding attention in the case of Christchurch, we argue that the sociotechnical affordances of the digital media environment connected to platform-specific cultural phenomena were integral to the attacks and served the perpetrator's desire for attention. An empirical detail helps to illustrate our argument here: Prior to walking from his car to the Al-Noor Mosque, Tarrant advised viewers of his livestream, "Remember lads, subscribe to PewDiePie". This is a reference to online gaming culture and to Felix Kjellberg, a popular online personality who was competing at the time of the attacks for the title of the most subscribed-to YouTube channel. By mentioning PewDiePie in his livestream, Tarrant forced

YouTuber Kjellberg, who had a massive following on YouTube and Twitter, to take a public stance on the attacks. On the same day, Kjellberg tweeted, "Just heard news of the devastating reports from New Zealand Christchurch. I feel absolutely sickened having my name uttered by this person. My heart and thoughts go out to the victims, families and everyone affected by this tragedy". This message attracted the attention of other popular YouTubers who tweeted their support for Kjellberg. On that Friday afternoon, PewDiePie became a trending topic on Twitter (Perez, 2019). This demonstrates how Tarrant strategically targeted an online celebrity and used PewDiePie's fame to direct attention to his own acts of hatred.

We can consider this an example of a terrorist seeking to manipulate the media for attention and his exploitation of the social relationship and sense of community that exists between Kjellberg and his virtual followers. Historically, this type of manipulation has typically been documented regarding the relationship between terrorism and journalism. In fact, journalist organisations and newsrooms have developed practices to identify and manage such manipulation attempts (see, e.g., Uusitalo & Valaskivi, 2020; Uusitalo et al., 2021). However, in contemporary hybrid, violent media events, the manufacturing of these types of apparently random and irrelevant connections between an act of violence and an extremely popular phenomenon has become increasingly common (Vainikka, 2020). This type of attention-seeking tactic resonates with the image-board culture of 4chan and 8chan, where trolling, "shitposting", and memefying current events in various – usually transgressive – ways are means of amassing social capital and prestige within the community (see, e.g., Zelenkauskaite et al., 2021). Such attention-seeking tactics can be considered examples of ambivalent ritual practices at play in hybrid, violent media events, as the attention attracted by acts of violence can be appropriated by various actors. For instance, hashtags associated with an event are often "hijacked" for the purpose of gaining commercial, political, or cultural capital (Evans, 2018) and can result in a polarised understanding of belonging (Sumiala et al., 2018).

Affect and accumulation

To elaborate even further on the theory of hybrid, violent media events and related rituals of belonging, we need to examine in more detail *how* attention is assembled in such media events and what type of messages, actors, and platforms are most likely to result in such assemblages. We work from the premise that in a hybrid, violent media event, certain content, actors, and modes of communication *accumulate* more attention than others. The kind of content that is particularly likely to attract attention is content that incites affect in users. Affective content both increases the amount of activity on platforms and generates collective feelings related to the event. For instance, a previous study that focused on the image board 4chan demonstrated how the terror attacks on a Pittsburgh synagogue and the Christchurch mosques visibly increased the circulation of conspiracy narratives

and hate speech associated with the two media events (Zelenkauskaite et al., 2021). The affective hate speech was used to support and strengthen the sense of belonging among the board users in relation to imagined enemies in these spaces of religious practice. That said, we need to analyse in more detail the relationship between our third auxiliary element, accumulation (of attention), and the fourth A, affect.

The work of Sara Ahmed (2004) is particularly insightful in this context. Ahmed views affect and emotions as social and cultural practices rather than individual psychological states. According to her, affects are not properties of signs or commodities; instead, they are produced during the (mediated) circulation of signs or commodities. Affects are also "sticky" insofar as certain affects stick to certain signs or bodies. Ahmed's illuminating example is the persistent metonymic connections between fear, hate, and the Muslim body (Sumiala et al., 2018). Affect, then, can be seen as a means of accumulating attention and amplifying the role of certain actors associated with particular meanings. Ahmed's discussion of hate as an affective economy is particularly relevant to our analysis of hybrid, violent media events, as she points out that "emotions do not positively inhabit anybody or anything, meaning that 'the subject' is simply one nodal point in the economy, rather than its origin and destination" (Ahmed, 2004: 46). In the circulation of hate, sticky affective expressions and metonymic connections are particularly potent. In a commodified communication environment, in particular, these expressions tend to be amplified through the circulatory meaning-making processes that follow a violent attack. What is more, the circulation and the accumulation of attention to sticky affects (and the drawing of attention away from other matters) gathers speed in hybrid, violent media events, spreading both geographically and across a multiplicity of digital media channels and platforms. This circulatory amplification of particular affects connected to certain bodies, actors, and meanings takes repetitive, ritual forms that profoundly impact how belonging and non-belonging are constructed in contemporary violent media events (Sumiala et al., 2018).

The accumulation of attention towards affective content in the livestreaming of the killing by the terrorist in Christchurch exemplifies our argument on the meaning and significance of affect in hybrid, violent media events. The livestream of the attack served as a magnet for attention in the hybrid media environment, resulting in a broad array of emotional reactions, ranging from expressions of horror, fear, and disgust to celebration of violence and simple curiosity about the spectacle. According to Facebook, the original video was seen live by fewer than 200 users and was viewed approximately 4,000 times in total before being removed from Facebook (Porter, 2019). However, the atrocious visuality of the video later engaged the attention of countless social media users, whose emotional responses and motivations were diverse. News media also published clips of the video and wide discussions of the livestreaming. The video was downloaded and copied by many social media users, who rapidly uploaded various versions of it on a wide range of platforms. The pace with which the copies were added was too

fast for the automated moderation systems of social media companies. Although Facebook Newsroom (2019) stated on Twitter that the company removed 1.5 million copies of the video in the first 24 hours after the attacks, and YouTube tweeted that it "removed tens of thousands of videos and terminated hundreds of accounts created to promote or glorify the shooter" (YouTubeInsider, 2019), the video continued to surface in response to searches conducted after the attacks. This was due not only to the speed of the new uploads but also to the creativity of the social media users whose aim was to disseminate the video of the massacre. The automated moderation systems of social media companies are generally effective in spotting single copies of a certain video but cannot cope with hundreds, if not thousands, of videos altered in order to evade detection. We argue that the extraordinary speed with which the video was circulated was related to the affective stickiness of the hateful material, which was particularly suited to the social media affordances. This resulted in an accumulation of attention to the video and created highly ambivalent and emotionally laden expressions of belonging related to the violent event and its perpetrator.

Acceleration

The previously discussed elements of the hybrid, violent media event surrounding the Christchurch attacks indicate that speed is a key factor to consider when theorising such events. The element of speed relates to both the temporal acceleration and spatial dispersion of hybrid, violent media events, where messages, photographs, news, videos, and memes disseminate immediately from actors, platforms, and devices to others, crossing geographical and cultural borders at increasing speed. To draw on Urry (2007), in hybrid, violent media events, there is no stasis, but instead dynamic and often unstable processes of movement and transformation that we can call acceleration (Hassan, 2009; Rosa, 2003). Acceleration is also key to the creation and maintenance of current media events and associated rituals of belonging. The social norms of the digital media environment require people to connect faster, share quicker, and participate ceaselessly (see also van Dijck, 2013). These requirements of liveness, immediacy, and constant availability through digital media platforms also affect how newsrooms report acts of terrorist violence (Uusitalo & Valaskivi, 2020). In addition, such acceleration shapes how rituals of belonging are created and experienced in hybrid, violent media events. They become fast-paced, unstable, and consequently, ambivalent (see also Sumiala, 2021). The accelerated temporal movement of information and its spatial dispersion in hybrid, violent media events shape violent conflicts in profound ways, affecting their internal and external formations and their consequences and aftermaths (see, e.g., Cottle, 2014; Eskjær et al., 2015). In a digital world, the consequences of acceleration are felt at all levels, from the global to the individual.

Issues of speed, acceleration, and liveness were instrumental in turning the Christchurch attacks into a hybrid, violent media event. While we have already

discussed the role of the livestreamed video, there is still another viewpoint to explore. Some of those who saw the video assumed the role of online detective and immediately set about verifying the video's authenticity by looking for digital evidence. For example, immediately after the attacks, one user posted a collection of images on Twitter that included a screenshot from the perpetrator's video in front of the Al-Noor Mosque and an image captured from Google Street View showing the entrance to the very same mosque. The user also published screenshots from the shooter's Twitter account showing the same gun that he had in the video. In posting these pairs of images, the user sought to verify the location of the massacre and the digital personality of the attacker. By aggregating diverse traces of digital data, online detectives can trace perpetrators and shed light on their actions. Although the amateur digital forensics were accurate in this case, this practice has also had unwanted consequences during hybrid, violent media events. The Boston Marathon bombing in 2013 is a case in point here. In this hybrid, violent event the accelerated public crowdsourcing of images in search of evidence concerning the perpetrators resulted in the publication of photographs of and public blaming of innocent people (see Allan, 2014; Mortensen, 2015). What follows, this type of accelerated interpretation and meaning-making also contributes to the ambivalence of hybrid, violent media events and often heavily impacts the direction, salience, and social consequences of a violent media event as a site of ritual social formation.

Conclusions: Ambivalence in hybrid, violent media events

In this article, we have attempted to demonstrate that hybrid, violent media events in the contemporary digital media environment can be conceptually and empirically analysed by investigating interactions and connections between five elements (actors, affordances, attention, affect, and acceleration) and three auxiliary aspects (assemblage, amplification, and accumulation). It is the dynamics between these elements and aspects that construct the rituals of belonging that pertain to hybrid, violent media events and shape their social, cultural, and political outcomes.

In the last part of this article, we reflect rituals of belonging in hybrid, violent media events and take into account the contemporary conditions of our digital media environment as driven by deeply commodified communication. At the core of media event theory is the idea of heightened sociality intensified in a special time-bound moment in which solidarities, belongings, non-belongings, and exclusions are established and maintained. Taking Christchurch as a case study, we have explored the different elements, interactions, and connections that can emerge in hybrid, violent media events and argued that we must look beyond the binary of the cohesive and disruptive functions of media events as explained in the introduction of this article.

In this context, we place special emphasis on the *ambivalence* of hybrid, violent media events and critically discuss how uncertainties and instabilities shape rituals

of belonging and consequences for social, cultural, and public life (see, e.g., Cottle, 2006). While the ambiguity and ambivalent nature of the internet and social media is well acknowledged in academic literature (see, e.g., Lindgren, 2020; Phillips & Millner, 2017), the ambivalence of hybrid, violent media events is particularly critical, because it makes the very event and the rituals of belonging embedded within it somewhat arbitrary and unstable. That said, we postulate that ambivalence in rituals of belonging is heightened by the technological properties of our contemporary media environment as profoundly driven by commodified communication.

This said, we conclude that a commodified communication (Dean, 2009) environment *incites* ambivalence in rituals of belonging associated with hybrid, violent media events because the environment posits itself as indifferent to the social consequences of the commodification of users' attention. If journalistic practices at their best function as checks and balances for abuses of power and exercise affective discipline aimed at containing the spread of hate and indignation as stimuli for a sense of belonging (Valaskivi et al., 2019; Uusitalo & Valaskivi, 2020), the market logic of the commodified communication environment is aimed at inciting all kinds of affects to create revenue. Communicative capitalism feeds on fear, hate, and resentment and fuels conflict, as these are most effective in inciting reactions (Knuutila, 2019; The Wall Street Journal, 2021). Although affective discipline in social media is practised by various actors and users (see Rantasila, 2020), these efforts are hampered by the ambivalence of the environment and its affordances, which provoke affects and reactions and hide the motivations, intentions, and often also the identities, of actors. This is a communicative condition, which increases the likelihood of biased and one-dimensional interpretations and opens up spaces for the spread of misinformation and disinformation, all of which tend to turn hybrid, violent media events into highly ambivalent ritual constructions of belonging.

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Notes

1. After careful ethical consideration, we have reached a conclusion to use the name of the Christchurch perpetrator in some contexts, while leaving him unnamed in others (e.g., Valaskivi & Sumiala, 2022). The justification of this decision is based on the nature of the argument of the article. To fully explain the dynamics of hybrid, violent media events and related politics of belonging, one must recognise the infamous influence of the perpetrator in manipulating such event. Undermining the perpetrator's influence as an actor does not serve our argument here.
2. Hybrid Terrorizing. Developing a New Model for The Study of Hybrid Media Events of Terrorist Violence (HYTE). See Acknowledgements for details.

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