The Russian-language Twittersphere, the BBC World Service and the London Olympics

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Abstract:
This article presents an analysis of Russian-language tweets generated by interactions between the BBC World Service (BBCWS) and their Russian-speaking audiences during the 2012 London Olympic Games. The BBC's Russian Service was selected as one of the case studies in the wider project reported on in this special section because it is a 'strategic' Language Service with a strong track record in using social media to engage Russian audiences. The main aim of the study was to assess the corporate and public value of BBC World Service's Twitter strategy. Tweets were collected with the use of keywords devised to identify the most popular conversations relating to five key sporting events. The research analysed various themes explored in these conversations, in particular gender, national and cosmopolitan identities, religion and Olympic values. Although the studied sample included a wide spectrum of opinions, these cannot be regarded as representative of present-day Russian society. To get a fuller view of the Russian-language Twittersphere, future studies would need to extend the parameters of the data gathered and analysed. The BBC's Twitter strategy did not produce a significantly large increase in the number of Russian social media users or audiences. Rather, as we demonstrate, the BBC Russian's Twitter presence can be more effectively assessed in qualitative rather than quantitative terms. Our qualitative analysis allowed us to pinpoint a wide range of perceptions and views expressed by citizens in the Russian Federation that would otherwise have not come to light. Most of their tweets were not directly related to the BBC's coverage of the Games at all. Russian tweeters were primarily concerned with Russian affairs, both sports-related and political. Users stated that they were impressed by the British values demonstrated in the course of the Games, especially fair play and multiculturalism, often comparing them favourably to those prevalent in Russia – a sign perhaps of UK soft power at work. However this might also be

due to the fact that, as other studies suggest, Twitter users in Russia tend to be outward-looking. Further studies are required to understand the dynamics of flows of conversation in the Russian Twittersphere and how it intersects with other national social media ecologies but this study has revealed some interesting tendencies and flagged some methodological issues that will be of benefit to future research.

Keywords: Twitter, London Olympics, Russia, soft power, nationalism, gender, religion

Introduction

International news organisations now regard social media as an important part of their audience research (Newman and Levy 2011; Gillespie, Mackay and Webb 2011). Indeed, any contemporary media outlet has to monitor its presence on Twitter and Facebook – and sometimes on other networks – by analysing the content of comments related to its reportage. Our project had a dual purpose: to assess the BBCWS's twitter strategy and report back to the BBC; and, in line with our academic aims to examine the negotiation of national and cosmopolitan identities, gender and religion among Twitter users, and assess the impact of UK soft power tactics on audiences. The tensions between academic and publically engaged research in corporations are discussed elsewhere in this section (Dennis, Gillespie and O'Loughlin, this issue).

The BBCWS chose to incorporate a special tool, the Twitter Module, into its coverage of the Olympic Games following the success of earlier pilots. It should be noted that the BBC's Russian Service was selected to use the Twitter Module from among 27 other Language Services as it is, like the BBC's Arabic and Persian Service, a 'strategic' Language Service in which the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) invests in order to generate soft power benefits and for public diplomacy purposes (Burchill, O'Loughlin, Gillespie and Nieto, this issue). The FCO funded BBCWS at the time of the London Games and although it is currently funded by the UK Licence Fee, the FCO still has the authority to open and close Language Services at will (Gillespie and Webb 2012). The Russian Service also had a strong track record in its successful use of social media to engage Russian audiences.

Prior to the Games, a number of Twitter accounts were selected and their comments were fed directly into online content during the three weeks of the Olympics. The editors of the BBC Russian Service included in their list of participants, which appeared on the Service's main Games-dedicated webpage, a number of Russian journalists (mainly Moscow-based, covering the Games for their respective publications), sports officials, national team members and former athletes, as well as several members of the Russian community in London. The tweets therefore combine Twitter users from Russia and those living in diaspora.

The Twitter Module was the key instrument of the BBCWS's Twitter strategy and therefore the starting point for this study (Dennis, Gillespie and O'Loughlin, this issue). The

BBCWS wanted to use it for a variety of purposes but understanding how audiences behave during the course of global sporting events and identifying patterns in behaviour that could predict future trends and shape social media strategy was one of its primary aims. The Twitter Module also sought to enhance the Olympics-related content by inserting live contributions from audience members. It was expected to provide a means of analysing the audience's reactions to the BBC's stories so that editorial decisions could be adjusted accordingly (Mackay 2011). The exercise proved timely as the 2012 Olympics turned out to be the first mass social media games (Miah 2012), where audience responses featured widely, sometimes overshadowing traditional forms of reportage.

Key questions for our academic research included: how do audiences navigate their way through content and across platforms and use social media in the process? how is Britain represented and perceived through the prism of social media conversations during the London Olympics? to what the extent do Twitter conversations among Russian audiences focus on topics related to the UK (as opposed to their own national sports or political issues)? do national sporting identifications trump the cosmopolitan Olympic Spirit that the Games seek to promote?

The analysis of the Russian-language Twittersphere presented in this article must be read in the context of the wider study of the London Olympics presented in this section, which covered several other strategic Language Services: Persian and Arabic and BBC.com. Although each of these Language Services had its own focus of discussion, we were especially interested in analysing Twitter conversations around a number of common Olympic events – particularly the Opening and Closing ceremonies of the Games where the soft power strategies can be observed with greater clarity.

To make the study as comprehensive as reasonably possible, we included a wide selection of tweets produced by, or as a result of interaction with, seven Twitter accounts deemed the most active among those selected for the Twitter Module. These consisted of two BBC Russian sports reporters, two editors of Russian sports publications, a former Russian Olympic champion turned politician, a sports official representing the Russian Federation and a Russian blogger living in London. Their tweets, together with those mentioning or addressed to them, were filtered by means of keywords devised to identify the most popular conversations related to five chosen events: the opening and closing ceremonies, the women's singles tennis final, the men's volleyball final and the latest visit of President Putin to London. The total number of tweets analysed was 1,874, the total number of accounts they were generated by was 494. The time horizon, 26 July 2012 to 14 August 2012, covered the whole period of the Games as well as a few pre- and post-Olympic days.

Methodology

This section outlines the research methods used in the project, focusing on those specific to its Russian-language component, with the key procedures being the same for all the

researchers involved (see Dennis, Gillespie and O'Loughlin, as well as Procter, Voss and Lvov in this issue for a full account of the methodological framework and wider issues raised)

Account Selection

Our initial plan was to analyse tweets that were related to a number of chosen events and mentioned the BBC Russian Service. To this end, a list of keywords based on the whole of the Twittersphere was compiled, producing a large number of tweets for each event. However, when applied to the selected key accounts, these keywords proved less relevant, resulting in fewer tweets and a narrower scope than before. To widen the range, we subsequently removed references to the BBC from the search criteria. As shown by the distribution of actor types, plotted in **Figure 1** below, a significant number of the participants (87, or 17.6%) work for Russian media outlets, hence their tendency to stick to dry facts when covering the events in question. Another 7% of the users were registered as official representatives of the Russian Federation, and therefore provided little insight into the views of Russian audiences, including their perception of the BBC. Although a large proportion of the analysed accounts (188, or 38%) allegedly belonged to members of the public, their tweets, often addressed to the above groups, were far less opinionated and open than one would expect. This may be attributed to the fact that some of the accounts in question could have been managed by trolls acting on behalf of the authorities: a practice increasingly popular in Russia. Exchanges between journalists and their audiences were for the most part merely informative and included straightforward questions and answers related to a particular event.
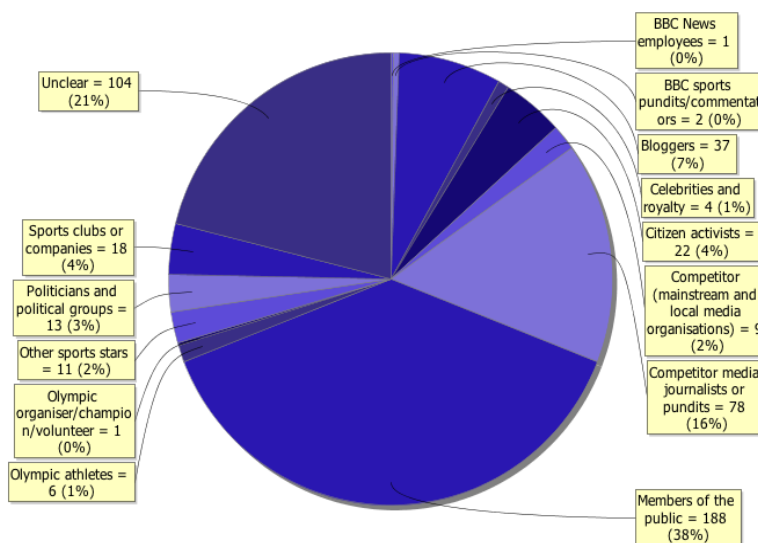
Figure 1: Actor type distribution

Keywords and Popular Events

With the above in mind, we did not restrict ourselves to the accounts suggested by the BBC when compiling a list of keywords to be used as filters for generating corpora. Using *Sysomos*, an online tool allowing one to browse through the entire Twittersphere, we filtered its content by applying different sets of keywords to tweets generated around the dates of the above-mentioned five events. After some fine-tuning, aimed at retaining a wide enough selection related to a given event while excluding false matches, the resulting keywords were finally established. The English versions of each list are given below in **Appendix 1** (the syntax used is related to *Sysomos* conventions and uses Boolean logic, with "AND" and "OR" indicating that, respectively, both or either words separated by it should be present in the filtered selection).

Coding Frames

In order to handle the obtained corpora in a way that would be meaningful and consistent across all language studies, our research team devised a number of codes to be associated with individual tweets. This would allow us to compare the data analysed by each researcher and to quantify the results. The codes were split into categories as follows: (A) Actors; (B) Types of tweet; (C) Reactions; (D) Gender; (E) Nation; (F) Religion and the sacred; (G) Olympic values and promises. The whole list of codes can be found in the consolidated project report; here we mention the adjustments made specifically to accommodate some of the Russian-language comments. These codes, added to the original list along with similar suggestions made by the other researchers, are listed in **Appendix 2**.

It is hard to say whether any of the above types and sentiments is, indeed, specific to the Russian Twittersphere. The fact that the debate around the chosen events was frequently politicised (see, in particular, the section below titled Putin's Visit and the Pussy Riot Trial) is also pointed out by Voss and Asgari-Targhi in their article on the Persian-language corpus, as well as by Aslan et al. in their article BBC.com (both in this issue), particularly in their analysis of the NHS-related discussion among the English-language audience. Our findings, presented in the Main Findings section, indicate that some of the newly introduced codes often featured in the examined data.

Characteristics of the Corpora

The language of the tweets included in the corpora was, for the most part, uncharacteristically subdued, the majority of them exhibiting a degree of political correctness unusual for the average Twitter discussion. This was due to the fact that most of the selected key accounts belonged to institutions or individuals acting in an official capacity, which may also be true about a significant proportion of those who interacted with them, given the widespread nature of trolling in Russia. Thus, a lot of controversial comments were lost, giving way to orchestrated official statements, which invariably praised multiculturalism, holding all nations in equal respect.

One has to bear in mind that although the results of our quantitative analysis enrich our understanding of the questions posed in the first section, the contingent of Twitter users in Russia is not representative of the Russian population overall (Procter, Voss and Lvov 2015, this issue). We find similar warnings in other research articles, including Alexanyan et al. (2012), whose authors suggest that '[t]he Russian Internet and its various platforms do not yet offer universal intake. [...] Internet penetration is growing rapidly, and is now approaching 50% in Russia, [although] use remains skewed towards younger, wealthier, and urban users'. This echoes our observations that point towards the necessity to interpret the harvested tweets as possibly indicative (depending on what proportion of the Twitter users in question acted independently), but unlikely to be fully representative of, the public opinion prevalent in Russia.

That choosing Twitter Module participants is important is also one of the conclusions made by Nour Shreim in her study of the BBC Arabic's approach in this issue. Our findings are in line with her point that 'there was a clear imbalance in the selection of Twitter participants. [...] In order for BBCA to widen global participation, more efforts need to be invested in the selection of such participants.' If the Russian editors used fewer official accounts in their Module, the interaction between the participants might have been more inclusive.

Main Findings: Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis

The lists of keywords in **Appendix 1**, applied to the five events in question, did not always generate the desired number of tweets, set to be 400 per event. To broaden the selection, we had to relax time constraints for most events, while also manually picking some additional tweets (not containing any of the keywords but related to one of the events) from the Twitter feeds of the seven key accounts. This allowed for a wider view, although some of the events remained underrepresented.

Opening Ceremony

One of the most frequently addressed issues was the organisation of the Games, including security, logistics, tickets, transport and volunteers. Some Twitter users noted empty seats at different venues, criticising the organisers for their lack of flexibility in redistributing tickets. Other comments showed people's high expectations, as expressed by this tweet: 'Shockingly many mishaps – with flags, locations, etc. Never expected it from the pedantic Brits' (@mashan 2012). Still, the majority of the participants highly appreciated the efforts of the organisers, often calling the Games exemplary in many aspects. Volunteers were unanimously praised, with day-to-day observations of their work featuring in the comments made by Twitter users based in the UK and Russia alike.

Security was repeatedly mentioned as Russians found the lack of special provisions for VIPs to be in sharp contrast with the arrangements typical for their country. Most people praised the organisers' decisions in this regard. On seeing a member of the royal family at

an event, one of the two BBC Russian reporters covering the Games said: 'The Queen's daughter is sitting in an ordinary press box, no bodyguards in sight. The arena is not cordoned off, unlike during Putin's visit. I'm glad to be living in the UK' (Nastya Uspenskaya 2012).

Another popular topic was the forthcoming Winter Olympics, to be hosted by Russia. Too many references to Sochi 2014, typically made by the Russian officials, sounded like an advertising campaign, turning the social network into a platform for promoting the next Games. The proliferation of such tweets indicated an imbalance in the choice of the participants: the selected Russian athletes, although numerous, were not the most active users among them, while the official accounts proved to be prolific. One of the conclusions made in the context of the English-language corpus suggests that '[a]udiences engage with athletes directly even if no response is likely' (Aslan, Dennis and O'Loughlin 2015, this issue). Our findings – unsurprisingly, given the selection of key accounts – do not support this point; a similar observation can be found in Newman and Levy (2011).

Olympic values were mentioned during the opening ceremony, although in a somewhat predictable way, best demonstrated by the following exchange. The chairman of the Sochi 2014 organising committee noted: 'Lighting the Olympic flame is the main mystery of any ceremony. The Brits astonished us all' (Dmitry Chernyshenko 2012). Several of his followers responded with comments along the lines of 'Magic!', while another user was less impressed: 'Mystery my arse! What's all this rubbish? They're jostling to get their fingers into the pie, both here and over there. #FuckOlympics #London2012' (@lisitsyn_k 2012).

The Opening Ceremony was deemed an overall success by the majority of the participants. A tweet from one of the key participants, the sports editor of RIAN, Russia's state news agency, read 'RT if you think this the best opening ceremony you've ever seen' (Vasily Konov 27 July 2012), and was retweeted 288 times, which was well above the average in the coded sample. This example strengthens our point that interaction with audiences should be actively initiated; Shreim comes to a similar conclusion (see her article in this issue).

Quantitatively speaking, the tweets related to the opening ceremony were generally within our expectations. Most of the tweets were generated by members of the public adding information about the event; they were followed by sports organisations and competitor media outlets providing links to their own coverage. **Figure 2** below shows these trends clearly: the darkest spots that mark the intersection of the relevant code values indicate that these were, indeed, the two most frequently encountered combinations. Half of the comments were observatory in nature and contained no retweets or mentions of other accounts. Only 15% of the actors saw the Olympics as a negative phenomenon; the rest referred to Olympic symbols in a neutral or positive way. The actors' reactions differed widely: 19% of the tweets were largely informative, while another 17% expressed joy, surprise or excitement. A significant number of tweets were intended to promote the users' interests, mainly related to the Sochi Games. There was relatively little mockery directed towards other nations (that such tweets constituted 4% can be attributed to excessive

political correctness, as pointed out above), with 36% of the actors referring to national symbols and 29% to national characteristics. The number of gender-related comments was very small and religion was never mentioned – two features that persist throughout most of the rest of the corpora.
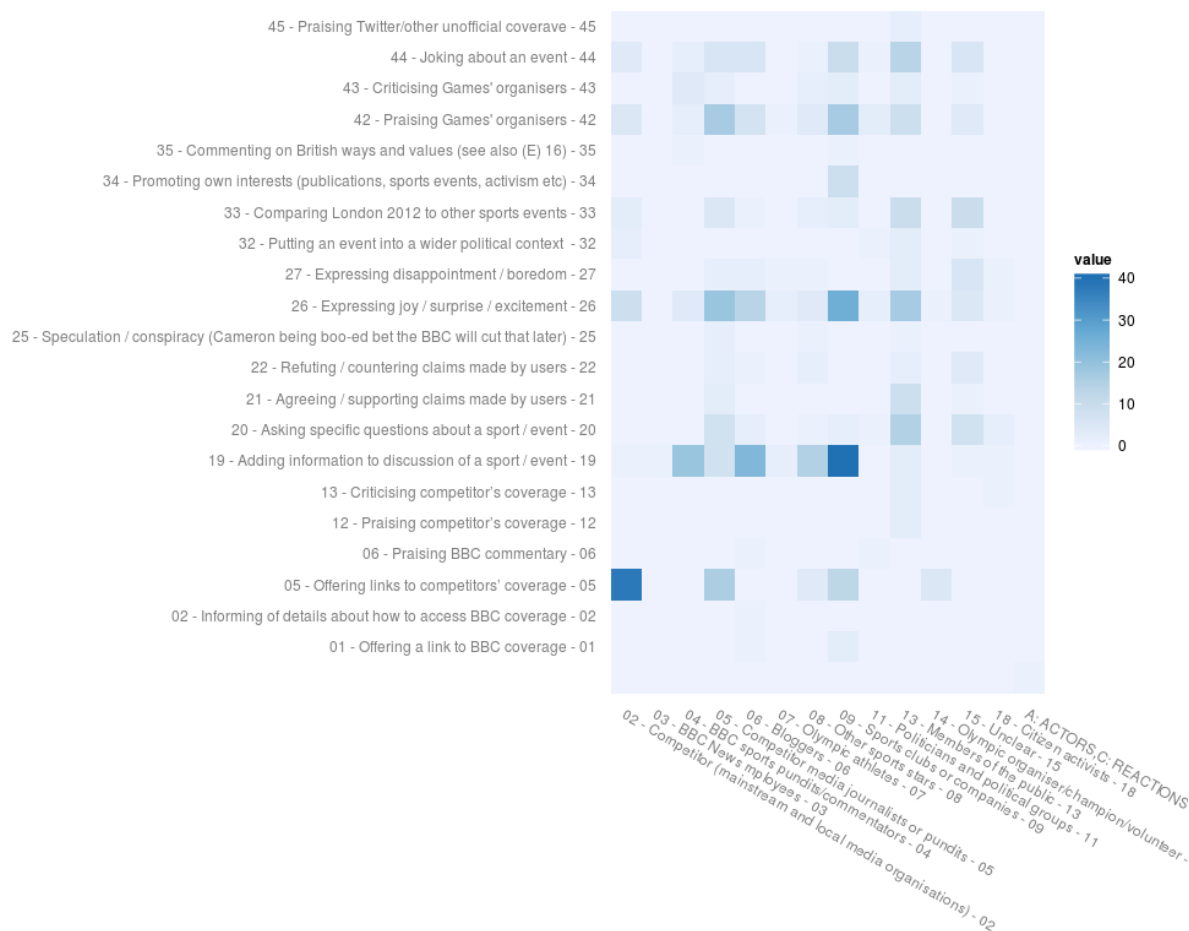
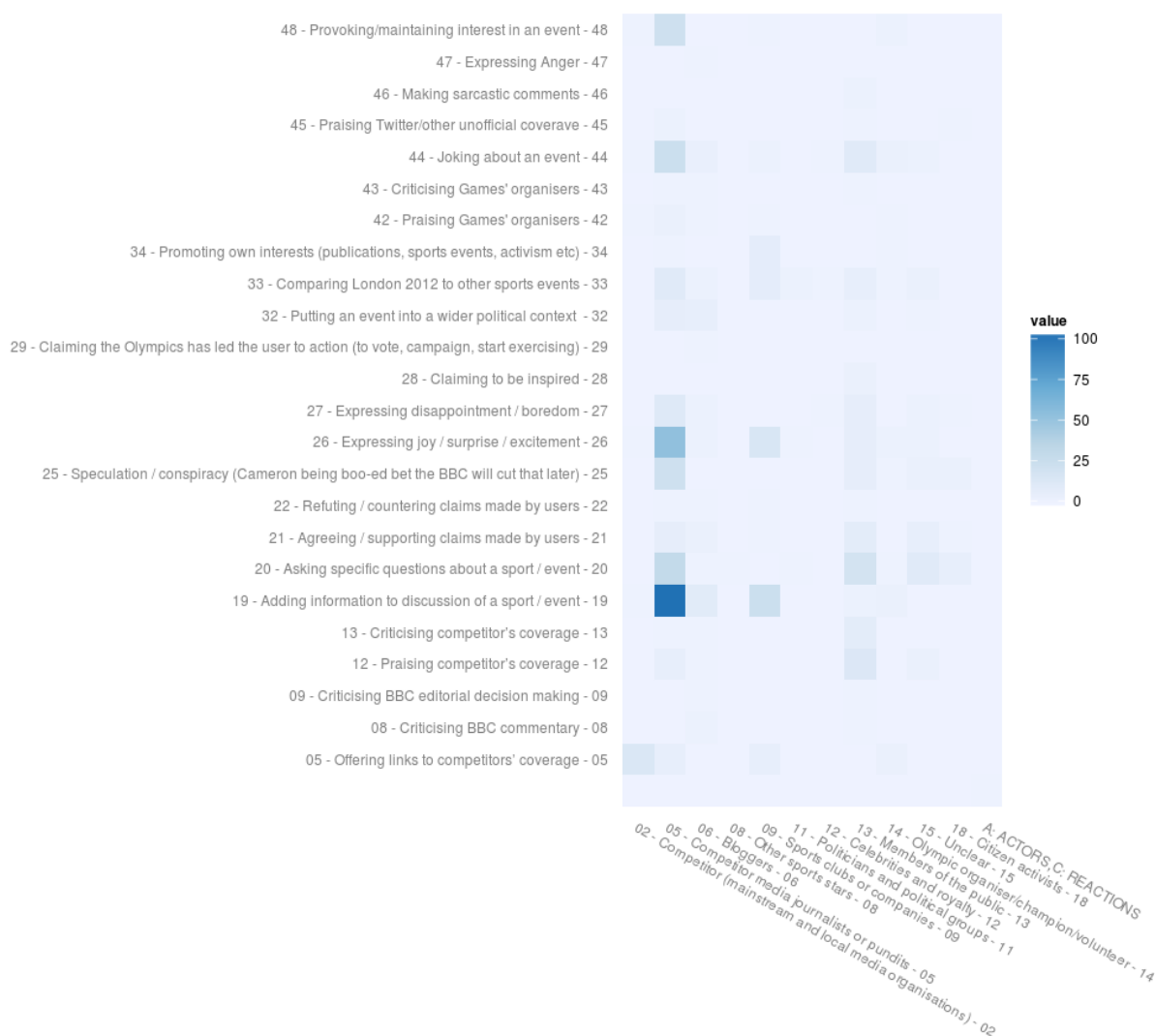**Figure 2:** Opening ceremony: distribution of actor type vs. reaction

Closing Ceremony

Again, the main bulk of the tweets related to the ceremony was purely factual. Since it was announced that the event would be a celebration of British music, audiences were eager to guess who was going to perform. Their interaction with @VasilyKonov grew into a lively conversation about artists rumoured to take part in the ceremony. A lot of people praised the journalist's coverage of the Games, particularly his live online commentary, while complaining about Russian TV channels with their omnipresent advertising and poor broadcasting quality.

In quantitative terms, most of the tweets were generated by members of the public, competitor media organisations and journalists. As seen in **Figure 3** below, the main

reaction of Twitter users was to provide more information or ask questions about the event. Original tweets (that is, not retweets) made up 44% of the selection, while 36% were interactions (retweets and replies) with competitor media representatives. The Olympics as a negative force featured in 13% of the tweets; another 13% saw it as a positive phenomenon; and the rest remained neutral. The reactions of the actors were diverse, with almost a quarter of their comments providing information about the event. The structure of nation-related tweets resembled that observed during the opening ceremony, with 59% of the Twitter users referring to national symbols and 17% to national characteristics. As before, gender-related comments were few (11 out of 400), all of them sexist tweets that were not directly related to the Games.

**Figure 3:** Closing ceremony: distribution of actor type vs. reaction

Tennis: Women's Singles Final

Women and the Olympics was a recurring theme touched upon, sometimes in an unexpected context, by the Twittersphere during the Games. The BBC Russian Service covered it in some detail, from a FEMEN protest near Tower Bridge dubbed 'Islamic marathon' and mentioned in a live broadcast, to features on women's boxing and beach volleyball. As pointed out above, the nature of the chosen accounts meant that specific comments about female athletes were few, with a clear discrepancy between politically correct statements (accounting for the majority of the tweets) and openly sexist remarks. Most of the collected tweets related to the tennis final praised the Russian star Maria Sharapova for her performance, describing her as a national treasure and occasionally commenting on her looks, as is the norm among the users of Russian social networks. Among the relatively small number of sexist comments made by the participants, the most overt read: 'Masha Sharapova and Serena Williams... the beauty and the beast!' (@SergeyGolubev_ 2012).

Our quantitative analysis of gender-related comments proved inconclusive for this event, as there were only 18 such tweets harvested. Of the tweets, 44% offered links to competitors' reporting and 14% added information about the final. The majority (76%) were not retweets and mentioned no other users. Nation-related tweets were heavily dominated by celebrations of the home nation with no antagonism towards others (64%, as shown in **Figure 4** below). Olympic values were almost never mentioned. This event demonstrated most prominently the difference between the topics discussed by the accounts selected for this study and by the whole Twittersphere, where gender was the main theme.

Volleyball: Men's Final

As London 2012 saw Russia's men's volleyball team win their first gold in Olympic history, this event, together with the run-up to it, was chosen as indicative of the nation's feelings towards its own athletes and their rivals. When it comes to sports competitions, it is hard to distinguish between jingoism and national pride, and a large number of tweets eulogising the home team was only to be expected. Those commenting on the performance of other teams were more than averagely generous towards them. A number of remarks concerned unfair rules, especially refereeing, which was deemed biased against the Russian team. A complaint made by one of the players, used as a headline for a post-game interview by *Sport Express*, a popular Russian daily, was quoted by a sports journalist tweeting as @SuperOlejo: 'Dmitry Musersky: "Referees never whistle in Russia's favour"' (Mikhail Maslov, 2012). This echoes a remark made by a Persian Twitter user, 'those hidden hands won't let Iran win so many gold medals', quoted in the article by Voss and Asgari-Targhi in this issue, and often features in athletic competition-related discussions. More positive
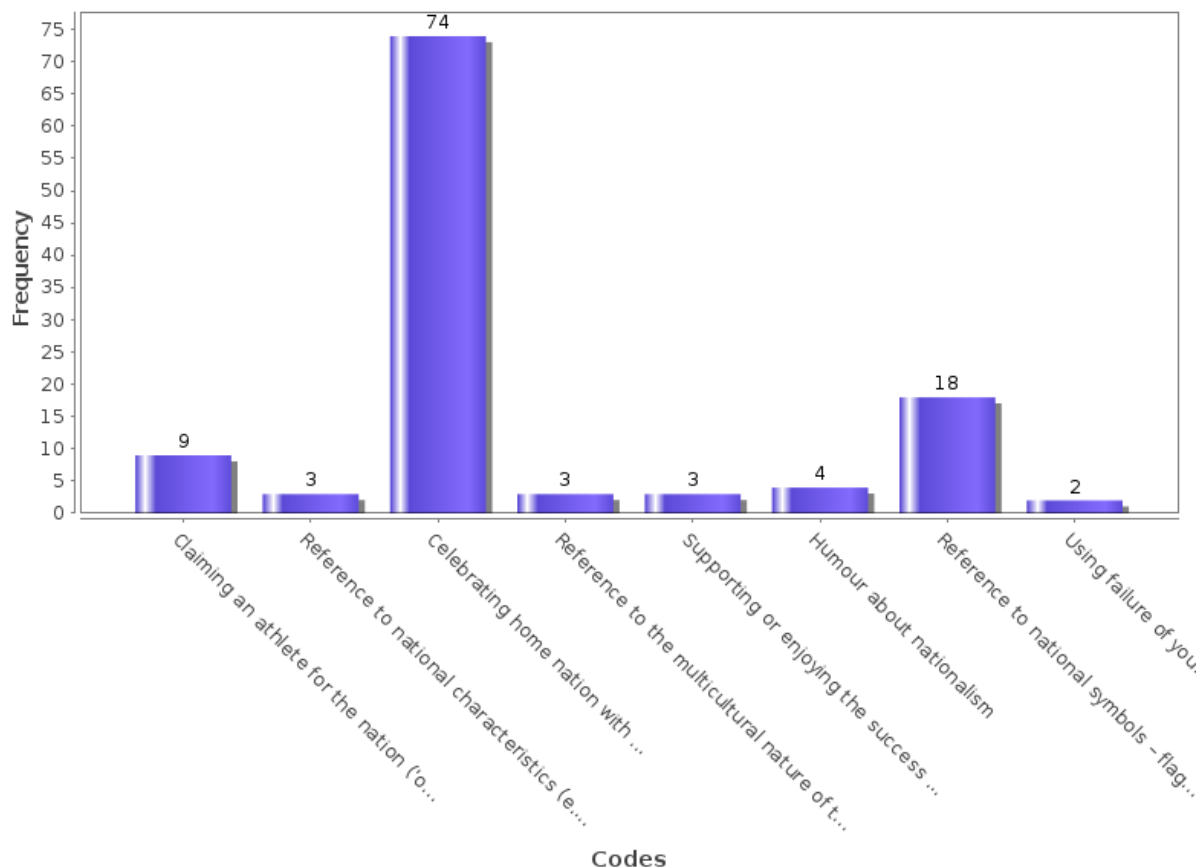
Figure 4: Tennis: distribution of nation-related tweets

opinions were exemplified by a comment made by a sports star turned politician: 'Perhaps one should support not just one particular country, but such qualities as strength, speed and beauty' (Svetlana Zhurova 2012). British spectators were often admired for giving a standing ovation to athletes from different countries, which contributed to the emerging complex picture of the participants' attitudes towards internationalism.

Quantitatively, fewer than a quarter of the tweets were interactions with other accounts; 53% provided links to competitors' coverage. Again, nearly two thirds of the tweets celebrated the home nation with no antagonism towards others, while almost a quarter talked positively about the success of another nation. With only nine gender-related comments it is difficult to make any conclusions; the only thing worth mentioning is that there were no derogatory ones among them. Olympic values and religion were absent from this corpus, too. The majority of the comments proved informative and dry, apart from those referring to the success of a particular team. This can be observed in **Figure 5**, which indicates the main trend persistent throughout the corpora: the dominance of tweets containing links to non-BBC coverage.
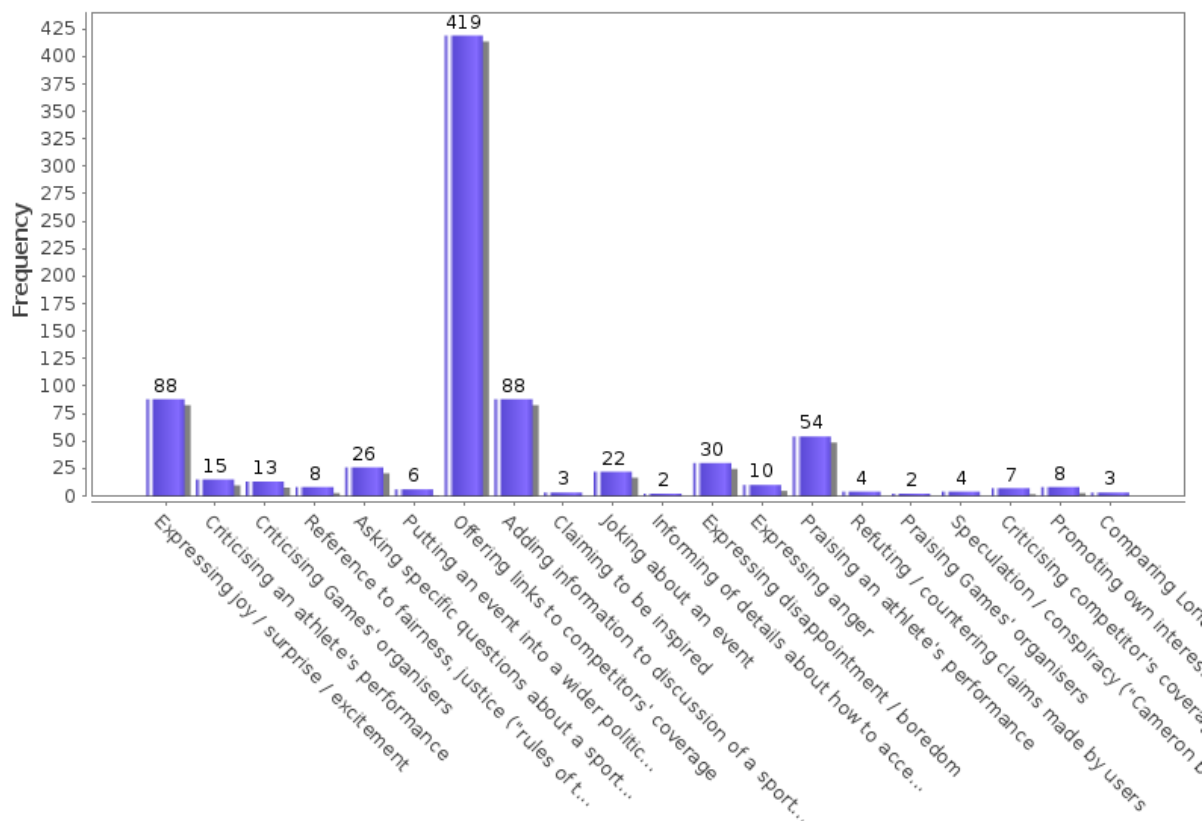
Figure 5: Volleyball: reaction distribution

Putin's Visit and the Pussy Riot Trial

Political developments in Russia were widely discussed during the Games, primarily in light of President Putin's visit to London on 2 August, including his appearance at a judo event. The visit coincided with the trial of the feminist group Pussy Riot, held in Moscow during the second week of the Games and covered in great detail by the BBC Russian Service.

Pussy Riot staged a performance titled 'Mother of God, Chase Putin out!' in Moscow's Christ the Saviour Cathedral on 21 February 2012. A few days later a criminal case was brought against its participants, who were accused of hooliganism motivated by religious hatred. Three members of the group were arrested and detained in custody. The Pussy Riot case became one of the most prominent political scandals in present-day Russia, leading to a wide public discussion about the role of the Russian Orthodox Church and its links to the increasingly oppressive regime.

The trial was often mentioned on Twitter, mainly by Russians living in London and by journalists, though almost never by sports personalities (Russian athletes had been criticised by the country's liberals for their lack of support for the jailed protesters). Some tweets were directly related to Putin's stance on the case as the president repeatedly backed the prosecution in his statements. '[T]he authorities, and Mr Putin personally, are digging their own grave with the Pussy Riot case' (@kommers_roma 2012) encapsulates the views of the more liberal Twitter users. Some of the actors talked about the support given to the persecuted activists by Western musicians, while others were less interested in the trial,

complaining that @sovsportru (a Russian sports daily) is 'the only one covering sports, the rest have switched to Pussy Riot' (@Marussialand 2012).

The political obedience of Russia's sports stars caused a highly negative reaction from a number of Twitter users: some athletes were called 'Putin's sluts' (Dato Tutashkhia 2012) and asked in strong terms why they were happy to toe the party line instead of using their position to protest against the regime, particularly in connection with the Pussy Riot trial. Characteristic in this regard was a discussion provoked by @EvgeniPlushenko, an Olympic champion whose admiration for Putin, expressed in a tweet, caused a squall of outraged responses from people critical of the regime and, by implication, of athletes who enjoy official support. Comments along the lines of (which we paraphrase here) 'You've found yourself a cushy job – why not use your weight to do something for the country?' were frequently made.

Conversations about Putin and the on-going trial also generated a number of humorous and sarcastic remarks. When @VasilyKonov informed his audience that 'Putin stands up and takes his jacket off to applaud the winner' (Konov 2 August 2012), an unidentified user replied: 'Is there a Pussy Riot t-shirt underneath?' (@radikal1978 2012).

The fact that political figures can play a significant role in discussions of Olympic events is also mentioned by Shreim in her article in this issue, where she says of the Arabic-language Twittersphere, 'a big proportion of actors tended to highlight the role of state leaders', pointing out that medals won by a particular team are often 'credited or dedicated to that nation's leader'. Voss and Asgari-Targhi in this issue, on the other hand, cite a tweet that expresses a different kind of sentiment: 'The Iranian Olympic team was unsupported [oppressed], the [Iranian] government has done nothing for them'. The Russian corpus exhibited both of these trends, with the actors' views dependent on their status: official figures praised the role of the state, while members of the public typically dissented.

The statistics for this event show that the main reaction type, especially among bloggers and members of the public, was putting the event into a wider political context (see **Figure 6** below). This was observed in almost a third of the captured tweets, while another fifth were sarcastic comments. Over 10% of the comments referred to religion, regarding it without exception as a negative force (unsurprisingly, given the nature of the Pussy Riot case). Nearly three quarters of the tweets were sceptical about the home nation's medal haul, seeing the success of the judo team merely as a minor event used by the authorities as a smokescreen to distract attention from the country's real problems, including the corruption of the judicial system and the dominance of the Church in the nominally secular state.

Other Themes
In addition to the above key themes, less frequently mentioned but equally revealing topics (some of them often brought up during the opening ceremony) included: the royal family and its involvement in the Games; British values, from the country's cultural heritage to the English sense of humour (a cliché no Russian conversation about Britishness can avoid); and

colonialism versus multiculturalism. This last line of discussion was especially interesting as several commentators drew parallels between Russia and the UK, two former empires facing the necessity to re-evaluate their colonial past. One analogy, for instance, concerned the combined medal haul of, respectively, the Commonwealth and the former Soviet Union countries. Athletes from the Caucasus region were hailed 'the rescuers of the Russian team' (possibly in another manifestation of excessive political correctness), much in the same way as immigration was regarded as beneficial to British sport. Such remarks as 'My respect to the Brits – their national hero Mo Farah is both black and Muslim' (@kot256 2012) were interspersed with comments criticising Britain for paying lip service to multiculturalism: 'They can't be all that keen on Eastern European immigrants' (@Alfa71 2012); 'Thank God this Olympic farce is over' (@gerhard_stolz 2012). This combination showed that the perception of the UK, as seen through the eyes of Russian social media users, was far from uniform.
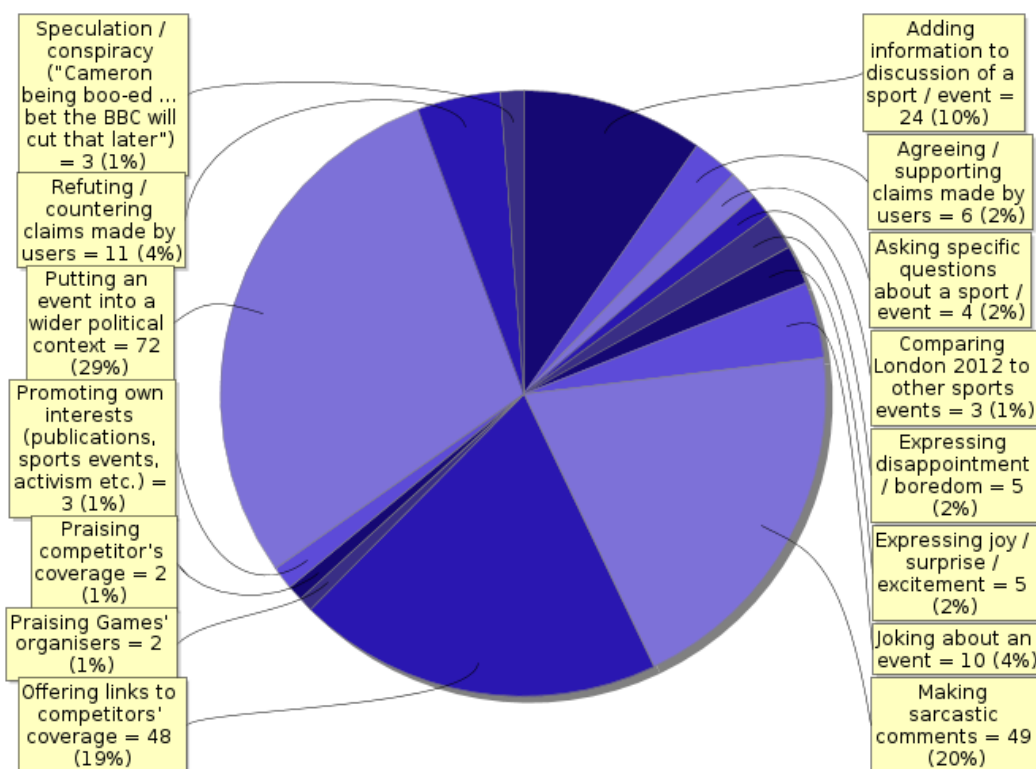

Figure 6: Putin's visit: reaction distribution

Conclusions

Qualitative Observations

The 2012 Olympics have been described as a mass social media event, and our findings related to the Russian-language Twittersphere support this view. It has to be noted that, although Twitter is less popular in Russia than other social networks, such as Facebook and

vkontakte.ru, the volume of comments was impressive. According to the data provided by the BBC Russian Service (see the Appendix), the interest in its online coverage was increased by a number of factors, primarily the use of infographics, which included an interactive feature entitled *Athletes Like You*. Shreim (see her article in this issue) comes to a similar conclusion, suggesting the BBC should place greater emphasis on interactivity and engagement in order to empower audiences to comment on published articles, videos and pictures, and play a greater role in shaping the news agenda. Our findings, like other recent studies, find that the rhetoric and reality of BBCWS's 'global conversation are wide apart' (Gillespie, Abdel Sattar and Lami 2015).

The Twitter Module per se did not – and was not expected to – create a substantial growth in either page views or unique visits, but it did provide a useful platform for the audience, while also lending the site a contemporary feel and enlivening the coverage. According to the editors, their main Twitter-related tasks for the Olympic period were as follows: to promote the BBC Russian Twitter account, to offer some unusual angles on stories, to examine a cross-section of tweets in order to gauge the audience's reaction, as well as to further innovation. As the editors noted, the overall number of referrals from Twitter did not rise significantly during the Olympics, which is in line with BBC's in-house Digital Insight report that they shared with us. However, live text events – particularly Twitter chats with BBC Olympic correspondents – did show good results in terms of interactivity. This suggests that Twitter, while not being the main driver affecting the BBC Russian site traffic, is an important coverage tool which should be used in order to maintain high journalistic standards and to fulfil the BBC's public purpose remit.

The second conclusion, related to the perception of the BBC's coverage, is that the Russian audiences were less interested in it than they were in the reportage provided by other media outlets. Although many of the actors pointed out that the Olympics – especially the opening and closing ceremonies – were not sufficiently well handled by domestic TV channels and radio stations, the majority of readers, viewers and listeners were drawn to links offered by competitors. This was, of course, to be expected, given the scale of the coverage: two dedicated BBC Russian reporters could not compete with dozens of accredited journalists reporting for Russia-based organisations. The same point is made by Shreim in this issue (2015) in her suggestions as to how the BBC Arabic Service, which only assigned three correspondents to cover the Games, could improve audience engagement. The lack of interest in the BBC Russian Service among Twitter users can be seen as indicative of its minor status compared to competitor Russian media giants.

On the other hand, our conclusions on this point should not be extended to the whole of the Twittersphere; as mentioned earlier, a large proportion of the key accounts were linked in some way to Russian media institutions, hence the bias in their favour. It is important to distinguish between 'instrumental' and 'organic' actors, to use the terminology of Kelly, et al. (2012), whose authors employ a special filtering technique to ensure the accounts included in their study reflect the real atmosphere in the Russian Twittershere rather than marketing strategies promoted by certain accounts. In our experience, media

accounts are typically instrumental, and their excessive presence can distort the picture. At the same time, studying the activity of key influencers, with their large followings, gives us some idea of what Twitter users are interested in, which can be turned to the BBC's advantage (see Recommendations below).

Finally, we were interested in the image of Britain as reflected in Twitter discussions during the Games. Even though the studied tweets gravitated towards domestic affairs (in both sports and politics), a number of comments were related to the host nation's values and characteristic features. They were mostly positive and referred to the organisers' efforts, as well as to the UK's multiculturalism, fair play ethos and the democratic nature of British society. A fair number of the actors favoured British ways over Russian and expressed their admiration with the atmosphere created in London during the Games.

Quantitative Results

Most of the quantitative results are summarised at the end of each respective section, though a few concluding remarks are in order.

In light of the above observations, any quantitative analysis based on the selected Russian-language corpora is bound to be statistically incomplete as we cannot call the sample in question representative. However, taking the above as a starting point for our study of the role of Twitter in the BBC's coverage of further events, we have learned some important information from the data available to us. One line of research was to look at the distribution of code values within each of the categories mentioned in the Coding Frames section.

The coded data, represented in the form of charts, demonstrates the main trend persisting throughout the corpora. **Figures 7** (below) and **5** (the Men's Volleyball section above) show the frequency of a particular reaction type for the opening ceremony and volleyball final, respectively. **Figure 7** indicates that, although the number of emotional tweets (expressing excitement and praising the organisers) was relatively high, two situations prevailed: users exchanging purely informative comments and sportscasters offering links to their coverage. The data plotted in **Figure 5** is even more polarised, with links to competitors' coverage fully dominating the picture. These features were prominent in most of our analysis and can be explained by the choice of the key accounts, discussed above.

Initially we were interested in the correlation between the number of site visits (available from the existing BBC daily reports) and the total number of tweets generated by the accounts included in the Twitter Module on a given day. As pointed out in the previous section, this correlation is weak and should not be regarded as a significant characteristic of the role Twitter plays in the BBC's online coverage. This can be seen in **Figure 8**, where the total number of tweets mentioning the BBC Russian Service is compared to the number of unique site users and page views on the same day.
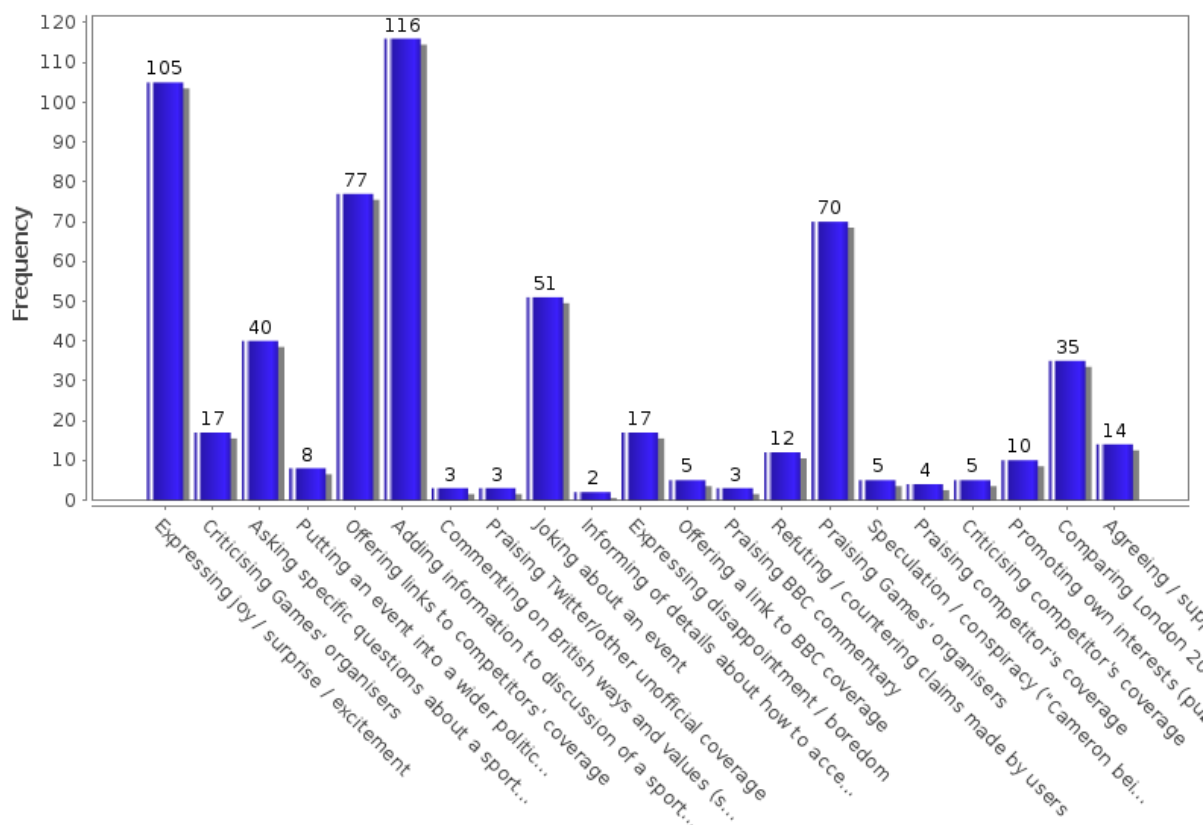
Figure 7: Opening ceremony: reaction distribution

Recommendations for Further Analysis and Suggestions for Improving the BBC's Coverage

As pointed out throughout the article, the main limitation of this study is its relatively narrow choice of accounts. One suggestion for any future analysis would be to ensure that the selected user group is more representative and includes fewer media specialists and official figures. This could take the form of extra filtering similar to that employed by Kelly et al. (2015). Another possible way to achieve this would be to abandon the approach that hinges on key accounts and work instead with keywords alone, paying more careful attention to criteria by which they are defined. On the other hand, one has to bear in mind the point made by Aslan, Dennis and O'Loughlin in this issue (2015) where it is noted that '[u]sing keywords to refine large collections of social data can compromise the data collected.' To avoid this danger one has to fine-tune keyword sets especially carefully.

It should also be noted that the Olympic Games, although a popular event among Russian audiences, may not be the best gauge for measuring reactions of the general public, which are, as our corpora suggest, biased towards domestic affairs. Nor is it pertinent to expect the BBC to be in the centre of attention in Russia during the Olympics, given the competition from national and local media outlets. However, when the BBC Russian Service used the Twitter Module in their coverage of the latest Russian presidential elections, the results were far more convincing, the increased number of site visits and Twitter referrals clearly showing the effects of this technique. Similarly, the Twitter Module incorporated into

a webpage dedicated to the 2012 US presidential election campaign has already provided some interesting insights into the event.
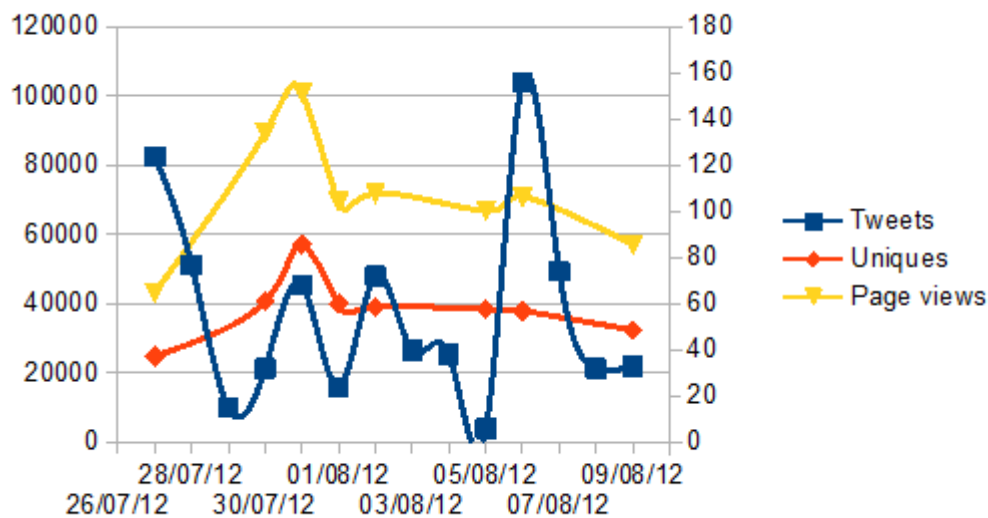
Figure 8: Twitter activity vs. online statistics

The choice of pertinent news topics to be accompanied by social media coverage is extremely important and should be based on independent editorial decisions made by Language Services according to their specifics. Comments that put an event into a wider political context proved the most useful for our purposes; therefore, it makes perfect sense to concentrate on events that lend themselves easily to this.

Our research has shown certain journalistic practices to be more efficient in marketing terms. The main driver behind the audience's engagement – and, ultimately, the site's statistics – remains live coverage. It is this form that has provided the most successful performance from both BBC reporters and their competitors. Real-time online commentary needs to be developed further to the BBC's advantage, a process that can be facilitated by the above observations.

Lastly, one disadvantage of the Twitter Module that our analysis has highlighted consists in the non-selective nature of this tool. Even though the nominated users know that their comments are published by a major media organisation, the content of their tweets may vary from relevant to highly personal to self-promotional. Moderation would be one possible way of dealing with this problem; a judicious use of filters (based on suitable key words) could also help. This suggestion would need to be thought through in detail and its implementation might require a lot of work, but it could significantly improve the quality of the site's live content.

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Alfa71. 'Неужто они так любят выходцев из Восточной Европы' ('They can't be all that keen on Eastern European immigrants.') 27 July 2012, 11:23 p.m. Tweet.

Chernyshenko, Dmitry (ChernyshenkoRu). 'Зажжение чаши олимпийского огня - главная тайна любой церемонии. Британцы поразили #Лондон2012 http://t.co/BrCZbp8R.' ('Lighting the Olympic flame is the main mystery of any ceremony. The Brits astonished us all #London2012 http://t.co/BrCZbp8R.') 28 July 2012, 12:42 a.m. Tweet.

gerhard_stolz. '@VasilyKonov Самое главное что весь этот ФАРС,под названием ОИ- закончился:))) Теперь и на футбол можно спокойно переключатся.' ('@VasilyKonov Thank God this Olympic farce is over:))) We can switch to football now.') 13 August 2012, 2:59 p.m. Tweet.

Gillespie, M., N. Abdel Sattar and M. Lami, *Social media and political participation: BBC World Service and the Arabic Spring. Political (dis)engagement and the changing nature of the 'political': examining contemporary political practice, policy and theory*, in Nathan Manning and Charles Husband (eds.), Policy Press, 2015.

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SergeyGolubev_. '@RSaanti Машечка Шарапова и Серена Уильямс... Красавица и чудовище! (@SurkovRussia).' ('@RSaanti Masha Sharapova and Serena Williams... the beauty and the beast!' (@SurkovRussia).) 4 August 2012, 3:05 p.m. Tweet.

Kelly, John, Vladimir Barash, Karina Alexanyan, Bruce Etling, Robert Faris, Urs Gasser and John G. Palfrey (2012) 'Mapping Russian Twitter', *Berkman Center Research Publication*, No. 2012(3). Available at URL http://ssrn.com/abstract=2028158 [visited December 2012]

kommers_roma. '@olegtinkovИнтресно, только Я понимаю, что Власть в лице В.В. Путина роет себе могилу с делом Pussy Riot)).' ('@olegtinkov I wonder if I'm the only one to see that the authorities, and Mr Putin personally, are digging their own grave with the Pussy Riot case)).') 10 August 2012, 10:53 p.m. Tweet.

Konov, Vasily (VasilyKonov) 'RT если считаете, что это лучшая церемония открытия ОИ, которую вы видели!' ('RT if you think this the best opening ceremony you've ever seen!') 27 July, 10:34 p.m. Tweet.

Konov, Vasily (VasilyKonov) 'Путин аплодирует стоя, сняв пиджак.' ('Putin stands up and takes his jacket off to applaud the winner.') 2 August, 4:19 p.m. Tweet.

kot256. 'Респект британцам – у них национальный герой Мо Фара темнокожий и мусульманин.' ('My respect to the Brits – their national hero Mo Farah is both black and Muslim.') 12 August 2012, 10:14 p.m. Tweet.

lisitsyn_k. '@ChernyshenkoRu какая нахуй тайна? что вы все бредите? бабло пилят , что у них, что у нас. #ВжопуОлипиаду #Лондон2012.' ('@ChernyshenkoRu Mystery my arse! What's all this rubbish? They're jostling to get their fingers into the pie, both here and over there. #FuckOlympics #London2012.') 28 July 2012, 6:03 a.m. Tweet.

Marussialand. '@sovsportru По-моему,Вы остались одни,кто пишет про Олимпиаду! Остальным ее заменили Pussy Riot и Елена Ваенга. За Державу обидно....' ('@sovsportru I think you're the only one covering sports, the rest have switched to Pussy Riot and Elena Vaenga. Shame about our Country...'). 2 August 2012, 7:40 p.m. Tweet.

mashan. 'Поразительно много сбоев: с флагами, объектами и т.д. Не ожидала от педантичных британцев.' ('Shockingly many mishaps – with flags, locations, etc. Never expected it from the pedantic Brits.') 27 July 2012, 7:18 p.m. Tweet.

Maslov, Mikhail (SuperOlejo). 'Дмитрий Мусэрский: "Судьи всегда свистят против России" http://t.co/0LWV6CYo #волейболлондон2012.' ('Dmitry Musersky: "Referees never whistle in Russia's favour"' http://t.co/0LWV6CYo #volleyballlondon2012.). 1 August 2012, 12:33 a.m. Tweet.

Miah, Andy. 'Viewpoint: London 2012, a social media Olympics to remember'. *BBC News*, 10 August 2012. [WWW document] URL http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-19191785 [visited December 2012]

Newman, Nic, and David A. L. Levy, *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2014*, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2014.

radikal1978. '@VasilyKonov после пиджака, футболка pussy riot?' ('Is there a Pussy Riot t-shirt underneath?') 2 August 2012, 4:23 p.m. Tweet.

Tutashkhia, Dato (19DATO17). '@szhurova Эх Света, россия- это не СССР. Нет гордости за державу, так, что шавки путинские, не утруждайтесь- мы не гордимся, нам стыдно.' ('@szhurova No Sveta, Russia is not the USSR. No pride for the country, so don't bother, Putin's sluts – we're not proud, we're ashamed.') 1 August, 4:21 p.m. Tweet.

Uspenskaya, Nastya (AnastasiaBim). 'Сидит королевская дочь без охраны, тихо-спокойно, в обычном пресс- боксе. И арену не оцепили, как для Путина. Радуюсь, что живу в Британии.' ('The Queen's daughter is sitting in an ordinary press box, no bodyguards in sight. The arena is not cordoned off, unlike during Putin's visit. I'm glad to be living in the UK.') 10 August 2012, 2:34 p.m. Tweet.

Zhurova, Svetlana (szhurova). 'Правильно ли,когда мы болеем не только за страну,а за красоту,скорость,силу.Например,за Болта,Федерера,Исымбаеву, Шарапову и вообще за звезд.' ('Perhaps one should support not just one particular country, but such qualities as strength, speed and beauty. For example, Bolt, Federer, Isinbayeva, Sharapova and stars in general.') 5 August 2012, 10:12 p.m. Tweet.

Appendices:

1. **Sysomos Boolean Logic**
Opening ceremony, 27-28 Jul
("london" OR "london-2012" OR "olympiad" OR "olympic" OR "olympics" OR "olympics-2012" OR "olympiad-2012" OR "games" OR "OG2012" OR "OG-2012")
AND ("ceremony" OR "opening")

Closing ceremony, 12-13 Aug
("london" OR "london-2012" OR "olympiad" OR "olympic" OR "olympics" OR "olympics-2012" OR "olympiad-2012" OR "games" OR "OG2012" OR "OG-2012") AND ("ceremony" OR "closing")

Tennis: women's singles final, 4 Aug
("sharapova")

Volleyball: men's final, 12 Aug
("london" OR "london-2012" OR "olympiad" OR "olympic" OR "olympics" OR "olympics-2012" OR "olympiad-2012" OR "games" OR "OG2012" OR "OG-2012") AND ("volleyball")

Putin's visit, 2 Aug
("london" OR "london-2012" OR "olympiad" OR "olympic" OR "olympics" OR "olympics-2012" OR "olympiad-2012" OR "games" OR "judo" OR "OG2012" OR "OG-2012") AND ("putin" OR ("pussy" AND "riot") OR "pussyriot")

It was these keywords that, applied to tweets generated by the key accounts, produced the corpora to be further analysed.

2. **Coding Framework**
(A) ACTORS
1. Citizen activists

(C) REACTIONS

1. Putting an event into a wider political context

2. Comparing London 2012 to other sports events

3. Promoting own interests (publications, sports events, activism etc.)

4. Commenting on British ways and values

5. Praising the Games' organisers

6. Criticising the Games' organisers

7. Joking about an event

8. Praising Twitter/other unofficial coverage

9. Making sarcastic comments

10. Expressing anger

11. Provoking/maintaining interest in an event

(D) GENDER

1. Neutral gender-related comments

(E) NATION

1. Disappointment at non-GB athletes lacking support from the crowds

2. Reference to the multicultural nature of the Games

3. Demeaning success of home nation

4. Claiming unfair treatment of home nation