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# 4,000: A Rhetorical Analysis of FIFA's Media Response to Human Rights Abuses in Preparation for the 2022 World Cup

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### Citation: Pilot Scholars Version (Modified MLA Style)

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4,000:  
A Rhetorical Analysis of FIFA's Media Response to Human Rights Abuses in Preparation for  
the 2022 World Cup

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Organizational Communication Capstone Project  
University of Portland  
Fall 2014  
CST 533  
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### Abstract

On September 25, 2013 *The Guardian* released a report that alleged human rights abuses at the construction sites for the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar. Further investigation from the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) has estimated that over 4,000 migrant workers will die before a soccer ball is kicked in 2022. Subsequent reports claim that the abuses and deaths have continued since the initial *Guardian* report. Despite these reports, as of December 2014, the 2022 FIFA World Cup will still take place as planned. Using rhetorical analysis based on Michel Foucault's method of genealogy, this research analyzes how FIFA uses rhetoric in the media to maintain organizational power in the face of these human rights abuse allegations. The findings indicate that FIFA's use of contradictory rhetoric and distancing rhetoric regarding their responsibility towards the workers' rights problems helps to establish and maintain a favorable subjective truth about FIFA's role the situation. Inoculation theory is applied to further explain how this sort of rhetoric helps FIFA to maintain power and remain inactive on the human rights issue.

*Keywords: FIFA, World Cup, Human Rights, Rhetorical Analysis, Michel Foucault, Inoculation Theory*

*“In the end, I found it hard to be too hostile towards globalization. For all its many faults, it has brought soccer to the far corners of the world, and into my life.”* – Franklin Foer, Author of *How Soccer Explains the World: An Unlikely Theory on Globalization* (2004, p. 18).

*“In fact, these working conditions and the astonishing number of deaths of vulnerable [migrant] workers go beyond forced labour to the slavery of old where human beings were treated as objects. There is no longer a risk that the World Cup might be built on forced labour. It is already happening.”* – Adian McQuade, director of Anti-Slavery International, on the 2022 World Cup in Qatar (Pattison, 2013).

## **Introduction**

On December 2, 2010 international soccer’s governing body, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) awarded the 2022 World Cup hosting rights to Qatar. Almost immediately, the decision faced harsh criticism for the country’s climate (where temperatures can reach over 50<sup>0</sup> Celsius or 120<sup>0</sup> Fahrenheit during the summer months when the tournament is played), as well as allegations of corruption and bribery in the bidding process (Oliver, 2014) (Oliver, 2014). Nevertheless FIFA and its president, Sepp Blatter, were adamant that the decision to hold the tournament in Qatar would not be reversed. With the tournament secured, Qatar started work on an estimated \$100 billion in infrastructure upgrades that include a new airport, roads, hotels, and five new stadiums (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 2013). Almost three years later, on September 25, 2013, British newspaper *The Guardian* released a report titled, “Revealed: Qatar’s World Cup ‘slaves’” (Pattison, 2013). This scathing report alleges that many migrant workers were brought into Qatar to build the massive infrastructure needed for the tournament only to face terrible and dangerous working conditions, which are likened to modern day slavery:

This summer [2013], Nepalese workers died at a rate of almost one a day in Qatar, many of them young men who had sudden heart attacks. The investigation found evidence to suggest that thousands of Nepalese, who make up the single largest group of labourers in Qatar, face exploitation and abuses that amount to modern-day slavery, as defined by the

International Labour Organisation, during a building binge paving the way for 2022. (Pattison, 2013)

Further accusations from the report allege that workers' wages are being withheld, passports are being confiscated, workers are being barred from leaving the country, and workers are living in unsanitary living quarters with up to 12 people per room. According to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), an estimated 4,000 workers will die in the preparation for the World Cup (Booth, Qatar World Cup construction 'will leave 4,000 migrant workers dead', 2013).

In the face of international criticism and scrutiny, FIFA has pledged to address the issue (Gibson, Qatar accused of dragging its feet over treatment of migrant workers, 2014). Yet over a year has passed since *The Guardian* published their article and accounts of working conditions in Qatar reveal that very little has changed. The conditions are still unsanitary and unsafe (Gibson, Qatar accused of dragging its feet over treatment of migrant workers, 2014). Workers are still being paid low wages, if receiving any payment at all (Booth & Pattison, 2014). According to these sources, there is large disconnect between FIFA's rhetoric and expressed values, and their actions (or lack thereof). Despite FIFA's claims that its values, principles, and ethics are being violated by the migrant abuses, the problem continues (Al Jazeera, FIFA 'not responsible for national policies', 2014).

## **Literature Review**

### **FIFA as a Globalized Institution**

There are several large entities that work together to produce the World Cup (such as FIFA, national and local governments, and multinational corporate sponsors) as well as countless smaller actors (such as individual players, coaches, administrators, local business owners, stadium maintenance workers, and construction workers). While all of these entities work

together to create the World Cup, FIFA is the governing body responsible for organizing the tournament. They are in charge of choosing the host country to stage their tournament after an extensive bidding process in which countries spend millions of dollars to *propose* that their country hosts the event. For the 2022 event, the three front running countries were the United States, Australia, and Qatar and they spent \$5 million, \$42.7 million, and \$200 million on their proposals, respectively (Peters, 2013). This magnitude of monetary expense indicates that there is significant global prestige in hosting the event. When FIFA announced that South Africa was to host the 2010 event, the lead organizer of the tournament said, “People will see we are African. We are world-class” (Zirin, 2014, p. 156). The political emphasis of the World Cup is exactly that – to showcase your country to the world, through FIFA’s tournament. South Africa ended up spending over \$3 billion to host the month long tournament, but in return it received what the government called, “An intangible legacy” (Imray, 2012).

The mere idea of a global sport tournament implies an economic and cultural exchange. However, though the World Cup has been an intercontinental event since its inception, according to Simon Kuper and Stefan Szymanski (2009) the tournament didn't truly globalize until the 1980s: “Though most people on the planet lived in Asia, the continent’s only representative at the World Cup of 1978 was Iran” (p. 294). However, this date also coincides with when scholars started to, independently, discuss globalization as it emerged out of the embers of the cold war (Kaldor, 2010). In fact, it wasn’t until the 1998 World Cup in France that more than one team from the Asian continent participated in the World Cup finals<sup>1</sup>. In many ways, the rise of emerging economies in a globalized world, particularly in Asia, has also mirrored the rise of Asian teams in the World Cup. This highlights an important concept: Just as the modern world

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<sup>1</sup> The term “finals” refers to the 32-team tournament based in a specific country. Technically speaking, any team that participates in the extensive qualifying is a participant in the World Cup.

has been and is constantly being redefined by the forces of globalization, so too is FIFA and the World Cup being remolded by those same forces.

Cynthia Stohl (2005) presented six processes that unify all theories of globalization (p. 247). Though all six of these processes have relevance to the human rights abuses in the Qatar World Cup, the two that this research is primarily concerned with are numbers 1 and 2. This framework can give context to the World Cup as it exists in a contemporary and globalized world.

The first process that Stohl presents – the dramatic increase of economic interdependence worldwide – explains that actions on the global stage are increasingly intertwined, as facilitated through communication. She states that:

The first dynamic generates and is generated by new forms of organizational arrangements and communication processes. Interdependence necessitates flexible forms of cooperation within and between traditional and emerging organizational structures at the local, state, regional, and global levels. (p. 248)

Complex and multi-layered, international coordination is at the core of the World Cup. FIFA (the global organization) works with the Qatari government (a national organization), who then contracts the construction out to companies (who can be either local, national, or international), who then hire construction workers (sometimes local, but in this case mostly international).

This international network is dependent on the communication processes between the various levels involved. For example, FIFA has communicated a clear standard for their stadiums to be built. FIFA's reputation is therefore tied to the construction companies who are tasked with building stadiums and infrastructure to meet that high standard. Likewise, the construction companies derive their capital from the Qatari government and sponsors who provide the investment for the tournament. The construction workers are dependent on the

construction companies for their work compensation. This connection is where the system is breaking down. The breakdown is happening at the lowest level of the hierarchy of interdependence that FIFA is relying on for their tournament to take place. While FIFA as an organization is distanced from the workers who are constructing their stadiums in that they are neither directly paying the workers (that duty technically falls to the private construction companies), nor are they directly responsible for worker oversight (as that duty technically falls to the Qatari government), the reality of a globalized event and world, as Stohl points out, is interconnectedness. Though FIFA is not directly connected to the workers, they are economically intertwined with them and therefore, as the lead organizer of the tournament, should bear some of the responsibility for worker welfare in the buildup for their event.

The second process Stohl presents – the intensification and deepening of material, political, and cultural exchanges – helps to explain the forces that have pushed migrant workers into this situation in the first place. Stohl explains that the eroding boundaries in a globalized world are changing everything; from what people talk about, to where they work and live. In this way, the forces of globalization are paradoxically driving money, culture, and labor into concentrated areas as influence spreads globally. Stohl says that:

Communication technologies may mean the end of distance, but location still matters. The very diffuseness of the global system demands concentrated financial infrastructures, management systems, and labor forces. (p. 249)

By its nature, the World Cup is an event that requires a tremendous amount of infrastructure – one that Qatar did not have at the time of the bidding process. Their existing labor force was far too small to completely renovate their infrastructure to meet the needs of the tournament, as the country only has a population of roughly two million people. This means that in order to put on an event that the entire world would partake in, construction contractors had to look outside of



the country for its labor force. Removing the workers geographically however also put them into a damaging political situation. Under Qatar law and the kafala visa system, which ties the workers' visa to one employer who must authorize and release the employee to work elsewhere and/or leave the country, migrant workers are not granted the same rights as Qatari citizens (Pattison, 2013). The Qatari government pledged to reform the system, but little has changed since the promise (Gibson, Qatar accused of dragging its feet over treatment of migrant workers, 2014). Seemingly then, the rights and humanity of the workers was lost somewhere in this cultural and economic exchange that was vital for ensuring that Qatar could host FIFA's event.

### **FIFA's Power**

It is clear by the amount of money countries spent on the hosting bid alone that FIFA has some sort of power to command such a price tag. Michel Foucault defined power as, "a more-or-less organized, hierarchical, coordinated cluster of relations... power is relations; power is not a thing" (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 2002, p. 352). From this perspective, FIFA's power comes from their relationships with every significant soccer body in the world. As the governing body of the sport, FIFA stands atop a global hierarchy from which every football organization derives its legitimacy. There is no higher honor in soccer than winning their tournament: The World Cup. FIFA's power comes from its ability to coordinate the global soccer network. People have consented to FIFA as the dominant group who has the legitimacy to establish a world champion of the sport because they are the only organization with the relationships with and access to the best players in the world.

### **Power derived from discourse**

Social Constructionism proposes that human knowledge and reality is not objective, but rather subjective (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). According to Lindlof & Taylor (2011):

In this view, that meaningfulness is not singular, stable or passively absorbed. Instead, it is dependent on human actors using cultural stocks of knowledge to engage an ambiguous and reactive world and to serve their situated, evolving purposes. (p. 45)

In other words, humans understand the world as constructed through our social situation. Our reality derives from our interpretations of the world around us and not from an objective reality or truth. As much as the world around us is created through our own perceptions, it is also understood through the people and the information that we are exposed to. Therefore, information and those who are granted the permission to disseminate it are given a tremendous amount of influence in shaping perceptions of the world. This is particularly true of the facts of events and situations that people are not directly privy to. For example, unless someone has the ability to travel to Qatari labor sites to see the abuses first hand, the only way to understand that reality is to construct it through the accounts and testimony of those who have. In this way, people grant a tremendous amount of power to the rhetoric of others in shaping their perceptions and understanding of reality.

Foucault's work lines up well with social constructionism as his early work was concerned with discourse as essential to the creation of knowledge and truth (Foss, Foss & Trapp, 2002). He asserted that the entirety of collective knowledge and truth that people accept and understand is one that is created "within the relations inside a discursive formation" (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 2002, p. 350). Foucault lays out three governing rules of discursive power (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 2002). The first is that by granting permission to talk about something, people give that subject empowerment as truth. Conversely, when people do not recognize certain topics of discourse, the resulting silence acts to repress it as an acceptable truth. The second principle is that people listen to the words of some and reject the words of others. Those whose are respected are viewed as a source of truth. The third rule is that speech must be formulated in certain ways

in order for it to be accepted, whether it is through gesture (such as clothing), location (such as a college lecture hall), or medium (such as a newspaper). In this way, the non-verbal context surrounding the discourse determines its ability to become an accepted truth.

Accepting Foucault's rules, it logically follows that the media is crucial for establishing truth and legitimacy in the public discourse. Though discourse is created across all mediums of human communication, the discourse of institutional media (i.e. newspaper, television) is particularly influential because it simultaneously satisfies all three of Foucault's rules. First, through selecting the subjects to talk about, institutional media inherently establishes the topics that are acceptable for the public discourse, thus establishing those topics and, more importantly, the surrounding opinions expressed through the media as the truth. Second, by selecting a limited number of voices to include in the public discourse, the media chooses the individuals who are to be the consistent sources of truth. Third, the medium of discourse itself becomes a source of legitimization. The fact that something is said in a newspaper or on a television in and of itself creates a powerful context for that information, making it much more likely to be accepted and understood as the truth. Existing research in the field of communications supports the notion that the medium and source of a message can significantly affect how the message is understood (Treadwell, 2014, p. 263). Therefore, given that the media is a powerful medium by which truth is constructed and power is granted, studying the way that FIFA's discourse as it appears in the media gives understanding as to how the organization constructs discourse to establish and maintain power.

*RQ 1: What truths about the Qatar World Cup preparation are produced through media discourse?*

**Power as productive and destructive**

Many critics of FIFA's practices are quick to point out the accusations of corruption that continually seem to mar the organization. They argue that FIFA's power comes from its ability to repress people, organizations, and bend entire governments to suit its interests (Oliver, 2014). However, as Foucault points out, power that is obtained solely through repression cannot sustain itself:

If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 2002, p. 354)

To say that FIFA's power comes from its ability to repress ignores the true source of its power: The ability to give the world something incredibly valuable.

The Pew Research Center estimated that at least 3.2 billion people – roughly 46% of the world's population – watched at least one minute of the 2010 World Cup in South Africa (Lipka, 2014). With increased access to technology around the world, it is easy to imagine that those numbers will have increased for the 2014 World Cup in Brazil. Thus, with these numbers in mind, it is easy to see why a country would want to host the tournament. For all of the costs, FIFA has the power to give a country the eyes of the entire world. It is almost impossible to think of another organization in the world, besides perhaps the International Olympic Committee who has to answer to its own political and ethical problems (Zirin, 2014), that has the ability to draw 3.2 billion sets of eyes towards one event.

However, the focus of this research is not on the constructive power that FIFA has, nor is it focused on their destructive power. The focus of this paper is to analyze how FIFA addresses the negative externalities that have come out its constructive power – specifically, the human

rights abuses of migrant workers in Qatar who are building the tournament's extensive infrastructure. One might think that the credibility of such an organization would be undermined by such accusations as condoning and perpetrating slavery. However, while threats have been made by both football and corporate organizations to disengage from FIFA (Reuters, 2014; Gibson, Qatari government admits almost 1,00 fatalities among migrants, 2014), very few entities actually have. Thus, as long as FIFA has the ability to organize the World Cup with full participation and commitment from players, soccer federations around the world, and corporate sponsors, they still hold power. This seems to be a fundamental contradiction – people want the World Cup, but people do not want to condone human rights violations. Yet seemingly, the desire for the World Cup spectacle has won out and though FIFA's reputation may be bruised, their power remains intact.

*RQ 2: How does FIFA's rhetoric help maintain their power?*

### **Methodology**

Foucault's studies on power fell under an investigational method he referred to as *Genealogy*. Genealogy's focus is on summarizing, "the kinds of power-relations which exist in our society... and they extend to which these relations conform to the goals and values which these institutions, practices and habits take as their justifications" (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 2002, p. 361). This research seeks to continue the Foucauldian tradition to analyze how FIFA establishes its power using the media.

### **Data Collection**

For this project, I looked at all articles from *The Guardian (England)* and *Al Jazeera (Qatar)* between September 25, 2013 (the day that *The Guardian* released the article that alleged slavery in Qatar) and November 17, 2014. To narrow results, I used the search term "2022 World

Cup” for *The Guardian* and the term “2022 World Cup Migrant Worker” for *Al Jazeera*. The reason for the two different terms is that *TheGuardian.com* has all the articles relevant to the 2022 World Cup already organized, whereas the term “2022 World Cup” on *Al Jazeera*’s website revealed so many articles that, due to the limitations of their interface, they were only searchable for the previous month. Furthermore, the majority of these articles had little to do with the FIFA World Cup since their search function included any articles with the words, “2022”, “World”, or “Cup”. While searching for coverage of the same issue using two different search terms is an obvious confound, the search functions of each organization made such differentiation necessary. I am confident however that the large number of articles that I retrieved from both websites under the given search terms gave an adequate representation of both organizations’ coverage of the issue.

There were two main reasons for choosing to look at FIFA’s direct statements through newspapers, instead of directly at FIFA’s 2022 Qatar World Cup website (which can be seen here: <http://www.fifa.com/worldcup/qatar2022/news/index.html>). One is that FIFA has released very little direct information on their website with regards to the 2022 World Cup in general and specifically towards the worker abuses. As of December 6, 2014, FIFA had released 11 statements total since September 25, 2013, six of which make mention of the worker abuses. The second reason for choosing newspapers is that this is likely where most people are going to be getting their information on this topic from and therefore this is where FIFA’s statements would hold the most relevance and influence in the public discourse.

Once the search function had revealed a pool of articles, I selected the articles that mentioned migrant workers in the title or subtitle. This produced 91 total articles: 54 articles from *The Guardian* and 37 articles from *Al Jazeera*. From here, I analyzed every article and

pulled all direct quotes attributed to a FIFA representative. These quotes were used as my unit of analysis for this research.

### **Data Analysis**

Once the data was collected, I went through all the direct quotes from FIFA representatives and performed a discourse analysis in the tradition of Foucault's genealogy methods of analyzing rhetoric through studying explicitly stated text and contradictions (Foss, Foss & Trapp, 2002, p. 363). The main purpose of a discourse analysis is to address how the rhetoric surrounding an event, subject, or person affects the perceptions of said event, subject, or person (Treadwell, 2014). Foucault employs an explicit type of discursive analysis in which he did not seek to interpret the meaning behind a person's statements. Instead, Foucault opted to focus on the specific statements that an individual said in order to establish the parameters of truth as they arise out of discourse. As Foss, Foss & Trapp describe:

[Foucault] does not approach discursive analysis by trying to discover latent and invisible elements or 'a hidden element, a secret meaning that lies buried' in manifest discourse. Rather, he hopes to discover the boundaries of acceptability for claims to truth in the discursive formation. (p. 364)

In this way, I approached the quotes for my analysis as directly as possible. In the Foucauldian tradition, my analysis of FIFA statements avoided interpretation and focused instead on what was explicitly stated.

### **Findings**

If I had to select just one quotation to summarize FIFA's position on the migrant worker abuses in Qatar, it would be the following:

"We can tell the country it goes against FIFA's rules, it goes against FIFA's ethics codes. It goes against FIFA's principle. And we can help and change. But we cannot be seen as responsible for what's happening in different countries."  
– Jerome Valcke, FIFA general secretary (Al Jazeera, FIFA 'not responsible for national policies', 2014)

In the above statement, Valcke hits on two themes that are prevalent throughout FIFA's statements in *The Guardian* and *Al Jazeera*. The first theme is *acknowledgement of a problem* in which FIFA states that there is a workers' rights problem. However, this theme occurs to support the more prevalent theme: *Active distancing from responsibility*.

### **Acknowledging the Problem**

Throughout their statements, FIFA acknowledges that a worker exploitation problem exists in Qatar. In this quote from FIFA president, Sepp Blatter, explicitly states that a problem exists in Qatar:

**They have a problem** and we know that, but this is not a question for FIFA. It is one which the state of Qatar must handle, as well as all the construction companies who are responsible for the workers.  
 – Sepp Blatter (Gibson, *The hundreds of migrant workers dying as a brand new Qatar is built*, 2014) (emphasis added)

Even the first word of the statement exists to set diffuse responsibility. By using the pronoun “they” instead of “we,” Blatter is pushing the problem onto another entity. In this instance, he is assigning responsibility to both the Qatari government as well as the construction companies building the stadiums.

### **Distancing from Responsibility**

Acknowledgement of the problem only seemed to serve as a set-up for FIFA's most explicit message: that they do not feel responsible for the workers in Qatar. This sort of rhetoric was not hidden by any means. Rather, FIFA wants there to be no doubt on the subject:

**FIFA is not the United Nations; FIFA is about sport, it's about football... We are not [in Qatar] to discuss with political authorities what they should do and they should not do.** We can discuss with them, and again be the platform for them to meet, to exchange and to make sure they are using football as a tool for change. And that's what we're doing... **But we cannot tell a country what should be their foreign policy. That's not our role.**



– Jerome Valcke, FIFA general secretary on his visit to Qatar to meet with the World Cup planning committee (Al Jazeera, Jerome Valcke: ‘FIFA is not the UN’, 2014) (emphasis added)

FIFA is leaving little to interpret, especially for a Foucauldian analysis that focuses on explicitly stated discourse. Even after the Qatari government announced that they were looking to amend the worker immigration system, FIFA used the opportunity to distance themselves from any responsibility:

**I would like to say again that we are not responsible for the [labour] laws, but we are happy to see that they will be amended.**  
 - Sepp Blatter (Agencies, Blatter: World Cup in Qatar is Not Reversible, 2013) (emphasis added)

Statement after statement makes their position clear: FIFA believes that a problem exists, and they are not responsible for it.

### **Contradictions**

One of the main methods of Foucauldian genealogy is to seek out contradictions in rhetoric to expose power (Foss, Foss & Trapp, 2002). FIFA’s acknowledgement of a problem in the build up for a tournament in which they are the lead organizer combined with the claim that they are not responsible for solving said problem is inherently contradictory. A direct analysis of their quotations shows explicit contradictions even within their own statements. Below is an excerpt from president Sepp Blatter, commenting before a trip to Qatar to meet with country officials:

What has happened now, we are not indifferent to that. We can’t turn a blind eye and say this does not concern us... We can only do something when we see, when we hear and when we know ourselves – it has been confirmed by the Qataris themselves that something is amiss... The worker’s rights will be the responsibility for Qatar and the companies – many of them European companies – who work there. It is not FIFA’s primary responsibility but we cannot turn a blind eye. Yet it is not a direct intervention from FIFA that can change things.

– Sepp Blatter (Gibson & Booth, World Cup 2022: football cannot ignore Qatar worker deaths, says Sepp Blatter, 2013)

There are several noteworthy contradictions in this statement. First, Blatter states that they are not “indifferent” to the situation in Qatar. Next, in the following line he states that, “we can only do something when we see, when we hear and when we know ourselves,” meaning that they can only take action on something when they have personally seen and heard it. Then, in the following sentence, Blatter states, “it has been confirmed by the Qataris themselves that something is amiss.” If all three sentences are taken at face value, then logically FIFA’s lack of indifference and direct evidence of a problem as stated by the governing body of the country should lead to direct action. Yet here we see the crux of FIFA’s contradiction: Blatter states, “It is not a direct intervention from FIFA that can change things.” It is this use of active contradiction that I assert is the rhetorical device helping to maintain FIFA’s power through discourse.

## **Discussion**

### **The Parameters of Truth**

*RQ 1: What truths about the Qatar World Cup preparation are produced through media discourse?*

*“There are three sides to every story: Yours, theirs, and the truth” – Robert Evans*

If we assume that Foucault’s notions of discursive knowledge and truth hold true, then what does FIFA’s use of acknowledgement, responsibility distancing, and contradiction say about parameters of truth that FIFA is attempting to establish through rhetoric? According to Foucault’s rules of knowledge creation through discourse, granting permission to talk about something empowers that subject. Therefore, by simply introducing the idea of FIFA’s lack of

responsibility into the discourse, the idea now becomes part of the discursive truth. In other words, FIFA could say anything about the abuses but the sheer fact that the media grants them word space and a voice in their publication means that statement becomes a part of the discussion. Regardless of whether or not the claims have any basis in objective reality, FIFA's presence in legitimate media gives the organization's perspectives legitimacy as a subjective perspective on reality. FIFA's statements become part of the truth story, and as social constructionists and Foucault would argue, the only way that we can understand and establish the truth is through the story that is told. As part of the truth construction process, people consider the possibility that FIFA is in fact not responsible for the workers, as Blatter and Valcke claim. FIFA's claims would only likely stop being part of the discussion if its claims were to be indisputably challenged, if FIFA changes their position on responsibility, or if their voice disappears from the truth creation discourse all together.

This power is not unique to FIFA. According to Foucault's notions of discursive knowledge, all of the entities that are granted space and voice in the media discourse have the ability to shape the subjective truth by the sheer presence of their voice. For example, the Qatari government has also been granted a significant voice in the media coverage surrounding the worker abuses. Their response has varied from denial of the problem to pledges to fix the issue and, similar to FIFA's rhetoric, has been abstract towards the problem. The unique thing to this particular discursive situation is the nature through which FIFA derives its power - exclusively through its ability to organize and communicate. Governments on the other hand have multiple ways in which they derive and maintain power (i.e. taxes, military, police, etc.). While discursive power is an important tool a government can use to establish and create truth, they have other means for enforcing their power on its citizens. This is an important distinction because this

means that FIFA's authority is exclusively derived through the rhetoric they create and therefore the media discourse takes on extra significance. Therefore the only thing that determines the organization's power is the collection of their communicative acts, which heightens the consequences of their media discourse.

### **Power Through Inoculation Rhetoric**

*RQ 2: How does FIFA use rhetoric to maintain their power?*

The issue of how FIFA uses contradictory rhetoric to maintain power is still thus far unresolved. While people have called out FIFA for being hypocritical in its position, the fact remains that no significant action has been taken against FIFA or Qatar by any organization in the world. This is even in spite of the fact that the United States State Department put Qatar on a human trafficking watch list (Hodal, Kelly, & Roberts, 2014). The action, though symbolic, does nothing in terms of direct consequences. Therefore, FIFA's use of contradictory rhetoric seems to be working, at least to evade significant counter-action.

Previous research in this field has demonstrated that such hypocrisy would undermine FIFA's legitimacy as an authoritative organization (Wagner, Lutz, & Weitz, 2009). This study by Wagner, Lutz, & Weitz (2009), which examined corporate hypocrisy in corporate responsibility statements, further found that abstract statements received less scrutiny. However, they found that rhetoric that employed inoculation tactics were able to significantly lessen the impact of negative and damaging information.

Inoculation theory comes from social psychologist named William J. McGuire (1964) and seeks to explain the mechanisms through which people prevent persuasion. The name of the theory derives from medical inoculation and immunization. Inoculation theory posits that, like medical immunization, an individual can protect attitudes by first presenting weak counter-

attitudes (McGuire, 1964). In doing so, an individual's cognitive immune system builds strength and confidence in its attitude through practice and is better prepared against a much stronger counter-argument in the future that might have otherwise persuaded the individual away from their original attitude. Wagner, Lutz, & Weitz (2009) found that if they used inoculation theory techniques by introducing the prospect of a negative situation that was counter to a company's corporate responsibility statement, it was enough to significantly reduce the negative perception against that corporation. The process works as follows: subjects were introduced to a company's positive corporate responsibility statement, which creates an initial positive attitude towards the company. Then subjects were exposed to the *possibility* that a negative event might have occurred that contradicted the corporate responsibility statement. In the study, this statement served as the inoculation – it was strong enough to challenge the subjects' positive attitude, but not strong enough to overcome it. In the end, the study found that inoculation was enough to lessen the negative perception once subjects found that the negative situation had in fact occurred.

A similar process emerges when applied to FIFA's rhetoric. Despite all the negative criticism, FIFA is still viewed positively in the public eye because they are the gatekeeper for the most beloved sport and sporting event on the planet (it's worth stating again that at least 3.2 billion people, just under half of the world's population, watched at least a minute of the 2010 World Cup). Therefore, people start with an initially positive view of FIFA. Then, by acknowledging that there is a problem in Qatar, FIFA introduces the prospect of a situation that runs counter to their assertion that they support human rights. According to inoculation theory, this rhetoric is the inoculation that prepares people for when they hear about the actual extent and

severity of the situation. It is noteworthy that FIFA only refers to the worker situation as a “problem” but never elaborates on it.

According to the research by Wagner, Lutz, & Weitz (2009), this inoculation alone should be sufficient enough to reduce any negative impact to FIFA’s image. However, FIFA takes it one step further by perpetuating the rhetoric that they are not responsible for the situation. This is where Foucault’s theory intersects inoculation theory. Foucault argues that all reality is subjectively created through discourse. Applied inoculation theory suggests that the general public already has a predisposition to like FIFA and therefore is primed for inoculation to protect them from negative attitudes towards the organization. The public, then, has been inoculated against negative information about FIFA and is also tasked with interpreting a subjectively created reality about the situation. In other words, when it comes to FIFA, people are not neutral. More likely than not, if they like soccer, then the average person has a positive view of the organization because of the good things they produce (i.e. the world’s most popular sporting event). FIFA is therefore starting from a position of power. Any attempts to change attitudes towards FIFA have to therefore overcome two very large obstacles: They must combat FIFA’s subjective reality and they must fight against positive inoculation in favor of FIFA.

### **The Uncertain Future**

Unfortunately, FIFA is using rhetorical devices to maintain an abusive and oppressive system that is predicted to result in the deaths of over 4,000 people. From their rhetoric, it does not appear that FIFA will act to do anything about the abuses without outside pressures:

“[In order for a tournament to be revoked from a country we would need] A real crisis which puts at risk the organization of the World Cup, which puts at risk the safety of a country, **which puts at risk the fact that you bring people to a country and their safety is not ensured**”

– Jerome Valcke (Al Jazeera, Jerome Valcke: ‘FIFA is not the UN’, 2014.  
(Emphasis added).

This statement may be perhaps the saddest and most alarming of any put forth by FIFA. Valcke says that the only thing that can cause the tournament to be revoked from a country is having a situation in which people are brought into the country and their safety is not ensured. The truth is then that FIFA does not view the workers brought into the country as entitled to safety. That entitlement belongs to other people.

As the situation currently stands, the World Cup is still scheduled to kick off in Qatar in 2022.

### **Study Limitations**

Though I analyzed news sources from different countries, including one that I thought would be more aggressive towards Qatar (*The Guardian*) and one that would be more defensive of Qatar (*Al Jazeera*), an analysis of only two news sources is limited. Though the newspapers come from different regions, they both have international perspectives and reach and therefore it could be argued that despite their geographic separation, they are speaking towards similar audiences and interests. Further studies into this topic should look at more newspaper sources that vary in size and location to ensure that the collection of quotations is completely representative of FIFA's contribution to the public discourse.

A second limitation is that this research was conducted on an event that is still ongoing and evolving. There is no way of knowing how this situation is going to turn out until the 2022 World Cup kicks off. By the time this research is completed, unforeseen events could completely change the rhetoric and processes outlined in this research. That being said, if such events do occur, this research will still prove useful in providing a theoretical framework for analyzing any future changes in FIFA's rhetoric surrounding the 2022 World Cup.

### **Further Areas of Research**

The purpose of this study was primarily one of analysis. However, the findings could provide a launching platform for further research, both into FIFA and powerful organizations around the world. For starters, the theoretical framework used for this research is just one of the many that could be employed in looking at organizational communication. Further applied theoretical frameworks would only serve to increase the depth of understanding of this issue.

This research is also not exclusive to FIFA and the World Cup. FIFA is but one of many powerful, multi-national organizations that are increasingly characteristic of a globalized world. As these organizations continue to grow and consume economic, natural, and cultural resources at an ever-quickenening rate, the rate at which they cause damage and promote inequality is accelerating at the same time. More research towards how these organizations use rhetoric and media to establish and maintain power is needed not only for the sake of understanding, but also for researching ways in which to combat abuse and negligence from these large organizations. As the worker abuses in Qatar demonstrate, these problems are no longer exclusive to a single nation, but rather exist on a global stage. Therefore communication research should seek to find ways to combat abusive power that takes into account how the forces of globalization are changing how human beings communicate and interact across the globe.

### **A Final Note**

As a little boy growing up in rural Oregon, I remember playing in the World Cup final against my two border collies in the back yard. Every time I would score a goal against my fence, I would run around the yard and celebrate as a hero to the entire world. Those dreams of World Cup glory stayed with me throughout my entire young life, as I devoted myself to the game for years until I decided to hang up the boots and continue life as an academic. Those



soccer dreams have been my inspiration and guided my life through my most formative years, as is the case for so many children around the world.

Perhaps that is why this research was so difficult for me to conduct. As I read article after article about the worker situation in Qatar, I found it impossible to distance myself impartially as a researcher. 103 days have passed since I started this project at the beginning of the semester on August 27, 2014. If the estimated numbers of a death per day are to be believed, that means that 103 people have died on World Cup construction sites since I started researching. In a way, I feel personally responsible because they are dying from building my dream.

I have always believed in soccer's ability to bring good to the world and promote peace and diversity. It is therefore painful to see such abuses perpetrated in the name of the sport I love so dearly. I still believe in the game's power to promote a better world. However, as this research pointed out, at the moment, this appears to be an uphill battle. Still, for so many reasons, I believe it's a battle worth waging.

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