

# Communicating a Mega Sporting Event in a Social Network Environment

Charmaine du Plessis

**Abstract**—Arguments on a popular microblogging site were analysed by means of a methodological approach to business rhetoric focusing on the logos communication technique. The focus of the analysis was the 100 day countdown to the 2011 Rugby World Cup as advanced by the organisers. Big sporting events provide an attractive medium for sport event marketers in that they have become important strategic communication tools directed at sport consumers. Sport event marketing is understood in the sense of using a microblogging site as a communication tool whose purpose it is to disseminate a company's marketing messages by involving the target audience in experiential activities. Sport creates a universal language in that it excites and increases the spread of information by word of mouth and other means. The findings highlight the limitations of a microblogging site in terms of marketing messages which can assist in better practices. This study can also serve as a heuristic tool for other researchers analysing sports marketing messages in social network environments.

**Keywords**—communication technique, microblogging, rhetoric, social networking, sport event marketing

## I. INTRODUCTION

**S**PORT is defined as “activities, experiences or business enterprises that centre on athletics, health and wellness, recreation and leisure time opportunities” [1]. Sport has a significant influence on the general public in that it creates a bond with consumers. Consumers can be active, passive, indirect, individual or event context-related participants or viewers [2].

Since sport creates a common language, entuses and adds to the spread of information by means of word of mouth and other forms of viral marketing, it has become a very attractive medium for marketers. Sports marketing has become a strategic communication tool directed at sport consumers [3]. Mega sport events are now also part of government strategies to provide social benefits to communities, and so they play an important role in branding and marketing strategies [2].

Sports marketing can have a powerful impact on the mass public. Mega sport events such as the Rugby World Cup also target the international tourism market. They provide economic benefits, media coverage and attract tourists to the host country based on its size and scope; at the same time they benefit the organisers. They also have the potential to build communities, establish unity and shape cultural and national identities [2]. Sport marketers also use various marketing communication methods, including social network services such as Facebook and Twitter as well as digital signage [3].

This paper explores the tweets on the social media platform Twitter, during the promotion of the 2011 Rugby World Cup sporting event. All tweets reflecting the 100 day countdown to

the event from 1 June to 1 September 2011 were included in the study. The tweets by the Twitter handle @RugbyWorldCup were evaluated to establish how these tweets promoted the sporting event and in particular whether any logos communication techniques could be found in the tweets. The context of this study is international event sports marketing which extends beyond a single domestic market.

The rhetorical framework for analysing the tweets was anchored in Hoffman and Ford's [32] methodological approach focusing on the logos communication technique. The logos communication technique was chosen because it could be suitable for the Twitter platform in that marketers had to gain the target audience's attention through sensible reasoning using only a condensed space. In this space, the events and activities related to the Rugby World Cup had to be shared with a wide target audience. By analysing the tweets rhetorically, a better practice for marketing messages on a social network environment could be advanced.

## II. SPORTS MARKETING

Sports marketing is part of the field of marketing and therefore has the same function and follows the same processes. Generally sports marketing can also be related to the new definition of marketing, as released by the American Marketing Association [4], namely:

*"Marketing is an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders."*

The marketing aspect of sport focuses on the functions involved in the transfer of goods and services from the producer to the consumer [1]. However, sports marketing is different because of the unique characteristics of sport as a product or service as well as the unusual marketing environment in which sport marketers need to operate. The concept “sports marketing” first emerged in 1978 in *Advertising Age*, a journal that covers news on advertising. In sports marketing the emphasis is placed instead on the extension of the sport product rather than on the sport product itself, for instance the Rugby World Cup. Sport experiences are promoted rather than the product. A large industry has developed around the World Cup, be it soccer, rugby or cricket. Since sport has such a universal impact and appeal, it is associated with relaxation and is hence experiential in nature [3].

Sports marketing actions generally attempt to generate revenue, promote through marketing communication and build communities and relationships [2].

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Another perspective of sports marketing is that offered by Schwarz and Hunter [1]. Schwarz and Hunter [1] base their definition of sports marketing on that of sports management, namely “the collection of skills related to the planning, organizing, directing, controlling, budgeting, leading and evaluation of an organization or department whose primary product or service is related to sport and its related functions”, because it is more related to the business world.

#### *A. Sport Event Marketing as a Communication Tool*

This paper adopts the same event marketing approach as Drengner, Gaus and Jahn [5]. The concept “sport event marketing” is understood exclusively in the sense of a communication tool (in this case Twitter) whose purpose it is to disseminate a company’s marketing messages by involving the target groups in experiential activities. This means that the company’s members are themselves active during a so-called marketing event, by doing sports or being creative, thus offering the opportunity for social interaction among the participants as well as between participants and the company. Active interpersonal communication about the event and the company or brand responsible may stimulate word-of-mouth communication, which in turn positively influences sales or extends the effects of communication strategies. Chalip, Green and Hill [6] add that sport events have become a vital component of the marketing mix. They attract participants and spectators thus boosting the number of visitors to the host destination during the time that the event takes place. They provide added exposure for the host destination due to advertising and thus have numerous economic benefits.

Dong-Hun [3] rightfully points out that sports marketing should be considered as a complementary tool and should not completely replace traditional marketing methods. It may be limited to delivering a short and simple message to consumers and is only one aspect of a communication strategy.

#### *B. Social Facilitation Theory*

The social facilitation theory is adopted as a theoretical approach. According to this theory, the mere presence (or absence) of spectators will have an effect on human behaviour because of an awareness of the social aspect of the environment [7]. According to Milne, Mark and McDonald [8] social facilitation is the social gratification of being with others who enjoy the same activity. Both spectators and participants are motivated to spend more time with family, friends and business associates. Milne, Mark and McDonald [8] reiterate that fans attempt to associate themselves with a successful team/athlete. Individuals satisfy needs for achievement by identifying with others who achieve and by sharing their success.

Within the context of this study, the enjoyment of counting down the 100 days leading up to the Rugby World Cup is facilitated by the ability to join in the excitement felt by other sporting fans around the world.

### III. USING SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS IN SPORTS MARKETING

Many sports marketers now consider using social media to build their sports marketing brands [3]. Social media are not only a way for companies to interact with consumers but are also a source of virtual networking and communication and of maintaining a good relationship with consumers. The conversations are two-way with immediate feedback. Social media applied strategically for marketing can even make a brand referential resulting in the growth of the brand [9].

According to Evans [10], social media marketing is an application of social media in that it uses natural conversation strategically to benefit the organisation. Social media marketing provides new ways for organisations to interact with their target audience and to encourage customers to spread the message for the brand [11]. Thousands of social media sites are available online [12]. This study concerns the microblogging social media platform, Twitter. Stevens [13] explains that Twitter is a freely and easily accessible microblogging tool on the multiplatform Web 2.0. It can be accessed via the internet, mobile phones, email, smartphones, tablet applications and instant messaging [14]. Users can use it to communicate and stay connected in 140 characters or less through the exchange of quick, frequent answers to one simple question: What are you doing? [15]. Other Web 2.0 microblogging tools include Jaiku, Tumblr, MySay, Hictu and Edmodo. Twitter, however, is one of the more popular microblogging tools [16]-[17].

Word of mouth (WOM) is the process of conveying information from person to person and plays a major role in customer buying decisions. Electronic word of mouth uses an online environment to convey information. One potentially new form of eWOM marketing is microblogging using Web social communication services such as Twitter [18]. Twitter was chosen for this study as it is one of the more popular microblogging tools currently available, has millions of users and provides an excellent opportunity to share short pieces of information about, for instance, the Rugby World Cup with users who have already demonstrated interest in the mega sporting event. In this regard Twitter can be used to share ideas and resources, and to ask and answer questions on the sporting event [19]. All of this communication happens instantaneously, so the exchange of information is immediate [20]-[21]. Java, Song, Finin and Teseng [16] refer to a study in which researchers found that the main communication intentions of people participating in Twitter could be categorised as daily chatter, conversations, sharing resources/URLs, and reporting news. Furthermore, theorists also consider sports marketing suitable for delivering short and simple message to consumers, making a microblogging platform appropriate [3]. Because the microblogging site, Twitter, can only accept 140 characters at the most, sports marketers should make the most of this form of communication.

Communication on Twitter is done in a specific manner. Borghagen [22] explains that Twitter has a particular sign language that is used, for instance the @ symbol and the hashtag #. Twitter users can refer to a specific user by including a mention anywhere in their tweets, done in the form of @username. Hashtags are used to identify keywords or terms, which can then easily be found through a search. Hashtags are free-form tags or keywords included in tweets, in the form of #keyword. Including a hashtag parallels using a tag in a social bookmarking system and creates a venue for collecting all tweets about a topic. Users can reply to a tweet and also retweet it to their followers, making the spread of the message even vaster [22]-[23].

Due to their widespread adoption by millions of users, Twitter and microblogging in general have become the focus of more academic research from various disciplines. Although the body of knowledge is still small, several studies have been done on describing the occurrence [24]-[25]. Moreover, the use of Twitter in different fields has been investigated, such as in political campaigning [26], as a form of electronic consumer brand word of mouth [18], as an education tool [27], and as a tool for social activism [28]. The function of the @ symbol has been examined [29], and the practice of retweeting has been discussed [30] as a tool to adopt and use at a time of crisis [31]. More recently, the differences among users of different languages have also been investigated [32].

#### IV. RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question is:

Could logical reasoning be used in a popular microblogging social networking site while promoting the Rugby World Cup in 2011 during the 100 day countdown to the event?

#### V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A more methodological approach to rhetoric was used to analyse the messages on Twitter. Rhetoric refers to “the strategic use of symbols to generate meaning” [32]. Hoffman and Ford’s [32] proposed framework for a rhetorical analysis in a business context was adopted and specifically the logos technique was explored. Logos in traditional rhetoric refers to a communication technique to convey a message in a way that is both obvious and believable to the target audience.

Within Hoffman and Ford’s [32] methodological approach, logos can also be achieved by means of inductive and deductive reasoning within a business context. It includes the clarity of the claim, the logic pertaining to its reason and the effectiveness of its supporting evidence [33]. Skerlep [33] explains that Aristotle [35] perceived “rational argumentation” or logos as the most important way of persuading the audience since he perceived persuasion as fundamentally argumentative. It is, however, important to note that persuasive messages contain all three elements of proof (namely ethos, pathos and logos).

Table 1 below explains the methodological approach to rhetoric that was adopted in terms of the logos communication technique:

TABLE I  
FRAMEWORK USED FOR RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

Logos	Element	Description
Inductive reasoning (begins with specific instances accepted by the audience and ends with a more general conclusion that had not been accepted by the audience before they saw or heard the argument)	Reasoning by example	The audience is asked to move from known examples provided by the organisation to an unknown general conclusion: the conclusion can be inferred.
	Reasoning by analogy	Apply the outcomes of a known situation to a new unknown situation.
	Causal reasoning	Establish a relationship between an apparent cause and effect. Move from a specific known cause or effect to an unknown cause or effect.
Deductive reasoning (works from a general accepted idea to a conclusion about a specific instance)	Categorical syllogism	This is a three-part set of statements (claim) that contains a major premise, a minor premise and a conclusion.
	Organisational enthymeme	This is a syllogism where one (or more) of the parts is left unstated. The audience then fills in the missing element based on knowledge that they share with the author. It is an informally stated syllogism with an implied premise.

When doing a rhetorical analysis, it is also important to consider the context of the rhetoric. Bitzner introduced the concept of the *rhetorical situation* in order to determine the goals of persuasion and to understand the circumstances in which rhetoric is created and received [32].

The rhetorical situation was written tweets by the handle @Rugbyworldcup on the microblogging site, Twitter.

Applying Aristotle’s [32] classical triangle of speaker, message and audience, the speaker of the tweets was an employee (or employees) of the Rugby World Cup event who was assigned the task of managing the communication of the sporting event on the microblogging site [35]. The speaker’s purpose was to enthuse the target audience about the forthcoming event, to keep them informed of activities and to promote ticket sales.

##### A. Sample

The 2011 Rugby World Cup was a mega international sporting event organised by Rugby New Zealand. The event took place from 9 September to 23 October 2011 in New Zealand. Tweets by the @rugbyworldcup handle of the official Twitter account of the 2011 Rugby World Cup were analysed. A total of 916 tweets were analysed during the period 1 June to 9 September 2011 reflecting the 100 day

countdown to the Rugby World Cup. Of these 48 were retweets. The 2011 Rugby World Cup official Twitter account had some 67 000 followers by 9 September 2011 and was launched in June 2009. Twitter was but one of the social networking sites used by the Rugby World Cup organisers to promote the event. Other social networking sites included Flickr, YouTube, Facebook and RSS feeds while official smartphone and tablet applications were made available for download.

### *B. Themes Identified*

The software programme Wordsmith 5 was used to identify the main themes of the tweets. The following main themes were identified based on their frequency in the tweets and were examined within their context:

*Matches:* Details of the matches were provided including replays, opening, schedules and highlights.

*Tickets:* Information regarding tickets was provided in terms of their availability, how to pay for them, how to win tickets and where to buy tickets.

*New Zealand:* Information about New Zealand was provided and focused on culture, travel and the New Zealand team.

*Road shows:* Information was provided regarding all road shows depicting different countries leading on to an event.

*Official:* References were made to official websites, tournament hashtags, broadcasters, ticket outlets, welcoming of the different teams to the country, the official welcome ceremony, official statements by the organisers, applications available for download and supporter merchandise.

*Team:* Information was provided regarding teams who were arriving and playing and also the volunteer teams who assisted during the event. Information about the different teams was also shared.

*Country:* Information was shared about the different countries of the teams.

*Great:* References were made to websites, photos, videos, moments, information, stuff, articles, exhibitions, tips, turnout, and things that fans said that were perceived as exciting.

*Days:* Continuous references were made to the number of days left to the opening ceremony and the start of the event.

## VI. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings can be elucidated as follows:

### *A. Inductive Reasoning*

Evidence of inductive reasoning in the form of *reasoning by example* and *by analogy* was found. Through logical inductive

arguing, followers of this account could be moved to conclusions about the 2011 Rugby World Cup by being provided with supporting evidence of claims made and with evidence of similarities with other events [34].

*Reasoning by example:* Several tweets referred to internet links containing specific information about the event or how many tickets were sold up to a moment in time. Followers' comments about how excited they were about the Rugby World Cup were often retweeted. Some tweets also referred followers to printed material about the Rugby World Cup.

Followers were given a paradigm in which to contemplate topics related to the 2011 Rugby World Cup and in doing so could infer their own conclusions. Reasoning by example is considered persuasive in that evidence of the real situation is supplied. Since the evidence is believed, the overall argument is also believed. The example could then be generalised to all topics related to the 2011 Rugby World Cup. The question is, however, whether the links were presented in such a way that the target audience was likely to accept them.

Examples are:

One million tickets now sold for #rwc2011 #ivegotmine  
<http://ow.ly/5xxmF> (6 July 2011).

RT @dewen09: 'Opening ceremony brought tears to my eyes'. Was your tweet included in today's Fan Forum?  
<http://bit.ly/qnJH75> (9 September 2011).

Ticket sales revenue for #rwc2011 now totals NZ\$200m or 75% of the revenue target. Sales open again July 4  
<http://ow.ly/5u4pt> (30 June 2011).

Kiwis, check out today's Sunday Star Times for our special "Countdown to RWC 2011" mag. Or read it online here  
<http://bit.ly/mrX6T2> #RWC2011 (4 June 2011).

Dunedin residents can see the progress of Otago Stadium at a special Open Day tomorrow from 11am-2pm #rwc2011  
<http://ow.ly/5expv> (10 June 2011).

*Reasoning by analogy:* Several tweets comprised reasoning by analogy in that the current event was compared to previous events or incidents. By referring to previous Rugby World Cup events and providing links, followers could conclude that the 2011 Rugby World Cup might also produce such exciting events and footage. This inference was not made based on arguments, but by describing or explaining previous events through the links provided in the tweets. However, for reasoning by analogy to be successful, enough evidence should have been provided in a way that followers would arrive at an appropriate conclusion. Also, the question remains whether the differences among the events outweighed the similarities. The brevity of messages in Twitter could create a possible weakness in terms of comparing information.

Examples are:

Golden Moments: John Kirwan scores a memorable try on the opening day of RWC 1987! #rwc2011 <http://bit.ly/nKJqCX> (9 September 2011).

We love this video. Reliving Samoa's first appearance @RugbyWorldCup <http://bit.ly/kHbdmI> courtesy of @MasterCard Priceless Moments #RWC2011 (4 June 2011).

How good is this #SuperRugby final? A taste of things to come 62 days hopefully! #RWC2011 (9 July 2011).

What a start to #rwc2011! How did this compare to other opening encounters from RWC history? (9 September 2011)

South Africa Rugby fans remember 1995? We do. Look back when South Africa made history at RWC 95 <http://bit.ly/pJmSiK> @rugbyworldcup #rugby (7 July 2011).

### B. Deductive Reasoning

Some examples of deductive reasoning by means of *categorical syllogism* and *organisational enthymeme* were found. Arguments by means of *organisational enthymeme* could bring followers to conclusions which are already contained in the premise (implicitly or explicitly) [34].

*Categorical syllogism*: The major premise of a syllogism makes a general statement that the writer believes to be true. The minor premise presents a specific example of the belief that is stated in the major premise. If the reasoning is sound, the conclusion should follow from the two premises. For instance, based on the major and minor premises contained in the tweets below, followers could conclude that no more tickets were available.

Examples are:

Flood of World Cup ticket sales since Bledisloe win <http://dlvr.it/FRCK1> (9 August 2011).

@ahmadnz July 4 was our final release of tickets so if the tickets that you want are unavailable then there won't be more on sale sorry (21 July 2011).

@ahmadnz The phone app will come out in August, as for tickets it was first come first served when we did the final release on July 4 (21 July 2011).

*Organisational enthymeme*: Arguments by means of *organisational enthymeme* could bring followers to conclusions which were already contained in the premise (implicitly or explicitly) [34]. In an *enthymeme*, the speaker builds an argument with one element removed, leading readers to complete the missing details. The examples below illustrate how the premise could be implied that the opening ceremony was a spectacular event or that the Rugby World Cup would be magnificent.

Examples are:

Bring it on! I'm sooooo excited. New Zealand is the place to be Sept 2011 (10 July 2011).

For the 1st time ever, fans have a voice! Vote for #NZL v TON Man of the Match <http://ow.ly/6pCAV> #RWC2011 (9 September 2011).

A visual display takes fans on a journey through New Zealand, celebrating the "stadium of 4 million" #RWC2011 #openingceremony (9 September 2011).

#allblack great Jonah Lomu arrived in Tonga today for the first time in 15 years on a #rwc2011 visit <http://ow.ly/5CdW7> (12 July 2011).

RT @dewen09: 'Opening ceremony brought tears to my eyes'. Was your tweet included in today's Fan Forum? <http://bit.ly/qnJH75> (9 September 2011).

### VII. CONCLUSION

Although the methodological approach used for this rhetorical analysis could be criticised, it serves as a useful framework for future similar studies in a business context.

The results of the analysis indicate that although Twitter is a platform that can only accommodate 140 characters, it can be used as a platform for logical reasoning but within limits. Especially inductive reasoning can be used in a microblogging environment, since links to text, pictures or other multimedia elements can be posted to support all arguments. A claim can be made by the speaker and then immediately be backed up with evidence in the form of a link. The evidence should, however, be accepted by the followers and presented in a way that it will not be dismissed. Providing reasons is the core of logical argumentation. As followers could also be in touch and reply to tweets, their comments could be used to emphasise arguments even further by retweeting their posts to all their followers. By retweeting the posts of followers, the speaker relied on their testimony to support the position.

Marketers should plan their messages in such a way as to make the most impact on social media networks. It is recommended that future studies also include analysing messages used on other social media platforms. It would also have been interesting to have analysed the tweets after the 100 day countdown to ascertain how the arguments differed, if at all. By continuing to analyse messages on social networking platforms, marketers will be able to make the most in terms of short and snappy marketing messages.

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