

THE FIFA WORLD CUP IN *USA Today*: 1990-2010

A Thesis by

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in Communication.

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ABSTRACT

Since the nineteenth century, U.S. newspapers have contributing to the promotion of sports, and in the twentieth century, their sports-related news has emphasized the country's big spectator sports such as baseball, football, and basketball (McChesney, 1989; Fort, 2000). In contrast, throughout the rest of the world, soccer and its FIFA World Cup tournament, which is held every four years, have captured much more attention than it has in the United States (*USA Today*, 2006). Schlesinger (1978) argued that news does not select itself, but is rather the product of judgments concerning the social relevance of given events and situations based on assumptions concerning their interest and importance. With this in mind, a study was designed in order to learn about how Americans regard soccer and the World Cup and whether their regard for them is undergoing a transition. More specifically, using quantitative content analysis and qualitative inductive thematic analysis, the thesis studied the amount and thematic nature of *U.S.A. Today's* news and editorial coverage of the six FIFA World Cup tournaments held from 1990 to 2010. Research indicates that the newspaper published 1,079 articles during these tournaments. The peak of coverage was reached in 1994, when the U.S. hosted the event for the first time. The paper's reportage and commentary pieces emphasized statistics, history, atmosphere, drama, political, social and international relation affairs. And finally, *USA Today* characterized the relationship between the FIFA World Cup and the United States as an event that is not for Americans, as the hope of U.S. soccer, as lacking a connection to U.S. television audiences, as a simple game that people from any economic group can enjoy, and as an event with importance not only in the domain of sports, but as one that inspires patriotism.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The first FIFA World Cup took place in 1930. Today, the 32-team tournament, which is held every four years, is widely considered to be the most popular sporting event in the world. More than 700 million people from across the world watched the final match of the 2010 tournament, and a record-breaking number of Americans were among them. According to Nielsen, 24.3 million U.S. viewers watched Spain and Netherlands compete in the tournament's final match on ABC and Univision (Nielsen Wire, 2010). Considering that American interest in the World Cup has always lagged behind football, basketball, and baseball, this is a notable statistic, one that bears further study.

This thesis employs quantitative and qualitative content analysis in a study of World Cup-related newspaper stories and commentary pieces published just before and after the tournament's final match from 1990 to 2010. Its goal is to gain insight into the evolving relationship between the American public and the FIFA-sponsored event. The centrality of newspapers in sports journalism supports the thesis's examination of *USA Today's* World Cup coverage. According to Boyle (2006), sports journalism has always been intrinsically associated with newspapers and print media in general. In countries where the tournament is highly regarded, newspapers strive for excellent reporting that reflects all aspects of the tournament. In contrast, U.S. newspaper stories about World Cup soccer have tended to be general in nature (Fink, 2001, p.232).

This first chapter of the thesis provides four sections that include historical information as well as literature review. These sections and their functions include the following: Section one provides a brief history of sports coverage in the U.S.; section two covers the position of soccer

(the game and the tournament) in U.S. newsrooms; section three explains the relationship of the FIFA World Cup to American newspapers; and section four discusses the status of FIFA World Cup research. The chapter's conclusion, which draws on these four sections, provides a summary of the thesis's rationale.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A Brief History of U.S. Sports Journalism

Pope (1997) explains that sports has been recorded in engravings, sculptures, paintings, and literature for thousands of years by some of the world's greater artists and writers, but for the past century the task of interpreting the significance of sports has largely been the domain of journalists.

Bryant and Holt (2006) divide sports journalism into three eras: agricultural, industrial, and information. Throughout these periods, sports coverage has been influenced by the media of the day, including newspapers, radio, television, and the Internet, and McChesney (1989) argues that the nature of sport-mass media relationship has been distinctly shaped by the emerging contours of American capitalism since the 1830s.

Seven sports magazines were published between the mid-1820s and mid-1830s, although some of them died soon after they were launched (Bryant and Holt, 2006, p 23). Walsh (1966) documented that the *American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine* was the country's first sports journal. Started in 1829, the magazine was devoted to horse racing. According to Garrison and Sabljak (1993), this publication lasted for 15 years. A second sporting publication, *Spirit of the Times*, began in 1831 and continued until 1901 (Mott, 1962). During this period, the country's general-circulation newspapers occasionally covered sports such as horse racing, boxing, and wrestling (Garrison and Sabljak, 1993, p 18).

Social class was an important issue in sports journalism's early nineteenth-century period. As a result, the first sports magazines tended to cover sports that people of the day considered to be respectable. Thus, news of horse racing was included, whereas boxing was not (McChesney, 1989, p. 51). But in the penny press era, which started in 1831, New York daily

newspapers, especially the *New York Sun*, *New York Herald*, and *New York Transcript*, began to cover prizefights and other sports associated with the lower classes (Garrison and Sabljak, 1993, p. 19). The penny press era also saw the emergence of sports newspapers. Although many were short-lived financial failures, their popularity forced general newspapers to give more space to sports (Garrison and Sabljak, 1993 p. 18).

Since print enjoyed dominance in sports coverage in the nineteenth century, the quality of reporting was not a big concern, although there was competition among papers. Famous reporters influenced what games the public paid attention to. William T. Potterm the founder of *Spirit of the Times*, expanded the coverage of boxing and, in the 1840s, made a concerted effort to establish cricket as the national game (Nugent, 1929). In the 1850s, Potterm emphasized baseball as the national game, and helped popularize its rules and terminology (McChesney, 1989, p. 51). Also during this period, newspapers began devoting more space to sports. Since the *New York Clipper* took over the *Spirit of the Times*, in 1853, sports have been one of major concerns of newspaper editors.

The coming of radio in 1920s, and eventually television in the 1950s, profoundly affected sports journalism, including how sports was handled by newspapers. In 1922, radio was found in only one of every 400 homes, but by 1929, a third of American homes had radios (Spalding, 1963-64, p. 35). Radio broadcasts of sporting events allowed millions of fans to experience events with immediacy that newspapers could not match (Enriquez, 2002, p. 202). Some early sports organizers saw the advantages of radio. According to Smethers and Jolliffe, “Entrepreneurs of early radio were quick to see the value of sports coverage, especially live play-by-play” (1992, p. 83). Despite considerable early resistance to radio by team owners and

managers, who feared that radio coverage would erode attendance, loyal listeners soon regularly crowded round the radio set to listen to sportscast of all kinds (Bryant and Holt, 2006, p. 30).

According to Enriquez, (2002) the first radio broadcast of a major league baseball game was heard on August 5, 1921, over station KDKA in Pittsburgh, the nation's first radio station. The technology was taking off at that point, and offered sports a place. By 1927, NBC's two networks covered the 1927 Rose Bowl Game (Bittner and Bittner, 1977). By the early 1930s, radio broadcasting was dominated by two networks, NBC and CBS, which found it lucrative to sell advertising for the airing of commercials during sporting events (McChesney, 1989, p. 59). Radio's supremacy forced newspapers to shift their emphasis to more in depth and nuanced coverage of sports. Since radio was the medium of immediacy, newspapers had to go beyond merely reporting sports statistics.

By the 1950s, the emergence of television was forcing radio to defend its position in the marketplace. According to Hitchcock (1989), television came into the sports world in 1939, when an RCA mobile TV unit broadcast a Columbia-Princeton baseball game from the field. In response to such competition, the coverage of sports in newspapers and on the radio became more insightful and interpretative, with an emphasis on explaining wins and losses rather than the simple reporting of them (Garrison and Sabljak, 1993). Television's audio-visual nature attracted audiences and influenced the U.S. sports marketplace. In the early 1950s, for example, professional football was a minor attraction compared to baseball and college games. But during the early 1960s, exposure to football via television captured the nation's imagination, and the sport grew in stature (McChesney, 1989, p. 62).

Another milestone in U.S. sports journalism history was the 1979 launch of the cable channel *ESPN*. Bryant and Holt (2006) stated that the new 24-hours-per-day cable network

provided an alternative that gave sports fans far more information about many more kinds of sports than they could get in other sports media. Today, Americans can choose from a variety of sports channels, such as FOX Sports, ABC, and others. And newspapers have not stood still as cable television has led to an exponential increase in televised sports coverage. Eventually, *USA Today* devoted 25 percent of its pages to sports (Bryant and Holt, 2006, p. 37).

Like radio and television, the Internet has had a profound impact on sports journalism. Since the mid-1990s, it has rivaled television with its transmission of live pictures of sporting events across the globe (Beck and Bosshart, 2003). Journalism is undergoing dramatic changes as a result of the Internet, most recently because of the emergence of Web 2.0 technologies. The interactivity of the online experience means that media consumers have more power in choosing, shaping and responding to media content (Schultz and Sheffer, 2007, p. 62). And most recently, the emergence of social networks (blogs, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and so on) has given audiences unprecedented power as content creators. These services are popular, especially during big sports events, and almost all sports clubs and successful athletes have their own websites and social networks (Beck and Bosshart, 2003).

Contrary to conventional wisdom, some scholars argue that new media have not destroyed the way traditional media work. Schultz and Sheffer (2007), for example, argue that the introduction of new technologies has not drastically altered journalistic work patterns, because journalists are slow to let go of the “we write, you read” dogma of traditional journalism. Beck and Bosshart (2003) believe that television remains the most important medium for sports reporting. That said, baseball, football, and basketball remain the driving forces behind U.S. sports coverage. But Bryant and Holt (2006) ask, “Where will things go from here?”

Soccer in U.S Newsrooms

Although this thesis concentrates on the FIFA World Cup, one can hardly separate the tournament and soccer as a game. Soccer, or, as the rest of the world calls it, “football,” is considered by many to be the world’s number one sport. But in the U.S., that is not the case. According to a 2008 Harris Poll, American football is king of sports, followed by baseball, American collegiate football, auto racing, hockey, pro and collegiate basketball, and golf.

The neglect of soccer by American journalism relates to the fact that very few Americans place soccer high on their sports lists. Soccer is popular among adolescents and women in the U.S, but to date it has not succeeded commercially. Indeed, successful American soccer players look to Europe for career opportunities (Eriksen, 2007, p.48). According to French, “Soccer has been stereotyped in America.... [as] ‘nil-nil’ snooze fests starring one named, short-panted foreigners who can’t use their hands but fall down at the least provocation amid... the idea that it’s a game best left for children who will soon go on to the better things” (2003, p. 40).

Much has been made of the fact that soccer’s simplicity could be responsible for its global popularity. Soccer’s minimal rules and basic equipment might explain why so many people enjoy it (Kelly, 2007, p. 83). Despite this, Fink (2001) stated that U.S. professional soccer struggles for fan support, and at the college level, soccer is one of those “non-revenue-producing” sports subsidized mostly by football. Such low interest has affected the game in all sectors, including television, radio, and newspaper reporting.

In an exploration of how American newspapers regard soccer, French (2003) learned that sports editors ignore it, treat its coverage as a luxury, or absorb it into their Olympic beats. In addition, French (2003) stated that sports editors often assign young reporters the task of covering soccer. Fink (2001) added that many metropolitan newspapers soccer stories are buried

deep inside their sports sections. And in his article, published during the 2010 FIFA World Cup, Fosty (2010) stated that so few newspapers carry accounts of soccer that the perception that it is a marginal sport is being perpetuated.

Concerning the quality of American reporters' soccer coverage, some scholars have made it clear that not all soccer reporters in U.S. newsrooms are qualified to cover the game. Ivkovic (1999), a soccer writer for *Newsday*, charges that few U.S. journalists understand the game. It is obvious that reporters lacking in soccer expertise will produce low quality soccer reports. However, some major papers do have knowledgeable soccer writers and give them news hole to report the game (Fink, 2001, p. 232).

While news stories can provide depth of coverage, getting the facts right is still critical. Apart from reporting game statistics, reporters should also have the knowledge to report on all of its components. Soccer's special terms and tactics should be fully understood by anyone who reports on its games. French (2003) argued, "Many soccer reporters in this country don't, and their copy is little more than descriptions of goals and assumptions based on match statistics" (French, 2003). He added that soccer stories should address tactical questions

The FIFA World Cup and U.S Newspapers

It is obvious that the FIFA World Cup is in a symbiotic relationship with non-U.S. newspapers and other sports media. Without media coverage, the popularity and revenue-generated potential of commercial spectator sports would be seriously limited. After games are played, they become news items, and reporters' interpretations of the action become entertainment for fans, regardless of whether they attended the event in person or not (Coakley,

2004, p.423). Rosentraub (1997) correctly notes that a “never-ending and mutually reinforcing network or linkage exists between sports and the media” (p.50).

Former U.N Secretary General, Koffi Annan, remarking on the 2006 FIFA World Cup, stated, “Football (soccer) is more universal than United Nations and that the FIFA World Cup brings the family of nations and people together celebrating our common humanity in a way the few other cultural events can equal.” And Smart (2007) stated that the number of countries to the FIFA World Cup has increased steadily, reaching 203 by 2006. In comparison, the UN has 191 member nations. During the FIFA World Cup, the world becomes a single sports venue, where competitors and their supporters promote, follow, and support their teams (Rumford, 2007, p.95).

The FIFA World Cup tournament first took place in Uruguay in started 1930. Today, sports experts rank it as the planet’s number one single sporting event. The summer Olympics ranks alongside the FIFA World Cup in terms of its popularity with audiences and the attention it gets from broadcasting and other commercial enterprises (Smart, 2007, p.10). Bairner wrote, “No other sport in the world draws more attention and fanaticism on a global level than the FIFA World Cup tournament” (Bairner, 2001, p. 86).

Although the tournament historically has not been as popular in the U.S. as in other countries, it started to gain more attention during 1994 FIFA World Cup, which was played in nine American cities. French wrote, “The hugely successful 1994 World Cup, held in the United States, brought greater consciousness to these shires and led to the formation of Major League Soccer, which kicked off in 1996” (2003, p. 42).

The tournament’s global popularity has diminished the U.S.’s media’s hold over the world’s mass mediated culture. In fact, no U.S. sporting enjoys a global following, a fact that doesn’t jive with many of today’s critiques of the U.S for its cultural imperialism (Eriksen, 2007,

p.48-49). That said, the World Cup has to compete with U.S. sporting events like the U.S Open golf tournament and major league baseball's ongoing games for the media's attention (McGuire and Armfield, 2008, p.45).

Soccer and World Cup promoters, however, are doing their best to raise Americans' interest in the game and its tournament. In his 2010 World Cup article "Media Make Selling Soccer a Goal," Philbin (2010) stated that more than just covering the month-long event, the media is doing its best to hype the event by overstating its popularity and potential appeal to U.S. sports fans. From *Time* magazine's dedication of an entire issue to "The Global Game," to CBS's "The World Cup Guide for Americans," the public is being browbeaten into catching "FIFA World Cup Fever."

Today, questions are being raised about the future of the World Cup in the U.S. sports market. In "America Wakes up To the World Cup," Dunmore (2010) wrote, "Is America a soccer nation, now? On the morning of the United States' most-hyped ever game against England, I combed through the front covers of every single U.S newspaper listed at 'Newseum,' a good couple of hundred of them (which is not comprehensive, but is a pretty hefty sample-size), to see what Americans were waking up to read about it on their front pages — if anything at all. I found broad coverage and feature stories in surprising places, from Las Vegas to Detroit. Some states, though, had complete black-outs; other sports stories such as Nebraska's move to the Big 10 in college sports or the Chicago Blackhawks' Stanley Cup celebrations wiped out any reference to the FIFA World Cup from the front pages in large areas of the Midwest."

Academic Research on the FIFA World Cup

While the FIFA World Cup has attracted much scholarly attention, little of that interest has come from outside the U.S. In addition, U.S. academic researchers who have studied sports have tended to feature certain sports, e.g., football, baseball, and basketball, and certain topics, e.g., gender, race, drugs, and violence, in their scholarship (Crossman, Hyslop and Guthrie, 1994). This section of the literature review begins with a few examples of these studies, and concludes with a discussion of soccer and World Cup research.

Regarding gender, Harris and Kinkema (1998) report that media images of male and female athletes tend to follow prevailing gender stereotypes. In examinations of racial stereotyping in sports, Murrell and Curtis (1994), and Sabo et al (1996), have found that sports journalists tend to attribute African American sport achievements to “natural” abilities and “instincts,” whereas white athletes are portrayed as hardworking and intelligent.

In the area of sports and drugs, scholars such as Messner and Solomon (1993), and Hill (1992), have delved into athletes’ use of both performance-enhancing and recreational drugs. For example, Hill (1992) found that reportorial attention to drugs has been evenly split between athletes’ performance-enhancing drug use and recreational drug use.

Studies of media portrayals of violence in sport have been influenced by a long line of scholarship in mass communication aimed at uncovering cause-effect links between viewer exposure to violence in the media and violence in society at large (Kinkema and Harris, 1998, p. 44). Whannel (1979) studied British soccer hooliganism, arguing that British journalists have tended to give a large amount of coverage to a relatively small decline in overall spectator attendance, prominently linking the decline to the hooligan problem.

Looking beyond gender, race, drugs, and violence, Kinkema and Harris (1998) report that scholarly attention to the audience is increasing, and that such studies are influenced by the uses and gratifications theory, as well as by critical cultural studies approaches that stress media production, political economy, and the interaction of sports fans and sports texts (Kinkema & Harris, 1998, p. 47-52).

Although the FIFA World Cup has not interested U.S. sports researchers, the tournament and its game have attracted a great deal of attention elsewhere (McGuire and Armfield, 2008, p. 48). In fact, Tudor has identified more than 30 non-U.S. academic works on international soccer and the FIFA World Cup (McGuire and Armfield, 2008, p. 48). The first major study on the FIFA World Cup, which was published in 1974, examined the coverage of the tournament by British television (Tudor). Since then, according to Tudor (2006), the World Cup has continued to attract the attention of media researchers, especially in regard to its impact on television (p. 218).

Other non-U.S. World Cup studies have focused on the tournament's national and international ideological dimensions (Kinkema and Harris 1998, p 34). In their studies of major international tournaments and other sporting events, Hargreaves (1992), and Larson and Park (1993), argue that the contexts within which international sporting events are presented invite the promotion of national identities and international perspectives.

Another line of non-U.S. World Cup-related research looks at race and ethnicity within in British TV coverage (Tudor, 1992). In addition, Tudor (2006) highlighted five primary areas he identified as important World Cup research topics: linguistic discourses, audiovisual, expertise, narrative and national identity (p.220).

RATIONALE

Along with the Olympics, the FIFA World Cup is one of the world's biggest sporting events. Followed by millions of people, who follow it in the newspapers, on television, and on the Internet, the tournament generates huge amounts of revenue for its owners, the media, and local economies. In addition, soccer and the World Cup tournament have become intertwined with various countries' national identities. In response, sports journalists and academic researchers outside of the U.S. have paid considerable attention to the tournament and the game of soccer in general. In contrast, their American counterparts show much greater interest to the sports that culminate in the Super Bowl, NBA finals, and NCAA March Madness. As a result, the FIFA World Cup and its game are ripe with research opportunities (Wenner, 1989, p.7).

The research to be completed for this thesis will delve into the amount and thematic qualities of newspaper coverage of various World Cup tournaments, as well as how sports writers characterize the importance of the FIFA World Cup to the United States. Such research will be enlightening in terms of how journalists have treated and regard the game and the tournament. In addition, it will offer clues about the future of the FIFA World Cup in the United States, and build a foundation for future studies in this area. The thesis's more specific research questions will be stated in chapter two, which describes the methodologies used in the research.

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

As noted in the final pages of the previous chapter, this thesis seeks to understand how American newspapers have treated and otherwise regarded the FIFA World Cup tournament. The first step in the development of the research protocol involved deciding what tournaments to study in the research. Because researching all of the FIFA World Cups since the first was held in 1930 was not practical, a decision was made to start with the 1990 tournament. This tournament on the surface appears to correspond with a period of growing interest in the American soccer community in the FIFA World Cup. The U.S. only started bidding for the honor of hosting the tournament in 1986, and it was subsequently awarded the honor of hosting the 1994 event. Thus, it was decided to include the FIFA World Cups in the research: 1990, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, and 2010.

The next decision that had to be made in the development of the study's research protocol was the newspapers to be studied in the research. The first chapter's review of the history of sports coverage by American newspapers points to the fact that every newspaper in America, and myriad other news forms offer their readers information on sports. However, it was decided to select a newspaper designed to serve a national audience rather than those that focus on specific communities. Thus, *USA Today* was selected for the study. Founded by Al Neuharth in the early 1980s, this paper purports to serve a national audience. In addition, it is one of the top circulating newspapers in the United States (Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2011). Finally, one of *USA Today*'s highest priorities is its sports section (Eastman & Billings, 2000, p. 196).

To amass a sample of newspapers to be studied in the research, the comprehensive collection of *USA Today* archived in the electronic database Lexis-Nexis Academy was searched using the term “world cup” during the month-long periods of time that coincide with the 1990, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, and 2010 tournaments. Lexis-Nexis Academy, as described in its Web site (<http://www.lexisnexus.com>), is a major database that includes full-text editions of many periodicals, including newspapers that are published across the world. In an article on “Academic librarians’ perception of Lexis-Nexis,” Oulanov and Pajarillo (2003) state that the database is extremely helpful.

Two kinds of texts were included in the research: reportage and commentary pieces. Reportage includes any articles that reported events and issues happened during the tournament without reporter’s opinion, while commentary included critical articles, interpretation and expert opinions. Any news stories that included analysis that could be interpreted as statements of opinion were also included in the commentary group. Moreover, both reportage and commentary were divided into three tournament-related related groups: reportage and commentary on pre-match, post-match, and general concerns. While photographs were also part of the coverage for the six consecutive FIFA World Cups, they were not included in the research. While many of the reportage and commentaries included in the research were included in the newspaper’s sports sections, some were included that were published in its more general news pages. This key-word search of Lexis-Nexis’s *USA Today* archive for reportage and commentary pieces related to the 1990-2010 World Cups resulted in a compilation of 1,079 texts for study.

The next step in the research involved reading this group of 1,079 newspapers to answer the thesis’s first research question, as follows:

RQ1: How much coverage did *USA Today* devote to FIFA World Cups from 1990 to 2010?

To answer this question, quantitative content analysis was employed. Kian, Mondello, and Vincent (2009) report that social scientists use content analysis in studies of myriad forms of communication, including newspapers, television and radio broadcasts, speeches, and literature. Another key source in the area of content analysis, Klaus Krippendorff (1980 and 2003), requires that six questions be answered in every content analysis. These questions and their corresponding thesis-related answers are provided below:

1. Which data are analyzed? Sports news articles and commentary pieces published during one-month periods surrounding each of the FIFA World Cup tournaments held during 1990-2010.
2. How are the data defined? The data are defined as any news articles or commentary pieces concerning the World Cup published in *USA Today*.
3. What population is the data drawn from? All news and commentary pieces published in *USA Today* during the period studied in the research.
4. What is the context relative to which the data are analyzed? The entire body of U.S. reportage and commentary devoted to the World Cups during the two decades studied in the research.
5. What are the boundaries of the analysis? The thesis's analysis of the sample of articles and commentary pieces drawn from *USA Today* population concerns the amount of coverage given the 1990-2010 tournaments, the relative frequencies of the two types of soccer coverage—news articles and

commentary pieces; and amount of coverage given the World Cup in the periods just before and during the tournaments.

6. What is the target of the inferences? The analyses of the data collected in the research makes suggestions about how all American newspaper coverage of World Cup might have covered soccer during the period studied in the research.

More specifically, the question's concern with "how much news coverage" was devoted by *USA Today* to the tournaments during those years is broken down into subcategories of descriptive statistics including: the frequencies, types, and topics of reportage (pre-match, post-match, or more general) and commentary pieces published over the six tournaments. The analysis of such data provides a foundation for the assessment of the newspapers' levels of attention to the FIFA World Cup over the past two decades.

A different methodological strategy – qualitative inductive thematic analysis – was used to address research questions two and three, which relate to the qualities of *USA Today* newspaper articles rather than the amount of coverage given the FIFA World Cup. These questions included the following:

RQ2: What did *USA Today* sports writers emphasize in their news articles and editorials on the FIFA World Cups from 1990 to 2010? And,

RQ3: How did *USA Today* news writers who covered FIFA World Cup events from 1990-2010 characterize the connection between the tournament and the people of the United States?

To address these questions, the study employed the thematic analysis approaches of Boyatzis (1998) and Grunwald and Rupa (2010). Boyatzis (1998) suggests inductive, i.e., data-

driven, coding allows researchers to understand the texts they are studying from the bottom up. In opposition to this approach, it would be also be possible to start any coding project with a preconceived list of themes to look for in the texts. But considering the fact that little scholarly research has focused on the content of U.S. soccer coverage, it was decided that the more inductive approach was the only option.

In addition, Grunwald and Rugar's (2010) scholarship was useful in planning the research. These scholars suggest a number of steps that researchers seeking to analyze news articles can employ. This study utilizes five of their steps, as follows:

1) Step one: Undertake a close reading of all the news stories in the sample in an effort to identify and understand their central organizing ideas;

2) Step two: Define, name, and classifying the ideas identified in step one as dominant story frames;

3) Step three: Identifications the variations within each frame;

4) Step four: Defining, name, and classifying variations of frames as dominant story angles; and, finally,

5) Step five: Based on the above readings and final decisions, complete the final coding of the news stories and commentary pieces.

Chapter three, which begins with a brief review of pertinent facts concerning the six FIFA World Cups studied in the research, provides the answers to the thesis's three research questions.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH FINDINGS

In light of this study's concern with the amount and nature of *USA Today's* coverage of the World Cup, it is reasonable to start this findings chapter with brief descriptions of the locations and other salient aspects of the six tournaments held from 1990 to 2010. Certainly, FIFA's decisions concerning where to hold its tournaments carry great importance for the teams, the countries that compete to host the tournaments, the communities close to tournament venues, fans, and journalists. The following information, gathered from FIFA's website, will provide a context for the interpretation of the thesis's research findings.

1990's "Hack Fest"

One of the most important processes leading up to any FIFA World Cup tournament is the selection of its host nation. Typically, more than one nation competes for the honor of hosting the event, and often more than one vote is needed to make the decision. Several years before the 1990 tournament, however, FIFA officials only needed one round of voting to decide it would be hosted by Italy.

According to an NBC website on the history of the World Cup, the 1990 event was both one of the federation's most popular and worst tournaments. The website reported, "Teams averaged just 2.21 goals a match (the lowest ever) and 16 red cards were awarded for foul play" ("World Cup Timeline," NBC Sports.) The winner of the tournament was West Germany, who beat the previous tournament winner – Argentina – in the 1-0 final. West Germany scored the match's single point in a free kick in the 85th minute.

1994's Landmark U.S. Tournament

After an unsuccessful bid to host the 1986 tournament, the United States became the site of its first World Cup tournament after receiving more than half the votes in a three-way race that involved Brazil and Morocco.

The 1994 event set records for attendance that still stand. In fact, according to NBC, the tournament's final match – with 3.6 million viewers – still holds the record for the most watched-FIFA match in the tournament's history.

The two-most decorated countries faced off in the final: Brazil and Italy. Brazil won its fourth trophy after beating Italy on penalty kicks. This was the first time the title was decided on penalty kicks.

1998 in France

In 1992, one round of voting was required to select France over Morocco and Switzerland as the host of FIFA's 1998 tournament.

The 1998 tournament was the first to allow 32 teams to compete, a change that expanded the event's impact.

France beat Brazil 3-0 in the final.

2002's Landmark Asian Tournament

The first Asian tournament was held in 2002 after South Korea and Japan were selected by acclamation to co-host its events.

Human interest was added to the tournament as Souleymane Mamam, a 13-year-old Tongolese, at 13 years of age was the youngest player to compete in a World Cup preliminary game field.

Brazil beat Germany 2-1 in the final for its fifth title.

As it turned out, the rivalry and distance between the countries led to organizational and logistical problems. As a result, FIFA has said it will not likely approve co-hosting arrangements again.

2006 in Germany

The selection of the 2006 tournament site – Germany – required multiple voting rounds. The four teams seeking to host the tournament were Germany, South Africa, England, and Morocco (Brazil had withdrawn its bid at an earlier date). Although South Africa was favored, in the end, Germany edged it out by one vote. The way this process was handled led to a controversy that ultimately resulted in a change in FIFA site selection practices.

Four African teams made their debut in the world cup final 16: Togo, Cote d'voire, Angola and Ghana.

An estimated 715 million fans watched Italy defeated France in a penalty shootout to win its fourth World Cup.

2010's Landmark South Africa World Cup

After a narrow and contentious loss in the bidding for the 2006 tournament, South Africa defeated Morocco to host the 2010 event. This was the first time an African nation had hosted a FIFA tournament.

The South African tournament was notable for a number of reasons, including the fact that Spain won the cup for the first time. Other factors that drew the attention of fans, as well as journalists, were its highly defensive opening matches, controversies surrounding goal-line technologies, and the blowing of plastic horns (known as vuvuzela) by fans.

RQ1: Amount of *USA Today* coverage devoted to the FIFA World Cups: 1990-2010

The thesis's first research question relates to the amount of reportage and commentary devoted by *USA Today* to the 1990 to 2010 FIFA World Cup tournaments. Not surprisingly, of the six tournaments, the one held in the United States in 1994 resulted in the greatest number of *USA Today* news articles and commentary pieces. The overall results of the research on the 1,079 news and commentary pieces include the following breakdown in coverage:

- 135 reportage and commentary pieces (12.5%) covered the 1990 tournament;
- 414 (38.4%) covered the 1994 tournament;
- 193 (17.9%) covered the 1998 tournament;
- 130 (12%) covered the 2002 tournament;
- 106 (9.8%) covered the 2006 tournament; and,
- 101 (9.4%) covered 2010 tournament.

These findings are additionally presented in Figure 1.

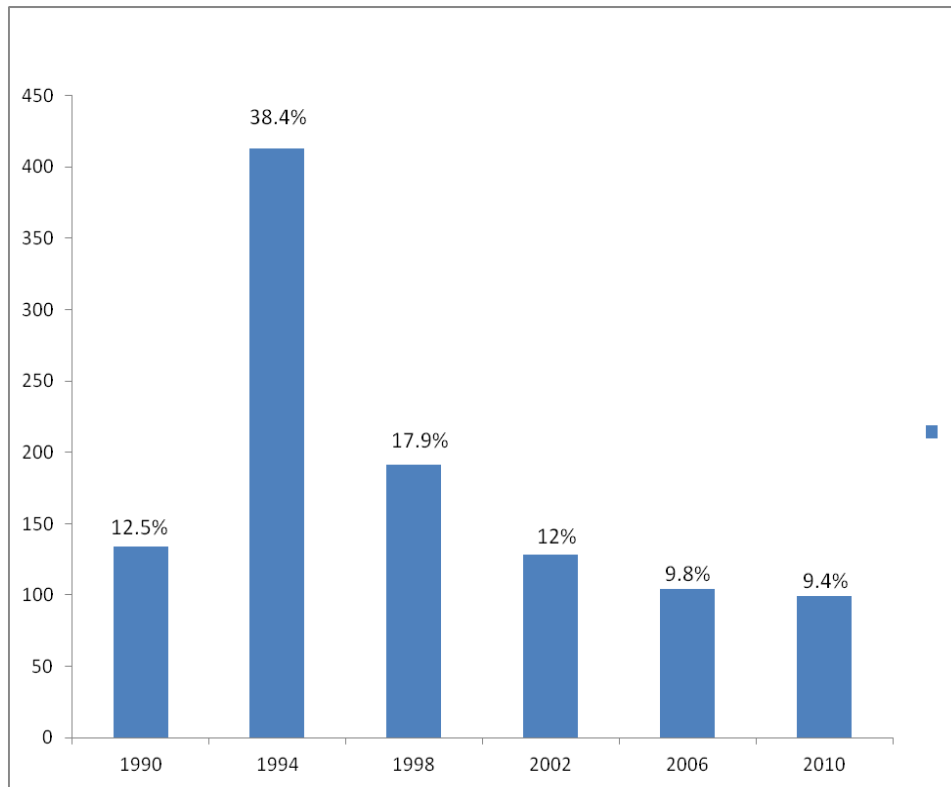


Figure 1. *USA Today* articles covered the FIFA World Cups: 1990-2010.

When the 1,079 *USA Today* texts were sorted into reportage and commentary, the following frequencies were identified: 644 reportage articles (56.7%), compared to 435 pieces of commentary. When broken down by tournament, the numbers of reportage and commentary pieces included the following:

- 1990 FIFA World Cup Italy: 88 reportage articles, and 46 commentary articles;
- 1994 FIFA World Cup USA: 266 reportage articles, and 147 commentaries;
- 1998 FIFA World Cup France: 131 reportage articles, and 60 commentary articles;
- 2002 FIFA World Cup Korea/Japan: 46 reportage articles, and 82 commentary articles;
- 2006 FIFA World Cup Germany: 50 reportage articles and 52 commentary; and,
- 2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa: 57 reportage articles, and 42 commentary articles.

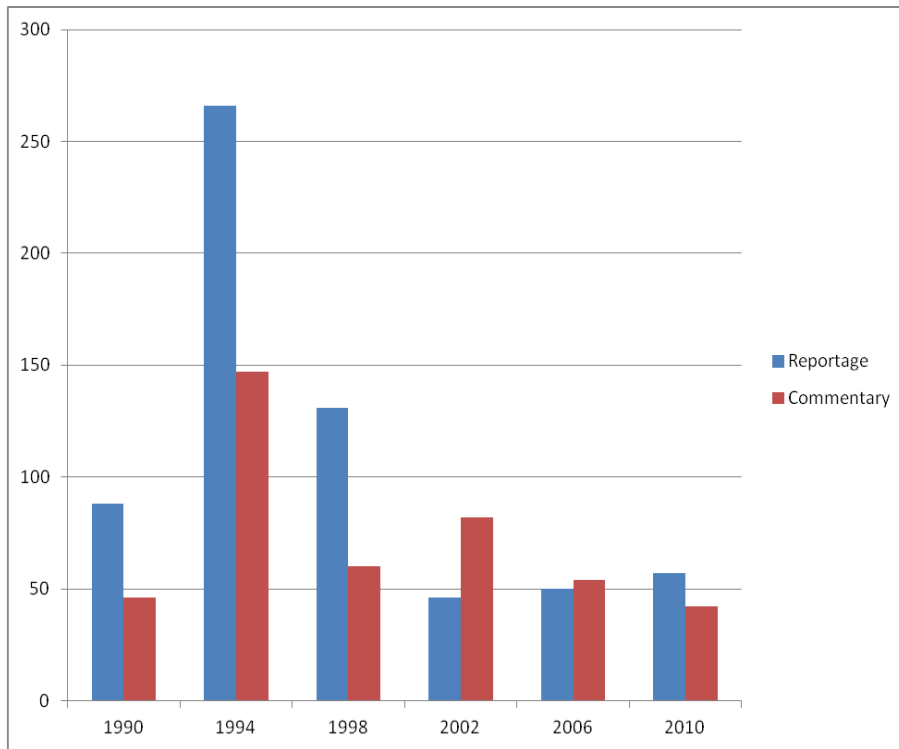


Figure 2. *USA Today* articles covered the FIFA World Cups: 1990-2010 by category (reportage and commentary).

Another component of the quantitative analysis of the 1,079 texts concerns the relative frequencies of pre-match, post-match, and general World Cup reportage and commentary. The results of the type of analysis are as follows: Considering the 1,079 texts as a whole, 217 concentrated on pre-match, 303 concentrated on post-match, and 559 concentrated on general tournament issues. Figure 3 displays this data.

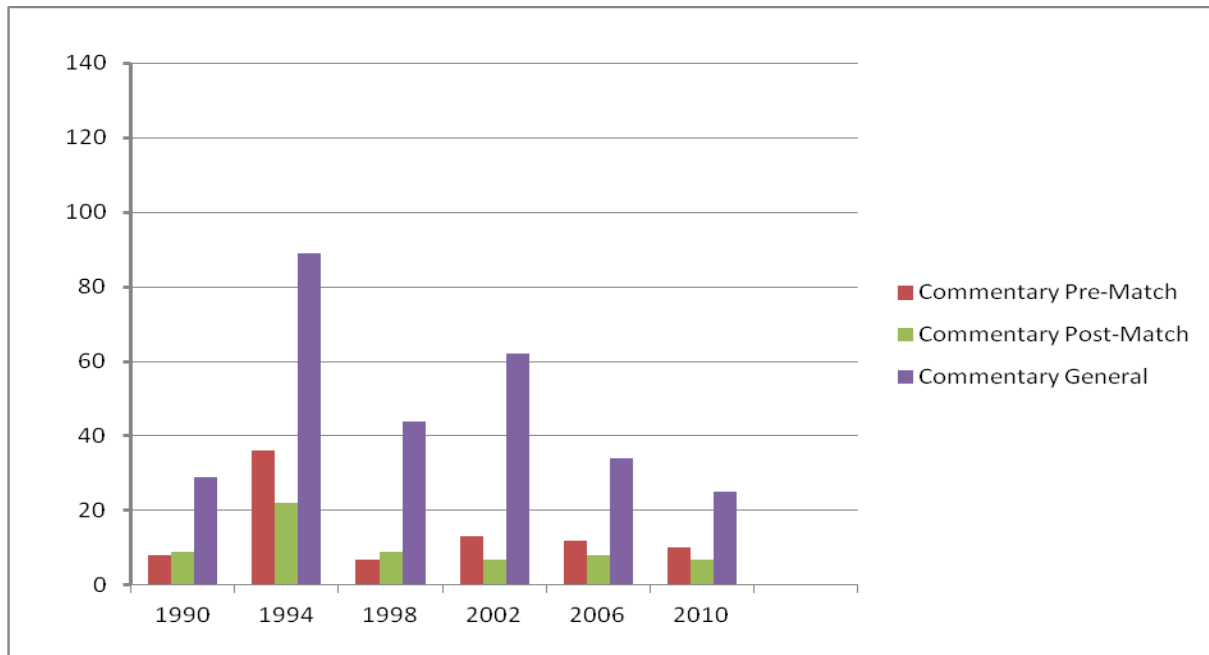


Figure 3. *USA Today* articles covered the FIFA World Cup in areas (pre-match, post-match and general) of major categories.

RQ2: Thematic Analysis of *USA Today* Coverage of the 1990-2010 FIFA World Cup Tournaments

The thesis's second research question relates to the themes *USA Today's* emphasized in the reportage and commentary pieces published about FIFA World Cup tournament soccer during its six tournaments held from 1990 to 2010. Using the methods suggested by Boyatzis (1998) and others, it was found that the following themes predominated: statistics, history, atmosphere, drama, and political, social, and international relations affairs.

Statistics

Statistics are crucial to the reporting of any sporting event. Moreover, journalism is a field that cherishes statistics because they add a great deal of factual information to stories. *USA Today's* news stories emphasized a variety of statistics. Not only do such statistics tell readers about each game's outcomes, but, about the histories of various World Cup

tournaments and their winners and losers. Since the tournament is not as popular in the U.S. as the rest of the world (*USA Today*, June, 8, 1990), the newspapers utilize statistics to foster awareness of the tournament. Common statistics included various country's tournament team rankings, scores, and statistics concerning individual teams through their histories.

Rachel Shuster, a *USA Today* reporter, who included statistics in her writing to create awareness of the game and the tournament, wrote an article titled "Give U.S. team credit: Sport is here to stay." Published during the 1994 tournament, Shuster's article stated the following:

The Soccer Industry Council of America reports more than 12 million children and 4 million adults played soccer at least once last year, including almost 7 million females. More than 7 million, adults and children, played at least 25 days.

An article titled "Gaining Foothold in Soccer's World Cup," published by *USA Today* at the start of the 1994 tournament, provides statistics on America's involvement in the tournament. Focused primarily on statistics, it can be inferred that its purpose was to tell Americans why they should care about the tournament.

The way *USA Today* writers treated statistics during the 1990 tournament differs from the way they have been treated in regard to more recent events. In 1990, statistics tended to provide general information and create awareness of the tournament, game, matches and teams. But as America's team began to appear more frequently, the statistics included in the news articles allowed for more in-depth news treatments. Furthermore, readers were given statistics that allowed them to analysis more deeply the performance of various players and teams. With the continuing growth of soccer in the U.S. (Barnes, et al, 1998), as observed by the study, perhaps

the newspaper utilized this strategy since the knowledge of American FIFA World Cup readers in 1990 was not as deep as it ought to be today.

Early reportage in the newspaper tended to provide statistics without background information or further analysis. For example, a 1990 *USA Today* article by Paul Oberjuerge and Frank Bertucci, stated, “England trailed 2-1 with eight minutes of regulation time remaining, but Lineker made his first penalty shot after being knocked down in the penalty area by defender Benjamin Massing.”

But the *USA Today* articles covered tournaments of recent years were more than just covering statistics. For example, in the article published during 2006 FIFA World Cup by *USA Today*, the reported provided insights on how statistics came about. Moreover, the reported provided more statistics apart from usual score statistics. Andy Gardiner stated this in the article:

Next-to-last: America's lack of offense has been startling. According to FIFA's statistics, the only shot on goal was Reyna's drive off a post in the 28th minute against Czech Republic. That's by far the lowest total after two games for any of the tournament's 32 teams. Angola is next-to-last with four.

History

The analysis of *USA Today*'s reportage and commentary revealed that the history of the game and tournament was of great interest to the paper's writers. This theme can be broken into three categories: historical relationships between nations and tournaments; tournament events that make history; and past events of the tournament that are consistent with the tournament.

Throughout the texts studied, writers used historical information to frame the relationship between nations, teams, and the tournament. In addition, history has been used to explain how teams became underdogs or favorites to win. For example, one story described how the U.S was not favored to win in 1990, 1998, and 2002, offering insight into why this has been the case. More specifically, articles discuss the fact that it took the U.S. 40 years to gain the opportunity to participate in the tournament. Before 1990, the U.S hadn't competed in the tournament since 1950. Moreover, the story shows that U.S has also not been a strong contender until recent years. Jeff Zillgitt, in "Brazil will face 'better' U.S. team," published on June 29, 1994, uses history to frame U.S as the underdog. He wrote, "Soccer superpower against overwhelming underdog...mighty Brazil against the upstart USA.... That's the matchup Monday at Stanford, Calif... Brazil and the USA have met five times, with Brazil winning all five."

Many articles highlighted developments that made history even when the focus of the article was not on that particular issue. For example, Diego Maradona's retirement statement, Bulgaria's win against the favored German team, and Spain's interest in the list of Cup winners, were covered in many articles. Regarding a semifinal pre-match between Argentina and West Germany, a July 5, 1990, article emphasized Maradona and his coach instead of the game. Its author wrote, "Diego Maradona says Sunday will be his World Cup farewell.... Argentina coach Carlos Bilardo also will retire after the final against West Germany."

In the article covering the quarter-final game between England and Cameroon, Paul Oberjuerge emphasized how the outcome of the game would be of historical importance in the history of Cameroon's team. He wrote, "Lineker's two penalty kicks ended a superb run by Cameroon, the first African team to advance past the second round in tournament history."

Another historical milestone noted in the coverage of the 1994 World Cup concerned the first time a penalty-kick won the tournament for a team. John Harrell started the lead of the post-match article of the 1994 final as follows: “Brazil is the World Cup champion, but only after a less-than-scintillating scoreless draw Sunday with Italy was resolved in the first penalty-kick shootout championship match in history.”

Atmosphere

The atmosphere of FIFA World Cup tournaments is a common theme in *USA Today* news stories and commentary pieces. The term atmosphere means essentially the feeling that permeates the tournament and that likely has an effect on fans. Examples of words that denote atmosphere include “tense,” “relaxed,” or “frenzied.” As this study found, *USA Today* writers often described a tournament or game’s atmosphere in their stories, especially in relation to games where powerhouse and underdog teams were competing. Examples of events that journalists have noted for their intense atmospheres include Brazil’s 3-0 loss to France in the 1998 final, and when Cameroon became the first African nation to make it to the quarter final in 1990. For example:

Players from Cameroon, a quarterfinalist for the first time, are looking forward to a first-class welcome home. Businessmen in Cameroon are planning to shower the players with cars and cash, and the Cameroon soccer federation also will pay thousands in bonuses.

And the author of an article that reported the victory of Argentina against Italy wrote the following on the game’s atmosphere: reported on the following game atmosphere:

Two people were killed, 16 people injured, including four police officers, and 207 people arrested in celebrations in Buenos Aires following Argentina's semifinal victory against Italy. About 30,000 frenzied revelers packed downtown streets after the game ended Tuesday, smashing windows, rocking buses and looting 38 stores.

Drama

In giving readers in-depth coverage of the tournaments, the study found that tournament drama was a significant element in the FIFA World Cup articles. The stories were coded as dramatic if unusual or exciting things appeared to draw attention away from other matters. This was a prominent theme in the sample's news and commentaries pieces. The actions regarded as dramatic happened on the field (players), in the stadium stages (fans), and beyond the stadium (public). In addition, dramatic statements from players, coaches, analysts, commentators and fans are part of this category. Examples gleaned from the *USA Today* coverage include the following:

Argentina coach Diego Maradona has vowed to run through the streets of Buenos Aires naked should his team win the World Cup" (June, 10, 2010).

And,

The northern Italian city of Turin is bracing for thousands of English and West German soccer fans, appealing for peace and issuing firm warnings against rowdy behavior. Because the threat of fan violence hangs over Wednesday's match, more than 5,000 riot police have been put on alert (July 3, 1990).

Political and Social Affairs

One of FIFA's (the governing board of the tournament) policies prohibits politics from interfering in the game. In line with this, *USA Today* reporter Mike Bambach wrote, "We're reluctant to mix sports and politics or sports and religion" (*USA Today*, June, 17, 2010). Nevertheless, political and social affairs are at times emphasized in the World Cup stories and commentary pieces. In fact, the coverage of some tournaments is nearly overshadowed in some cases by news of political and social issues. This is consistent with the argument that the FIFA World Cup is more than a sporting event. Manzenreiter and Horne (2006) pointed out that mega sports events like the FIFA World Cup are best understood within their broader political and social contexts. In the midst of the coverage of the 1990 tournament, for example, are references to the fact that Romanian fans asked for political asylum in Italy. In addition, the political and social importance of the fact that South Africa hosted the 2010 tournament is also prominent in tournament coverage. The following quotations demonstrate how political and social affairs became important themes in *USA Today* FIFA World Cup coverage.

The fans, who came to the tournament with the Romanian team as a reward for their roles in the December revolution, say they have been betrayed by President-elect Ion Iliescu. (*USA Today*, June 9, 1990).

And,

This year's World Cup is also symbolic -- of how far South Africa has come. Despite its bedeviling problems, it is a vibrant modern democracy, much to the surprise of skeptics who thought it would descend into chaos. Its citizens are newly energized by their success at getting facilities built on schedule. The World Cup is a statement, as well -- that the continent of Africa need not remain forever

impoverished if it can escape its history of political instability and corruption
(*USA Today*, June 14, 2010).

This theme illustrates that the tournament does not exist in a vacuum. In fact, the political and social issues that surround the tournament add to its interest among the people of the world. In addition, the tournament essentially becomes a context within which political and social disputes or debates are addressed and, at times, even resolved. Romanian fans were rewarded for attending the Cup after they sought to ignite a political revolution. Moreover, the action of South Africa to host the FIFA World Cup heightened expectations not only about the spectacle itself but also about the benefits that would accrue to South Africa and the rest of Africa (Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed, 2010).

International relations

The theme of international relations was indicated by the great amount of journalistic attention paid to competition between national teams based on issues that have nothing to do with the game itself. For example, when South Korea competes with Northern Korea, or when newly formed Southern Sudan plays against Northern Sudan, news writers stress the tensions that arise when they face off on the field that have little to do with their actual matches and technical issues. When U.S played Iran in the 1998 tournament in France, *USA today* focused more coverage on the relationships between these nations than the actual match. The title of the article by Marco R. della Cava, published on June 22, 1998, was “Iran kicks U.S. from Cup, 2-1 on the field, in the stands, politics just didn't matter.” Moreover, della Cava’s story included the following references to the strife between the two nations in his story: “Celebrating from Lyon to Tehran, fans watched their countrymen take on the nation once dubbed the "Great Satan." The

game was viewed as a step forward in U.S.-Iran relations. The game was played amid diplomatic optimism.” And, the story reported the following statement made by President Bill Clinton: "As we cheer today's game between American and Iranian athletes, I hope it can be another step toward ending the estrangement between our nations.”

RQ3: The Characterization of the FIFA World Cups: 1990-2010 by the USA Today

The thesis’s third research question relates to the way *USA Today* news writers characterize the tournament’s importance to America and its citizens across the six tournaments studied in the thesis. The following characterizations of the relative importance of the tournament were identified: 1) The World Cup is not for America; 2) the World Cup is the hope of U.S. soccer; 3) soccer is not an American TV sport; 4) soccer is a simple and poor game; and, 5) the World Cup is a patriotic sporting event.

Not for America

It is difficult to argue with the idea that the FIFA World Cup is still struggling to gain popularity in the U.S. The study reveals that, across the six tournaments, a number of *USA Today* reporters and editorial writers stated or implied that the tournament is not for Americans. This is interesting in light of the fact that the number of Americans watching the tournament on TV or on the Internet is on the rise.

In 1990, many articles stated or inferred that the FIFA World Cup is not, and never will be, an event that would capture the hearts of Americans. This low appreciation of the tournament led some major sponsors to stay away from 1990 U.S World Cup team, according to *USA Today*. Michael Hiestand, a *USA Today* reporter, wrote that the FIFA World Cup was

not easy to sell: “It's a tough sell: The 1990 U.S. World Cup team attracted only three major sponsors - Anheuser-Busch, Chiquita Brands and Adidas - which put up a total of about \$ 1 million.”

In 1994, when the U.S hosted the Cup, some *USA Today* writers stated that more Americans were becoming interested in the tournament, and/or that the country's hosting of the tournament was an important moment in the history of the its relationship with the FIFA World Cup. For example, the authors of one of the stories published during the 1994 tournament stated, "I'm seeing a lot of Americans hyped up about soccer that weren't even interested in it before the World Cup began."

Across the coverage of the 1998, 2002, 2006 and 2010 tournaments, *USA Today* reporters' characterizations of the events' relationship with America have been going back and forth. According to *USA Today*, the contributions of the Cup to Major League Soccer (MLS), and the strong participation of the U.S men and women soccer national teams in the tournament, have had an impact on the tournament and game's status in the U.S. As soccer TV and Internet viewing audiences rise, the MLS is becoming more popular and the presence of U.S national teams is very strong in the soccer sphere. However, the study also found that characterizations of the FIFA World Cup as “not for America” are still present. According to Marco R. della Cava, “As long as American soccer remains the casual sport of middle-class suburbanites and their elementary school offspring, it won't penetrate gain salience within U.S. popular culture” (2006). In addition, Christine Brennan wrote in 2010,

To be sure, golf chugs along with the U.S. Women's Open, and baseball plays through the weekend. Mostly, though, the week is so devoid of big American

sports news that it makes you wonder what might have been if we as a sports nation still cared about what the rest of the world pays most attention to, the soccer World Cup.

The FIFA World Cup, the hope of U.S Soccer

In the mid-twentieth century, approximately 40 years of U.S. dormancy on soccer's big stage killed the game as a professional sport in America. That said, analysis of *USA Today's* coverage of the six FIFA World Cups held during the 1990-2010 period indicates the tournament is considered of crucial importance in the development of American soccer. Many *USA Today* articles highlighted the fact that the strong participation and success of the U.S national team in the Cup is changing the position of soccer in the U.S. For example, Mike Voitalla of Gannett News Service, in 1990 reported for the *USA Today* that "the U.S. team's passage into the second round ignited interest in the sport that previously was considered popular in this country only on the participatory level."

Various *USA Today* articles reveal the importance the U.S.'s hosting of the cup had for the professionalization of soccer in the country. Taylor Buckley, for example, wrote, "Now we learn FIFA, the world soccer federation. And we have discovered that soccer is precisely what we want in sports in the U.S: Entertainment. Now I get it." And Mike Voitall wrote in 1994 about his discovery that it is possible to enjoy the game without hating the opposition.

The growing strength of U.S teams over the period of the study may be having an impact on Americans' sentiments about soccer. As one writer put it, "Maybe the USA's success in the World Cup will encourage greater appreciation of the game in America." In addition, the article discussed the American Major League Soccer, which held its first season

in 1996. According to its author, although the MLS might be struggling, the World Cup, which started in 1930, is still flourishing (*USA Today*, June 23, 2006).

Not American TV sports event

Although statistics show increases in the FIFA World Cup U.S. viewership (Nielsen, 2010), thematic analysis of the *USA Today* news stories and commentary pieces indicate that the tournament is not a popular on American TV because it doesn't lend itself to what Americans consider to be exciting television viewing. Soccer is in the category of sports most Americans would rather play than watch (*USA Today*, 2006). *USA Today* writer Rose Nance wrote, in 1990, that soccer is "not a game geared to TV." Unlike football, basketball, and many other popular American sports, which have frequent time outs, soccer's action is nearly continuous. This doesn't allow for as many commercial breaks, a fact that interferes with commercial television's predominant revenue stream model. Rose Nance emphasized this problem by quoting former FIFA president, Joao Havelange, who suggested that the game be split games into four quarters instead of two halves, to allowing a three-minute break between each quarter for TV commercials to increase income.

Expanding on the theme that soccer would never be a big sport in the U.S., Michael Hiestand, who wrote for *USA Today* during the 2002 FIFA World Cup, pointed to additional reasons why the event and its game (soccer) will never draw a huge American audience. He stated, "You've heard why soccer's World Cup will never be a U.S. TV hit. It has too many foreigners, not enough U.S. success and action Americans otherwise never watch. It's often held too many time zones away. And there's too little scoring." In addition, he asserted that soccer hasn't thrived on U.S. television because the 90-minute game takes 90 minutes, unlike the three

hours of a "one-hour" American football game. He asserted that soccer will never be popular on American television (USA Today, 2006).

Soccer's Appeal as a Simple and Economical Sport

Another theme within *USA Today's* characterizations of the relationship between soccer and the United States relates to the fact that soccer is different from most American sports, which have complicated rules and require heavy investments in equipment. In a 1990 *USA Today* story, Roscoe Nance described soccer as a "game whose rules are easily understood wherever you live in the world." Indeed, soccer succeeds in most countries because it is the simplest game to start to play, and because only a ball is required, soccer goals can be made from trees, a garage door, or even the gap between two chairs in the living room (*USA Today*, 2006). In a July 7, 2006, article published by *USA Today*, Marco R. Della Cava quoted Randy Roberts, a historian at Purdue University, who said, "It's worth noting that the sports that gain popularity in any culture tend to have great appeal with the lower classes. That's true with soccer in the rest of the world." And Desmond Armstrong, writing for *USA Today*, in 1990, wrote:

Historically, soccer is a poor man's sport. Maradona and Pele come from poverty-stricken backgrounds. In the USA, soccer is a suburban sport. When we tap into all segments of this country, then you'll find a player with hunger and more desire. That will make for a more aggressive, attractive and competitive brand of soccer.

American Patriotism and the World Cup

Although the FIFA World Cup is only a game, it offers fans, including those in America, opportunities to express their feelings of national patriotism. This theme is evident throughout the articles and commentary pieces studied in the research. *USA Today* reporter Charles Cuttone, discussed this in an article published in 1994, the year the America hosted the tournament. He wrote that a U.S win would appeal to Americans' sense of patriotism. In addition, he labeled the last-minute heroic moves of Italian star Roberto Baggio and stunning upsets by Bulgaria against Germany as acts of patriotism. Therefore, when players are on the pitch (field), the fans who cheer them on are doing so not only for their own pleasure but because they are fighting for their nations. Christine Brennan, who wrote for *USA Today* in 2010, argued that the World Cup is not really about soccer. It is a big event, and Americans adore big events. The World Cup encourages nationalistic pride, and nationalism is something that Americans are really good at. With all its trappings – rivalries, flags, anthems, and contentious team brackets – the World Cup inspires a kind of patriotic consciousness.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

By utilizing quantitative content analysis, as well as Boyatzis's (1998) inductive thematic analysis and the five steps of analyzing news articles suggested by Grunwald and Rupa (2010), the thesis studied the amount, scope, and nature of *USA Today's* coverage of the six FIFA World Cups that took place over the period 1990 to 2010. The findings consist of data on the amount of coverage given to these six World Cups by the newspaper, and a list of themes that indicate what the writers of the stories emphasized in their coverage, as well as themes that reveal how they have characterized the relationship between the FIFA World Cup, and the game soccer more generally, to the United States. This section discusses these findings more fully.

RQ1: How much sports coverage did *USA Today* give FIFA World Cups tournaments from 1990 to 2010?

As explained in Chapter three, *USA Today* devoted space in its news and sports sections to the coverage of the FIFA World Cups from 1990-2010. The total number of all articles was 1,079 reportage and commentary pieces. Since no previous studies amass data on the amount of American newspaper coverage allotted to the World Cup, it is impossible to make a claim about the magnitude of the coverage. Interestingly, however, after the 1994 tournament, which saw the highest number of stories and commentary pieces, there has been a decline in their numbers in every subsequent tournament. Considering that so many journalists and soccer promoters have stated that interest in the tournament is on the rise in the U.S., one would not expect that the number of stories and commentary pieces published in *USA Today* would be dwindling.

It seems obvious that the relatively high number of articles and commentary pieces published in 1994 – a total of 414 – relates to the fact that the tournament was played in the United States. But since then, the number of stories published in *USA Today* has declined with every tournament. This is surprising for several reasons. For one thing, many writes have stated that there interest among Americans in soccer and the tournament is growing.

Also, it was thought that the historical import of the fact that the tournament was held in South Africa in 2010 would draw more attention from the newspaper than it did. In fact, of the six tournaments studied in the research, the 2010 event attracted the least amount of coverage – 101 articles and commentary pieces.

In addition, the dwindling number of news articles is surprising because, in recent years, the U.S soccer national team has made a growing presence in the tournament.

Finally, considering that more Americans are watching the World Cup on television and on the Internet than ever before, it's interesting that *USA Today's* coverage of the event is on the wane. Indeed, as the 2010 Nielsen ratings demonstrate, more than 120 million U.S viewers watched at least one minute of FIFA World Cup telecasts. But perhaps this seeming anomaly can be explained by the fact that the newspaper realizes that it is fruitless to compete with audiences developing allegiance to online media. Many traditional and non-traditional media outlets report and comment on how the Internet and social media, especially social networking, have begun to seriously affect news organizations and how they operate (Harper, 2010). Social media enables people to be content creators than content readers (Safko, and Brake, 2010). Therefore, social media may have impacted the coverage of the tournament and perhaps the decrease in quantity of coverage will be observed.

RQ2: What did *USA Today* sports writers emphasize in their news articles and editorials on the World Cup from 1990 to 2010?

The themes that *USA Today* emphasized in its coverage of the six World Cup tournaments held from 1990 to 2010 include the following: statistics, history, atmosphere, drama, and political, social, and international relations issues. The use of statistics in sports coverage is an essential requirement. But the newspaper articles go beyond the mere recitation of statistics by using them to provide knowledge and awareness of the game.

The use of historical information by many of the authors indicates a desire to inform readers about the long and rich history of the game and WIFA tournament. This is also a reflection of American journalism's need, especially since the early decades of the twentieth century, to provide contextual material that will help the reader understand any story's bigger picture.

The atmosphere and drama themes fall in line with American journalism's penchant for human interest stories that touch on conflict. Such news values have been a staple of journalism since the early days of news reporting.

Finally, these themes—especially those related to political, social and international relations – highlight the global picture of the tournament. As these findings suggest, such themes went well beyond the tournaments' game-oriented activities and events in that they reflect the nature and social perspectives of participating nations. For example, U.S. diplomat Henry Kissinger, an ardent soccer fan, covers the tournament for the *Los Angeles Times*. In 1986, Kissinger wrote an analysis linking the styles of play – including the shifts in emphasis from offense to defense – to nations' cultural and political heritage (*USA Today*, 1990). Any reporter who writes about the FIFA World Cup should be keen in highlighting these issues.

RQ3: How did *USA Today* news writers who covered FIFA World Cup events from 1990-2010 characterize the connection between the tournament and the people of the United States?

As the findings as described in chapter three indicate, *USA Today* has characterized the relationship between the tournament and game of soccer and the people of the United States in the following ways: 1) The World Cup is not for America; 2) the World Cup is the hope of U.S. soccer; 3) soccer is not an American TV sport; 4) soccer is a simple and poor game; and, 5) the World Cup is a patriotic sporting event.

Such characterizations of the relationship between America and the World Cup tournament and the game of soccer in some ways appear to contradict each other. On the one hand, writers emphasize, especially in the early tournaments researched in the thesis that the World Cup and soccer are not for Americans. On the other hand, some authors claim that the World Cup is the hope of U.S. soccer. In fact, it would be odd if these perspectives failed to differ, because it's not reasonable to expect that *USA Today's* journalists would agree with each other.

In addition, the fact that so many writers have characterized the tournament and the game of soccer as “not for Americans” is not surprising considering the tremendous investment Americans have made to sports such as baseball, basketball, and football (Fort, 2000). Indeed, one of the precipitators of the love-hate relationship between Americans and the FIFA World Cup comes from the fact that so many Americans, who are used to the country's big sports, claimed that it is boring. Watching a soccer match for 90-minute, with only one break, is a much

different experience than watching basketball and football, where the clock is frequently stopped for a variety of purposes.

One of the biggest anomalies in *USA Today* writers' characterizations of the relationship between the World Cup and American sports fans over the past six tournaments relates to the references growth in U.S. television and Internet audiences (Nielsen, 2010). One would think that, with World Cup viewing up in the U.S., journalists would discuss how this could be an indication that the nature of the relationship between the U.S. and World Cup soccer is changing.

CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was to explore the coverage of the FIFA World Cups of 1990-2010. Through the use of quantitative and qualitative content analysis, the thesis explored the scope and nature of *USA Today's* World Cup coverage. The more than one thousand World Cup-related articles published in the newspaper over the six events held during these two decades revealed a considerable amount of enlightening information. For one thing, although writers suggest that World Cup soccer is growing in stature in the U.S., the data gathered in the research do not support such contentions. Without a doubt, the tournament and soccer still face challenges in the United States.

While the quantitative content analysis and qualitative thematic analysis methods used in the research uncovered valuable findings, it's important to state that this is only an exploratory study involving analysis of one newspaper's World Cup coverage. Future research should delve further into the amount and nature of American press coverage of the World Cup tournament by looking at others sources of soccer coverage. In addition, it would be interesting to explore the perception of American sports reporters on the FIFA World Cup, perhaps through interviews.

These professionals play a big role in framing the event and the game to Americans, and such a study could help to identify the factors that influence their writing about the World Cup.

Finally, future research could not only focus on the coverage of the tournament, but pursue in depth studies of leagues involve soccer's clubs, such as America's Major League Soccer. This would make it possible to delve into clubs' hidden agendas, as well as into how sports writers frame the clubs that participate in the tournaments. However, since this study concentrated only on the FIFA Men's FIFA World Cups, it will be crucial to explore the media coverage of FIFA Women's World Cup tournaments.

In conclusion, while the thesis has unearthed information and perspectives that invite further research, its findings will be of interest to anyone with an interest in the World Cup and soccer more generally. Hopefully, this thesis is just the beginning of a long line of inquiry into U.S. journalistic coverage of the FIFA World Cup.

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