Pre- and Post-Event Media Representations of the 2014 FIFA World Cup: A Comparison

Bogdan Ciomaga, Brock University

Purpose and relevance to sport management. Major sport events have been used for more than a century as spectacular event strategy (Deutsch & Merritt, 1965) for spurring growth (Brunet, 1996; French & Disher, 1997; Montalban 1992) by, among other means, trying to improve the image of an area, increasing its prestige and recognition (Chalkey & Essex, 1999). As the size and visibility of these events has grown, they have been increasingly used to promote an image of power and competence for the nations where these events have been organized (Alegi, 2008; Jinxia & Mangan, 2008; Van der Westhuizen, 2004). The fact that hosting some of the largest mega-events (e.g., FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games) in recent years has been predominantly awarded to developing countries that aspire to be recognized as economic and political superpowers (e.g., China, Russia, Brazil, South Africa) suggests that hosting mega-events represents a way of furthering this objective of gaining legitimacy on the international stage by altering global perceptions. Due to their power to alter beliefs and values (Croteau & Hoynes, 2000), mass media play an important role in the way these global perceptions are formed. Consequently, any evaluation of the impact of hosting a mega-event needs to take into consideration the effect the event has on media discourses directed at the hosting country. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of a mega-event on media representations of social, economic, and political realities in a host country by comparing media discourses before and after the event. The 2014 FIFA World Cup hosted by Brazil is used as the focus for this analysis.

Examining changes in media discourses after the event can contribute to the evaluation of the level of success of a major sport event, helping future organizers develop strategies to improve the image of their event in the media.

Review of relevant literature. Media reflection of major events has been analyzed from a variety of viewpoints, focusing on social aspects like gender (cf. Billings, 2008; 2010; Christopherson, Janning, & McConnell, 2002), globalization (Bernstein, 2000; Roche, 2006), nationalism (cf. Cho, 2009; Elder, 2006; Housel, 2007), race or ethnicity (cf. Gardiner, 2003), and disability (cf. Chang, Crossman, Taylor, & Walker, 2011; Schantz and Gilbert, 2001). Research on media coverage of the Olympic Games has identified a number of central patterns. Thus, the educational, professional, and ethnic makeup of media sources' audiences is correlated with the nature of the coverage (Pollock, Kreyer, & Ouano, 1997). Cultural, economic, and political relationship between the country of the media source and the host country influence the framing of mega-events (Hargreaves, 1992; Moragas Spà, 2010; Rivenburgh, 1992, 1995). The image projected in the media was shown to rely heavily on stereotypes, especially when little interesting information was available to the journalists (Blain, Boyle, & O'Donnell, 1993; Tudor, 2006). The experiences of journalists on site were also shown to play a key role in the nature of the coverage, protests (Giffard & Rivenburgh, 2000) or the weather and pollution (Zhong & Zhou, 2012) being some of the influencing factors.

Methodology and Data Analysis
Data consist of newspaper and magazine articles in international media available through the LexisNexis database. The search terms "Brazil" and "World Cup" were used in the case of two time intervals, the first covering two weeks prior to the start of the competition and the other covering one month after the World Cup final (in order to obtain a manageable amount of data). A total of 702 articles were identified in the first interval and 384 articles in the second interval. Since the purpose of this study is to examine the image of the country in the media, articles that were not focused on Brazil or that reflected only on-field performance were eliminated, leaving 181 articles in the first interval and 59 in the second.

Since this study compares media coverage before and after the event and since comparisons tend to be static practices, that cannot effectively highlight the dynamic relationship between two sets of discourses, a thematic narrative analysis (Boje, 2001; Riessman, 2003) was used to better mirror the process through which media discourses before the event are replaced by discourses after the event (Van Maanen, 1988). More precisely, since narratives are composed of beginnings, middles, and ends (Kaplan, 2002; Roe, 2003), narratives were created by
putting together themes from discourses before the event as beginnings and themes from discourses after the events as ends, with the event itself functioning as a middle. This process generated three potential types of narratives: continuing narratives (when a theme from before the event maintains the same level of relevance in the post event discourses), declining narratives (when a theme dominant before the event plays a less important role after the event or disappears), and surging narratives (when a theme in the post-event discourses has no precedent in pre-event discourses). Themes were identified through a general inductive approach (Bryman & Burgess, 1994; Dey, 1993).

**Discussion/Implications/Applications**

A preliminary analysis failed to identify a dominant continuing narrative. The themes before and after the event are very different, with dominant themes in the before discourse disappearing or playing a marginal role, being replaced by a new set of themes. Thus, the dominant themes in the before the event media discourses reflected negative perceptions regarding the organization of the event and other social, economic, and political aspects of the hosting country. Themes like delays in construction, price gouging in construction projects, labour strikes, waste, and corruption accusations coagulate in an operational incompetence thematic cluster. Furthermore, connected to it, another cluster of negative themes revolves around general dysfunctions in Brazilian society that are part of a context broader than the FIFA World Cup, involving themes like corruption, gangs, child prostitution, public health concerns, favelas and urban development challenges, and political dissatisfaction. While many of the themes in the general dysfunctions clusters are linked to stereotypical images in the West about Brazil, the themes in the operational incompetence cluster, while reinforcing the negative stereotypes, usually involve a level of detail (e.g., surveys of public opinion, review of construction progress) that goes beyond stereotypes. After the event, these clusters play a far less important role. While the narrative remains, they are usually accompanied by positive evaluations of the event, even if these evaluations define success as averting disaster. While this seems to suggest that successful events can overcome negative perceptions, it is important to note that pre-event media interest far surpasses post-event media attention, so positive post-event coverage will be more diluted and, consequently, less likely to have an impact than the heavy concentration of pre-event media images.

An immediate implication of these results is that organizers need to engage with the community in order to prevent protests and general dissatisfaction that can generate negative image of sport mega-events. The reluctance of cities like Oslo and Stockholm to host the 2022 Olympic Winter Games originates from this type of awareness of public concerns. Also, host countries should resist the temptation to overpromise during the bidding process, even with the risk of losing the bid, since failed promises may generate similar operational incompetence narratives, thus leading to a negative image which undermines one of the central goals of hosting an event, namely projecting an image of strength and competence.