

An exploration of digital rhetoric in a social network environment

ABSTRACT

This article explores the use of digital rhetoric in a social network environment with a view to obtaining greater insight into how traditional rhetoric may be applied. In this article, *digital rhetoric* refers to persuasive communication in different electronic formats. The article focuses on an inductive logos communication technique used in a popular microblogging site to promote the 2011 Rugby World Cup event held in New Zealand. Sport readily lends itself to the viral spread of information by means of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) because it generates excitement among sport enthusiasts. Big sporting events thus provide an ideal medium for marketers of sports events to use different marketing communication tools to communicate persuasive messages regarding sport to a large target audience. The findings of the study on which this article is based shed more light on digital rhetoric and can also serve as a heuristic tool for other researchers analysing sports-marketing communication messages in social network environments.

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INTRODUCTION

While digital rhetoric is opening up more opportunities for rhetorical studies, it also faces challenges in that well-known traditions in rhetoric have to be adapted to a digital environment. As much communication is now being done via various electronic formats, Zappen (2005:319) calls for a “comprehensive theory of digital rhetoric” to contribute to rhetorical theory in general. This article thus aims to explore the use of digital rhetoric in a social network environment so as to obtain a better understanding of its potential use. According to Lunsford, Wilson and Eberly (2009:504), digital rhetoric refers to persuasive communication in different formats (for example text, images, non-verbal cues and sound, which could all be blended together).

The context of this study is international sports-event marketing – in this case the 2011 Rugby World Cup in New Zealand. Sport has a significant influence on the general public in that it creates a bond with consumers who may be active, passive, indirect or individual or who may be context-related participants or viewers of an event (Funk, 2009:5). Since sport creates a common language, enthuses and adds to the spread of information by means of eWOM and other forms of viral marketing, it has become a very attractive medium for marketers and has also become a strategic communication tool directed at sport consumers (Dong-Hun, 2010:113).

New media have transformed society in numerous ways with regard not only to consumption but also to how we communicate and participate by using these media (see Levinson, 2013). By using digital rhetoric, while also borrowing from traditional Aristotelian rhetoric, this article explores the use of an inductive *logos* communication technique – reasoning by example – on the microblogging site Twitter as reflected in tweets both during the 100-day countdown to the event in the period between 1 June and 9 September 2011, and also during the event itself between 10 September and 23 October 2011. The tweets by the Twitter handle @rugbyworldcup were analysed to ascertain how reasoning by example was used in a digital environment.

1. INTERNATIONAL SPORTS-EVENTS MARKETING

Sports marketing is part of the field of marketing and therefore has the same function and follows the same processes. The marketing aspect of sport focuses on the functions involved in the transfer of goods and services from the producer to the consumer (Schwarz & Hunter, 2008:14). However, sports marketing is different because of the unique characteristics of sport as a product or service and also because of the unusual marketing environment in which sports marketers operate. In sports marketing, the emphasis falls rather on the extension of the sport product than on the sport product itself, such as, for instance, the 2011 Rugby World Cup. Experiences connected with sport rather than with the product are thus promoted. A large industry has developed around World Cup events, be this the soccer, the rugby or the cricket World Cup events. Since sport has such universal impact and appeal, it is associated with relaxation and is hence experiential in nature (Dong-Hun, 2010:113). Because sport can have a powerful impact on the general public, international sports-events marketers use various marketing communication tools, including – though not limited to – social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter (Dong-Hun, 2010:114).

1.1 International sports-events marketing as a marketing-communication tool

This article adopts the same sports-events marketing approach as do Dregner, Gaus and Jahn (2008), though the context here is an international sports event. The concept of *sport-events marketing* is understood exclusively in the sense of a marketing communication tool (in this case the social network Twitter) whose purpose it is to disseminate a company's marketing-communication messages by involving the target groups in the excitement. This means that the company's members are themselves active during a marketing event by being creative, thus offering the opportunity for social interaction not only among the participants but also between participants and the company. Active interpersonal communication regarding the event and the company or brand responsible may stimulate eWOM communication, which in turn positively influences sales or extends the effects of communication strategies. Chalip, Green and Hill (2003:214) add that sport events have become a vital component of the marketing mix. They attract participants and spectators and boost the numbers of visitors to the host destination during the time that the event takes place. They provide added exposure for the host destination through advertising and they thus also have numerous economic benefits. New media can thus be a valuable tool in the marketing-and-communications mix for sports organisations in that a more personal communication experience is advanced (Masterman, 2009:257).

Dong-Hun (2010:113) rightly points out that sports-events marketing should be considered as a complementary tool and should not altogether replace traditional marketing methods: it may be limited to the delivery of a short and simple message to consumers and is only one aspect of a communication strategy.

Customer engagement was used as a theoretical point of departure for the study on which this article is based. This means that customers generate content and become active participants in the conversation in the social media (Sahi, 2012:254). For this study, sport consumers were engaged in the 2011 Rugby World Cup event by participating in and spreading the sport message on different social media networks (see Goodman, 2012).

2. USING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR INTERNATIONAL SPORTS-EVENTS MARKETING

New media have transformed the way sports marketers reach sport consumers in that they have to compete with numerous entertainment and communication technologies. Sport consumers also consume more media, belong to several social media networks, are more fragmented and moreover expect a more personalised and interactive experience. Since sport consumers are also exposed to an enormous number of marketing messages, conventional marketing strategies are thus becoming less effective to reach them (Smith, 2008:261). As illustrated by Sanderson (2011), especially social media such as Twitter and Facebook have changed the sports industry by impacting on sports-media processes and also on how sport organisations promote their events since sport consumers can be reached globally.

Sports marketers in particular use social media to build their sports-events marketing brands by talking to sport fans (Dong-Hun, 2010). Some theorists refer to this as *marketing 2.0* or *social media marketing* (Borges, 2009:5). This is also in line with the perspective that social media involve more active consumers of content and brand messages and could be used to build both community and relationships (Borges, 2009:5; Golden, 2011:19). As early as 2001, Durand (2001:68) contended that communication about sport would become more imperative because of the introduction of new technologies.

Not only do social media allow both athletes and sport organisations to interact more personally with sport consumers or fans and in this way build relationships because conversations are two-way and provide immediate feedback, but the consumer experience too is enhanced and more insight is gained into consumers' experiences of a sport brand. Social media applied strategically for marketing can even make a brand referential, that is, a brand can benefit from social media links, mentions and interest (MacDonald, Van Duinkerken & Stephens, 2008). This can be achieved through traditional word of mouth (WOM), which is the process of conveying information from person to person, a phenomenon that plays a major role in customers' buying decisions, while eWOM uses an online environment to spread information. One potential new form of eWOM marketing is microblogging, which uses web social communication services such as Twitter (Jansen, Zhang, Sobel & Chowdury, 2009).

When an international sporting event is promoted by means of social media marketing, the natural conversation of sports marketers and fans is used strategically to benefit the organisation by, for example, consumers spreading the sport brand message (Charton, 2007; Evans, 2008:13). Though thousands of social media sites are available, this study was only concerned with the microblogging social media platform, Twitter. Twitter was chosen for this study for the following reasons:

- It is one of the more popular microblogging tools currently available.
- It has millions of global users.
- It provides excellent opportunities for sharing snippets of information about events such as the 2011 Rugby World Cup.
- Sport fans had already demonstrated interest in the mega sporting event.

Twitter can thus be used to share ideas and resources, and to ask and answer questions on a sporting event and, ultimately, to build community and relationships (Weaver, 2011). All of this communication happens instantaneously, so that the exchange of information is likewise immediate (Parry, 2008; Young, 2008). Java, Song, Finn and Teseng (2007) 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-events marketing suitable for delivering short and simple messages to consumers, making a microblogging platform appropriate (Dong-Hun, 2010). Because the microblogging site Twitter can only accept 140 characters at the most, sports-events marketers should make the most of this form of communication. Other Web 2.0 microblogging tools include Jaiku, Tumblr, MySay, Hictu and Edmodo, to name but a few (Java et al., 2007; McFedries, 2007).

Because of their widespread adoption by millions of users, Twitter and microblogging in general have become the focus of academic research in various disciplines. Although the body of knowledge is still small, several studies have been done on the Twitter phenomenon (Huberman, Romero & Wu, 2008; Krishnamurthy, Gill & Arlitt, 2008). Moreover, the use of Twitter in different fields has been investigated, such as its use in political campaigning (Cetina, 2009), as a form of electronic consumer-brand word of mouth (Jansen et al., 2009), as an education tool (Riemer & Richter, 2010) and as a tool for social activism (Galer-Unti, 2009). The function of the @ symbol has been examined (Honeycutt & Herring, 2009) and the practice of re-tweeting has been discussed (Boyd, Golder & Lotan, 2010) as a tool to adopt and use in a time of crisis (Hughes & Palen, 2009). More recently, the differences between users of different languages have also been investigated and are gaining more interest among researchers (Hoffman & Ford, 2010).

3. RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question is the following:

How was digital rhetoric used by the @rugbyworldcup Twitter handle in the process of promoting the 2011 Rugby World Cup event?

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A digital rhetorical analysis was conducted, which can be explained as follows:

4.1. Defining rhetoric

The concept *rhetoric* has been defined and redefined over many years, but there is still no universally accepted definition. The understanding of what rhetoric is, has further evolved from the narrower perspective of only being persuasive discourse (as put forward by Aristotle), to a much broader understanding of rhetoric as consisting of various types of discourse (Skerlep, 2001:180).

This article adopts a definition embracing the broader understanding of rhetoric as being “persuasive dimensions in discursive practices” (Jasinski, 2001:xxii). This means that rhetoric is perceived as being interdisciplinary and it can thus be applied in different situations and contexts. Aristotle’s three types of argumentation, namely ethos, pathos and logos are adopted as the underpinning for this analysis because the broader perspective does not exclude these classical types of argumentation (Rorty, 1996).

References to rhetoric in this article also imply positive rhetoric that aims to promote an awareness of the 2011 Rugby World Cup event and, at the same time, to engage stakeholders. This view is similar to the perspectives of Dhir (2006) and Kelly Page and Mapstone (2010).

4.2 Digital rhetoric

Online and social media have introduced new opportunities for rhetorical studies and are still relatively unexplored. Manovich (2001) is however reluctant to refer to rhetoric as being 'digital', which can refer to many types of electronic communication. According to Lunsford et al. (2009:504), *digital rhetoric* refers to persuasive communication in different formats (for example text, images, non-verbal cues and sound, which can all be blended together). Kelly Page and Mapstone (2010:1346) add that digital media also enable users to comment, edit, share and even create digital content on various online platforms, including the social media. Digital media have changed how people communicate and ideas are consequently conveyed in new ways. Zappen (2005:30–33), for example, explains that communication in an online environment is different in terms of interactivity, anonymity, speed and reach, has a more informal style, and is also often redundant and even repetitive. Lunsford et al. (2009:504) therefore suggest that an analysis of digital rhetoric should rather be focused on specific cases of online communication. This idea is also supported by Zappen (2005:323), who refers to digital rhetoric as "discrete components" of rhetorical theory. Because electronic text is different from print text, Warnick (2005:327) further argues in favour of innovative ways of analysing digital rhetoric. According to Warnick (2005:330), when digital rhetoric is analysed, it should also be acknowledged that, owing to the personalisation and customisation of information, the rhetorical appeal is rather to an individual than to the masses. Different users have access to a different display of the same content. Given the interactive nature of online communication, users often also become authors of the digital rhetoric. Because of these differences, adapting traditional rhetoric to a digital environment remains a challenge.

In this study, tweets on a microblogging social networking site were analysed. This can therefore be perceived as an exploratory study to establish how traditional rhetoric might be used on a social media network. Given that Twitter only has a condensed space to communicate, the inductive *logos* rhetorical strategy was examined, in other words, reasoning by example. The study is also in line with the argument advanced by Lunsford et al., namely that specific cases of online communication should rather be analysed.

4.3 The inductive *logos* communication technique

Because of the limitations of the medium analysed (see Section 4.2), the analysis for this study includes only inductive reasoning. The inductive *logos* communication technique encompasses the clarity of the claim, the logic pertaining to its reasoning and the effectiveness of its supporting evidence, and it can be either inductive or deductive. Skerlep (2001:180) explains that Aristotle perceived *rational argumentation* or *logos* as the most important means of persuading the audience, since he perceived persuasion as being fundamentally argumentative. In traditional rhetoric, *logos* refers to a communication technique to convey a message in a way that is both obvious and credible to the target audience. In an organisational context, attention is paid to how arguments are supported so as to be convincing to the recipients (Hoffman & Ford, 2010).

According to Aristotle, rhetorical induction refers to reasoning based on an example in which an inference is made on the strength of knowledge that is transferred from one case to another (Bonet & Sauquet, 2010:122; Huang & Galliers, 2011:221). The audience is asked to move from known examples provided by the organisation to an unknown general conclusion, meaning that the conclusion can be inferred (Hoffman & Ford, 2010). Digital rhetoric also provides for the use of facts and figures as supporting evidence, but these are presented in innovative ways because of the use of technology and can reach a large audience (Zappen, 2005). Warnick (2005:329) points out that, because technology changes so fast, the ways in which digital rhetoric is analysed should continuously be adapted.

It is noted that the three types of argumentation as put forward by Aristotle are all interdependent and that all three will thus most likely be present in persuasive arguments. Although in this article the emphasis falls on the inductive logos persuasive technique, all three appeals may be present (Ross, 2010).

4.4 Sample

The 2011 Rugby World Cup was an international sporting mega-event organised by Rugby New Zealand. It took place in New Zealand between 9 September and 23 October 2011. Tweets by the @rugbyworldcup handle of the official Twitter account of the 2011 Rugby World Cup were included in the sample. A total of 916 tweets were included in the sample for the period between 1 June and 9 September 2011, that is the 100-day countdown period prior to the Rugby World Cup and also the opening ceremony of the event. Of 916 tweets, 48 were re-tweets. A total of 1530 tweets were included in the sample for the period between 10 September and 23 October 2011, that is the sporting event itself. Of this number, 384 were re-tweets.

The 2011 Rugby World Cup official Twitter account was first launched in June 2009 and had approximately 67 000 followers by 9 September 2011, and 113 350 by 23 October 2011. Twitter was one of the social networking sites used by the Rugby World Cup organisers to promote the event in a social media marketing campaign. Other social networking sites used by the Rugby World Cup organisers included Flickr, YouTube and Facebook, while Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feed syndicated online content and official Rugby World Cup smartphone and tablet applications were made available for downloading (Rugby World Cup, 2011).

4.5 Identifying themes

To identify the main themes of the tweets included in the sample, Wordsmith 5, a program by Oxford University Press to study the use of language, was used to facilitate the reading and analysis of a large quantity of text. The 2446 tweets in the sample were collected between 1 June and 23 October 2011, copied from Twitter, stored in electronic text format suitable for analysis in Wordsmith 5 and then used to build a study corpus comprising 55 869 words. A

study corpus is a compilation of pieces of language text in electronic form used for analysis when language is being studied (Baker, 2006:2). Wordsmith 5 was used for this study because it has a powerful feature that allows one not only to compile a word list to identify the most frequently used words in a study corpus (see figures 2 and 4) but also to study the said words in context by using its concordance tool. A concordance presents a selected word (node) in its context by highlighting the word searched for (see Figure 5). The most frequently used content words were identified with a view to categorising the main themes in that such content words give texts their meaning, for example, main verbs, adverbs, nouns and adjectives. Function words, such as auxiliary verbs, modal verbs, pronouns, prepositions, determiners and conjunctions were not considered (see also Fox, 2006:20).

Figure 1 below depicts a screenshot of the statistics of the study corpus compiled during the 100-day countdown to the event.

	Overall	1
N		1
text file	OverallanedforanalysisTweetstoanalysed	
file size	139,882	139,882
tokens (running words) in text	20,647	20,647
tokens used for word list	18,527	18,527
sum of entries		
types (distinct words)	2,624	2,624
type/token ratio (TTR)	14.16	14.16
standardised TTR	32.06	32.06
standardised TTR std.dev.	63.13	63.13
standardised TTR basis	1,000	1,000
mean word length (in characters)	4.98	4.98
word length std.dev.	2.91	2.91
sentences	555	555
mean (in words)	33.38	33.38
std.dev.	38.88	38.88
paragraphs	1	1
mean (in words)	18,527.00	18,527.00

Figure 1: A screenshot of the statistics of the study corpus compiled during the 100-day countdown to the event

Figure 1 above indicates the tokens (running words) as 20 647, with a total of 2624 word types.

Figure 2 below depicts a screenshot of the most frequently used content words in the study corpus compiled during the 100-day countdown to the event.

N	Word	Freq.	%	Texts	%	Lemmas	Set
1	#	2,120	10.27	1	100.00		
2	TICKETS	849	4.11	1	100.00		
3	OFFICIAL	812	3.93	1	100.00		
4	MATCHES	766	3.71	1	100.00		
5	COUNTRY	764	3.70	1	100.00		
6	TEAM	700	3.39	1	100.00		
7	REPLY	700	3.39	1	100.00		
8	RETWEET	700	3.39	1	100.00		

Figure 2: A screenshot of part of the word list generated for the study corpus compiled during the 100-day countdown to the event

Figure 2 above indicates the frequency of content words in the tweets used to identify the main themes, namely *tickets* (849), *official* (812), *matches* (766), *country* (764) and *team* (700).

Using the concord tool, the following main themes were identified in the study corpus compiled during the 100-day countdown to the event:

- *Details of matches* were provided, including replays, the opening, schedules and highlights.
- *Information about tickets* was provided in terms of their availability, how to pay for them, how to win tickets and where to buy tickets.
- *Official depiction included* references to official websites, tournament hashtags, broadcasters, ticket outlets, the welcoming of the different teams to the country, the official welcoming ceremony, official statements by the organisers, applications available for downloading, and supporter merchandise.

Figure 3 on the following page depicts a screenshot of the statistics of the study corpus compiled during the event.

rugbyworldcupduringevent.lst			
File	Edit	View	Compute
			Overall
			1
			Overall
			rugbyworldcupduringevent.txt
			file size
			218,282
			218,282
			tokens (running words) in text
			35,222
			35,222
			tokens used for word list
			30,817
			30,817
			sum of entries
			types (distinct words)
			3,455
			3,455
			type/token ratio (TTR)
			11.21
			11.21
			standardised TTR
			31.88
			31.88
			standardised TTR std.dev.
			65.13
			65.13
			standardised TTR basis
			1,000
			1,000
			mean word length (in characters)
			4.67
			4.67
			word length std.dev.
			2.89
			2.89
			sentences
			1,277
			1,277
			mean (in words)
			24.13
			24.13

Figure 3: A screenshot of the statistics of the study corpus compiled during the event

Figure 3 above indicates the tokens (running words) as 35 222, with a total of 3455 word types.

Figure 4 below depicts a screenshot of the most frequent content words in the study corpus compiled during the event.

rugbyworldcupduringevent.lst										
File	Edit	View	Compute	Settings	Windows	Help				
							Word	Freq	%	Texts
										%
										Lemmas
										Self
							N			
							1	#	4,405	12.51
										1
										100.00
							2	MATCH	1,532	4.35
										1
										100.00
							3	SCORE	1,530	4.34
										1
										100.00
							4	FINAL	1,471	4.18
										1
										100.00
							5	HIGHLIGHTS	1,458	4.14
										1
										100.00
							6	GAME	991	2.81
										1
										100.00
							7	SEP	780	2.21
										1
										100.00
							8	OCT	689	1.96
										1
										100.00

Figure 4: A screenshot of the most frequently used content words in the study corpus compiled during the event

Figure 4 above indicates the frequency of the most used content words in the tweets namely *match* (1532), *score* (1530), *final* (1471), *highlights* (1458) and *game* (991).

Using the concordance tool, the following main themes were identified based on the most frequently used content words in the study corpus compiled during the event:

- *Match information*: Man of the Match, commentary on matches, match statistics, players and match centres
- *Final event*: Information about the upcoming final was given, as were the final scores of matches.
- *Match scores* were posted and reposted.

Figure 5 below depicts a screenshot of the concordance tool in Wordsmith 5, which facilitated identification of the main themes in the study corpus and also identification of examples of digital rhetoric.

N	Concordance	Set	Word #	Sent	Cent	Para	#a	Pos	Lead	#lead	Sec	#	Sec	Pos
1	World Cup If you are heading to any matches, here is a quick guide to help		1,294	53	15%	0	6%				0		6%	
2	Cup @ @earth2jo All #RWC2011 matches will be available to view with 24		1,883	58	81%	0	9%				0		9%	
3	yes you will be able to buy them at the matches or the superstores which are		2,731	78	28%	0	12%				0		12%	
4	highlights as well as full replays of all matches on rugbyworldcup.com 5 Sep		3,286	82	82%	0	15%				0		15%	
5	highlights & delayed replays of all matches via rugbyworldcup.com 5 Sep		3,222	82	28%	0	15%				0		15%	
6	mail deliveries have ceased for this w/e matches and you revised the wrong		3,450	88	92%	0	16%				0		16%	
7	@scott1980harris you can watch all 48 matches live on Showtime http://ow.ly/		5,114	122	30%	0	23%				0		23%	
8	Cup * @ @Hulme_Travis Yes, all 48 matches are being shown live on ITV in		6,145	150	43%	0	28%				0		28%	
9	Cup * @ @29mer Live RWC 2011 matches will be shown in Mexico. You		6,000	145	92%	0	27%				0		27%	
10	Predict the results of all 48 #RWC2011 matches with this prediction game		6,852	167	48%	0	31%				0		31%	
11	* @ @TheJackGibson Yes, all 48 matches are being shown live on ITV in		7,121	174	37%	0	33%				0		33%	
12	60k capacity is for #rwc2011 matches * 6 Aug Favorite Retweet		13,929	347	47%	0	64%				0		64%	
13	off the beaten track between #rwc2011 matches? Get ideas and chat about trips		14,023	349	100%	0	64%				0		64%	
14	NOS. They are broadcasting some matches 2 Aug » rugbyworldcup Rugby		14,374	358	24%	0	66%				0		66%	
15	Cup @ @KatianNZ tickets for most matches still available here http://bit.ly/		14,476	362	63%	0	66%				0		66%	
16	Thanks. Tickets to all USA matches still available via the official		15,130	391	17%	0	69%				0		69%	
17	» rugbyworldcup Rugby World Cup 20 matches! Impressive! RT @LucasMcIver		15,730	406	100%	0	72%				0		72%	
18	Showtime are showing all matches live in UAE www.rugbyworldcup		16,302	425	13%	0	75%				0		75%	
19	World Cup We have a draw at 15 matches RT @lessni: @rugbyworldcup		16,660	432	89%	0	76%				0		76%	
20	Neo Sport appointed to broadcast all 48 matches of #rwc2011 http://ow.ly/5HAHq		16,702	435	35%	0	76%				0		76%	
21	no probs. hope you make some matches :) 16 Jul Favorite Retweet		17,063	439	80%	0	78%				0		78%	
22	Rugby World Cup #rwc2011 knock out matches (quarters, semis and Bronze		18,475	472	71%	0	84%				0		84%	
23	agree. You can buy all 4 Wales pool matches today for \$419 NZD or just		18,565	476	15%	0	85%				0		85%	

Figure 5: A screenshot of the concordance tool in Wordsmith 5, which facilitated identification of the main themes of the study corpus

Before a rhetorical analysis is made, the researcher should become familiar with the meaning of the text (Hoffman & Ford, 2010). By first examining the most frequent content words in their contexts using the concordance tool in Wordsmith 5, the main themes were identified based on a better understanding of their meaning. The texts were repeatedly read for a holistic understanding of their meaning, a procedure similar to that followed by Rose (2001:150).

When conducting a rhetorical analysis, it is also important that one should consider the circumstances in which the rhetoric was created. Bitzner (1964) 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 (Hoffman & Ford, 2010).

The rhetorical situation includes digital rhetoric, which in this case constituted 2446 tweets by the handle @rugbyworldcup on the microblogging social networking site Twitter during the 100-day countdown to the 2011 Rugby World Cup event, and during the event itself. Applying Aristotle's classic 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 (Hoffman & Ford, 2010; Ross, 2010). Hoffman and Ford (2010:93) refer to the corporate voice that is the “faceless, nonspecific source of organisational messages”. However, because followers’ tweets were often re-tweeted, the followers in turn became authors of the digital rhetoric. The purpose of the speaker(s) was to enthuse and engage with the target audience about the forthcoming event, to keep them informed of activities, to count down the days to the event and to sell more tickets. During the event itself, the purpose of the speaker(s) was to keep followers updated about the event, to share resources, and to engage with the followers. The message was made up of the tweets and re-tweets within the sample, while the audience were the account’s followers, followers of a specific hashtag or Twitter users who received a re-tweet in their timelines.

5. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Some arguments bearing evidence of inductive reasoning by example are now elucidated according to the main themes identified in the two study corpora to provide some structure to the analysis. Since induction is a process of reasoning that moves from specific information to general conclusions, the specific information is often in the form of empirical data but might also be textual evidence used to support or prove an argument (Hoffman & Ford, 2010:39).

5.1 Inductive reasoning during the run-up to and during the 2011 Rugby World Cup event

Analysis by means of the concordance tool in Wordsmith 5 provided evidence of inductive reasoning – in the form of *reasoning by example* – in the two study corpora covering the run-up to and the 2011 Rugby World Cup event itself. Through logical inductive reasoning, followers of this account and of the 2011 Rugby World Cup hashtag could possibly have been moved to make positive inferences about the 2011 Rugby World Cup by being provided with empirical data, visuals or textual evidence. This means that although the inferences could not be certain – being based on the examples and a possibility that the future might be similar to the past – the conclusions could be inferred (see Cavender & Kahane, 2010:42; Hoffman & Ford, 2010:39).

It is important to note that in traditional rhetoric using the inductive *logos* communication technique, arguments are supported by giving examples – or by referring to previous occurrences that have already been accepted by the receiver – in order to propose new arguments that have as yet not been accepted. By doing this, the receiver is prompted to reason inductively to accept the claim based on the supporting evidence. However, digital rhetoric affords new means of providing supporting evidence. Twitter, as a social media platform, provides the ideal means of giving examples to substantiate reasoning. It does so in the form of links on which followers can click for more information. For the 2011 Rugby World Cup, links were provided to photos, articles and videos, thereby making it possible to

compare previous events and matches with the upcoming event or to support what was said in tweets. Followers' comments about how excited they were about the Rugby World Cup were often re-tweeted, thus also making them participants in the digital rhetoric. Reasoning by example is illustrated in the following sections in terms of the identified main themes.

5.2 Reasoning by example during the 100-day countdown to the event

The study corpus included 20 647 words. Reasoning by example during the 100-day countdown to the event is explained in terms of *matches*, *tickets* and *references to official events*. The purpose of the digital rhetoric was mainly to build the community, to engage with followers and to promote ticket sales so as ultimately also to enhance anticipation of the event (Rugby World Cup, 2011).

5.2.1 Details of matches

Numerous details were provided about all the matches that would be played by comparing them with previous matches or by providing more information to substantiate tweets.

Some examples are:

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

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

Martin Johnson talks about what it was like to lead England to victory on Australian soil at RWC 2003 <http://t.co/KapCTIU> #rwc2011 (27 July 2011).

Inductive reasoning is evident in the above examples in that followers were encouraged to relive previous Rugby World Cup events. Followers of the @rugbyworldcup handle or the Rugby World Cup hashtag were, among others, directed to video links about previous matches and about players so as to provide evidence and specific information regarding the excitement that could be expected. It could thus possibly be inferred that the 2011 Rugby World Cup would produce similar matches and sport experiences, and the readers of the tweets were persuaded to watch videos, look at photos and read supporting articles to add to their excitement in anticipation of the event. Twitter only allows for a condensed space, but because users could click on the links provided, there were ample opportunities to provide evidence to support all arguments.

5.2.2 Information about tickets

To substantiate arguments, several tweets referred to Internet links containing specific information about the buying of tickets or information on how many tickets had been sold up to a particular point in time.

Some examples are:

\$240m (90%) of #RWC2011 tickets sold. That's 10x more tickets than previous highest selling NZ event the 2005 Lions Tour! @irbmikemiller (26 August 2011).

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

#RWC2011 One month go update: ticket sales reach 87% of target, expected visitor numbers grow to 95,000 <http://ow.ly/5YpCp> (9 August 2011).

Inductive reasoning is evident in the above tweets in that the popularity of the event had been enhanced by providing evidence of ticket sales. From the number of tickets already sold, followers could possibly infer that the event was popular. The above examples are moreover also indicative of the brevity of sports-marketing messages that are supported by other communication tools. By reading more information on other communication tools provided by the Rugby World Cup, followers could, for example, verify for themselves that one million tickets had been sold or determine the status with regard to the availability of tickets.

5.2.3 *Official depiction*

Several tweets referred followers to Internet links containing specific information regarding official teams being welcomed to the event, thereby promoting the event through generating excitement. Followers were purposively involved in the digital rhetoric in that the @rugbyworldcup handle also often re-tweeted photos to demonstrate their enthusiasm concerning what was happening.

Some examples are:

Great photos! RT @nakiman: Pics of SA Official Welcome i took today <http://flic.kr/ps/21RdJr> @rugbyworldcup #rwc2011 (5 September 2011).

Thousands fill Aotea Square #Auckland to officially welcome @allblacks for #RWC2011 <http://ow.ly/i/gHB2> (3 September 2011).

French team officially welcomed today at Orakei Marae #auckland. Great turn out for Les Bleus! #RWC2011 (3 September 2011).

Inductive reasoning is evident in that further excitement concerning the event was generated by sharing and encouraging followers' pictures of the various teams arriving for the event. In this way, followers also participated in the digital rhetoric and in so doing enhanced anticipation of the event. Followers were directed to pictures and information – often also provided by the 2011 Rugby World Cup site itself – regarding specific events pertaining to the arrival of the different rugby teams and the upcoming Official Opening Ceremony.

5.3 Reasoning by example during the event

The study corpus included 35 222 words. Reasoning by example during the event is explained in terms of the themes match information, final event and match scores. The focus in the digital rhetoric fell on highlighting games, sharing resources, providing relevant content and keeping followers updated. In this way, a positive experience of the event was engendered (Rugby World Cup, 2011).

5.3.1 Match information

During the event itself, tweets under this particular theme included references to Man of the Match, arguments about matches that had been played or to footage that had been provided for watching replays.

Some examples are:

Re-live the closest match of #RWC2011 so far, with South Africa v Wales full match replay now available. bit.ly/pEvl2e (12 September 2011).

Congratulations Man of the Match Marius Tincu of #ROM. For stats, video, photos + more visit our Match Centre <http://ow.ly/6qvr6> #RWC2011 (10 September 2011).

Sunday's #rwc2011 Final will be Lièvremon't's last match in charge, win or lose! bit.ly/ofRfhW Has he been misjudged by his critics? (22 October 2011).

Inductive reasoning is evident in the above examples in that the positive experience of the Rugby World Cup event engendered the provision of links to the followers in the form of videos, pictures and statistics. Followers were given the opportunity to relive and to read more about exciting matches by clicking on links while simultaneously reinforcing the positive digital rhetoric about the event through providing supporting evidence.

5.3.2 Final event

The final match on 23 October was the highlight of the event and the inductive digital rhetoric was aimed at creating anticipation, enthusiasm and continuous engagement. Numerous postings were thus made about the final match of the Rugby World Cup event, which was also grouped under the hashtag #final. Tweets were supported by photos, video footage and links to the Rugby World Cup website.

Some examples are:

Miss any of the #RWC2011 Final? Watch the official highlights now bit.ly/odF6O4 (23 October 2011).

Video highlights, photos and stats available at ow.ly/75YMV #RWC2011 #final (23 October 2011).

What can we expect for tonight's #RWC2011 Final? Brush up on your trivia with these Talking Points ow.ly/75Ny3 #FRAvNZL (23 October 2011).

Inductive reasoning is evident in the above tweets in that supporting evidence regarding followers' positive experience of the event was enhanced by providing the followers with links to more information, to discussions about the final and to up-to-the-minute highlights of the event.

5.3.3 *Match scores*

Tweets about scores were also numerous, while followers' tweets about scores were often re-tweeted to support own arguments, to engage and also to enthuse followers.

Some examples are:

RT @faheycreations: Wow the Rugby World Cup app gives up to the minute score, and all game stats on every live game. Impressed! #RWC2011 (10 September 2011).

@MartinKinLA We do tweet match scores. You can also follow the live match tracker for updates and video highlights at www.rugbyworldcup.com (12 September 2011).

Golden Moments: Jeff Wilson scores for #NZL against #JPN at RWC 1995 bit.ly/oPNZUi #RWC2011 (15 September 2011).

Inductive reasoning is evident in the above three examples in that the excitement of the event was promoted by inter alia re-tweeting followers' comments about scores and also comparing scores with those of the 1995 Rugby World Cup event. By providing links and re-tweets to live scores, followers were continuously engaged with valuable resources to create a positive experience of the event in terms of always having access to relevant information.

As is evident from all the above examples, followers were given an encouraging paradigm in which to contemplate topics related to the 2011 Rugby World Cup before and also during the event. As a result, followers were able to draw their own conclusions. Reasoning by example in digital rhetoric is considered persuasive in that evidence of the real situation is supplied, which in this study was used to promote the event through positive experiences and evidence.

From the references to the previous Rugby World Cup or to other rugby events and the accompanying links, followers could conclude that the 2011 Rugby World Cup might also produce such exciting events and footage. This inference was not made through arguments, but by making reference to previous events, empirical data or supporting evidence through the links provided in the tweets. In digital rhetoric, and especially in a microblogging environment that allows only short messages to be exchanged, providing

examples involves asking users of the account to click on links that contain articles, videos or photos to support particular arguments.

The question, however, is whether the links were presented in such a way that the target audience would be likely to click on them. Followers could moreover have missed tweets as a result either of the large volumes or of not accessing their Twitter timelines at the time of the posting.

A shift in the focus of the digital rhetoric was evident during the event: the account's followers were purposefully engaged with valuable updates and resources rather than being encouraged to watch the event or to buy tickets for the different matches. This is also in line with Warnick's argument (2005:329) that digital rhetoric rather engages the user by means of responses and interactivity and in this way entices the user to become active.

Within a digital environment, content is provided according to individual interests and also through various forms of interactivity (Warnick, 2005:329). In the context of the study corpora, followers of the 2011 Rugby World Cup account and/or hashtag were engaged through continuous updates about matches, tickets, scores and the final match. Their tweets were often re-tweeted to support arguments and they could, for example, participate in voting for the Man of the Match. The authors of the rhetoric were therefore both the followers and the "corporate voice". The inductive logoi communication technique was appropriate for the social network in that Twitter provides opportunities for supportive arguments to be presented in the form of links to other resources.

6. THE LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

The study on which this article is based had the following limitations:

- The findings can only be generalised to the digital rhetoric used in the study corpora.
- The adaptation of traditional rhetoric to digital rhetoric is subject to criticism because of a lack of an integrated theory.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Even though the application of traditional rhetoric may be open to criticism, it does serve as a useful framework for similar future studies in an organisational context. While this study is by no means an in-depth digital rhetorical analysis, sufficient evidence of an inductive logoi communication technique (reasoning by example) was evident in the two study corpora to provide some idea of how traditional rhetoric may possibly be applied to a digital environment. It is also important to note that words only carry meaning and that the interpretation of words also depends on the reader. Persuasive messages usually contain all three elements of proof (ethos, pathos and logoi).

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 inductive logical reasoning. This is so because 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 such a way that it will not be dismissed. Providing reasons is the core of logical argumentation. As followers can also be in touch and reply to tweets, their comments can be used to emphasise arguments even further and can be re-tweeted as evidence. By re-tweeting the postings of followers, the speaker relies on their testimony to support the position. Because of this interactivity, the followers in many instances thus also become authors of the digital rhetoric.

It is recommended that future studies should also include evaluating messages posted on other social media platforms to add to the body of knowledge of digital rhetoric. It would also have been interesting to have evaluated these study corpora to establish whether they also contained the other elements of proof, namely ethos and pathos. By continuing to evaluate digital rhetoric, marketers will be able to make the most of their persuasive messages in the digital environment.

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